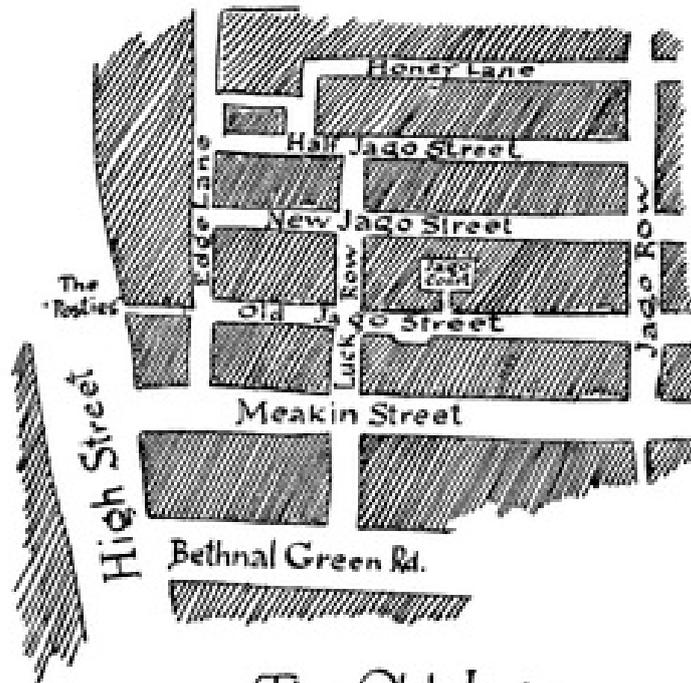


ARTHUR MORRISON, THE 'JAGO', AND THE REALIST REPRESENTATION OF PLACE



The Old Jago
Sketch Plan

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ABSTRACT

In vitriolic exchanges with the critic H.D. Traill, Arthur Morrison (1863-1945) argued that the term ‘realist’ was impossible to define and must be innately subjective. Traill asserted that Morrison’s *A Child of the Jago* (1896) was a failure of realism, conjuring a place that ‘never did and never could exist.’ And yet, by 1900, the East End slum fictionalised in Morrison’s novel had been supplanted by the realist mythology of his account: ‘Jago’ had become, and remains, an accepted term to describe the real historical slum, the Nichol.

This thesis examines Morrison’s contribution to the late-Victorian realist representation of the urban place. It responds to recent renewed interest about realism in literary studies, and to revived debates surrounding marginal writers of urban literature. Opening with a biographical study, I investigate Morrison’s fraught but intimate lifelong relationship with the East End. Morrison’s unadorned prose represents the late-Victorian East End as a site of absolute ordinariness rather than absolute poverty. Eschewing the views of outsiders, Morrison *replaced* the East End.

Since the formation of The Arthur Morrison Society in 2007, Morrison has increasingly been the subject of critical examination. Studies have so frequently focused on evaluating the reality behind Morrison’s fiction that his significance to late-nineteenth century “New Realism” and the debates surrounding it has been overlooked. This thesis redresses this gap, and states that Morrison’s work signifies an artistic and temporal boundary of realism.

Asserting that his most well-known novel, *A Child of the Jago*, is the apotheosis of his personal realist style, I examine it in the context of his prior and succeeding work, both fiction and non-fiction, as well as the slum fictions of his predecessors and contemporaries. I explore how Morrison’s work troubled the boundaries of reality and challenged the limits of representation.

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I, Eliza Cubitt confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Eliza Cubitt

15th September 2015

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INTRODUCTION

Describing the East End in 1773, topographer John Noorthouck wrote that ‘these parishes [...] in general close and ill-built [...] afford little worthy of observation.’¹ For nineteenth-century journalists, reformers and slum fiction writers, however, it was precisely the close ill-built houses and the struggle for life in these overcrowded places that fascinated and entranced. The Victorians transformed the idea of the East End as too-ordinary: West End writers and their readers sought excitement and horror in the East, characterised in fiction and non-fiction by murder, squalor, slums, desperation and vice. Writing and rewriting, visiting and exhorting others to visit that other district at the periphery of the city, Victorians created in literature the legendary place of the East End.

By the late 1880s, when native East Ender Arthur Morrison began publishing his urban writings, the literary marketplace had already been saturated with depictions of the East End, and particularly the problem of its slums. The East End had been deeply mythologised in both fiction and non-fiction. Despite decades of journalistic and fictional examination, late-Victorian accounts of the East End portrayed it as a new problem, perpetuating the tenet that the place was unknown and unknowable. As historians and literary critics have explicated in recent years, the late-Victorian East End had visions both dystopian and fantastic imposed upon it.² It was not only seen as a city apart, as described by Sir Walter Besant in *East London* (1901) but as a nation apart.³ As Jack London later described, it was ‘the “East End” of all England’ – a vast abyss in which the mysterious poor struggled and suffered.⁴

The efforts of Morrison to resist this picture have not been fully investigated. Morrison spent his writing career revising the view of the East End written by these

¹ John Noorthouck, *A New History of London*, (London: 1773), p. 769. Available at *British History Online* <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/new-history-london/pp769-772> accessed 21st August 2015

² See for example Seth Koven, *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London* (Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2004); Judith K. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (London: Virago Press, 1992).

³ Throughout *East London* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1901), Besant describes the East End as a city in and of itself.

⁴ Jack London, *The People of the Abyss*, (London: Macmillan, 1903), p. 141.

outsiders. Raising the rhetorical question, in 1891, ‘who knows the East End?’ he made it clear that he intended to confront the speculative and sensational representations of the area. Engaging with the contemporary vogue for slum fiction, Morrison redressed accounts written by outsiders, positioning himself as uniquely knowledgeable about a place considered unknowable.

Throughout his oeuvre Morrison attempted to provide a corrective to the image of the East End perpetuated by his forebears. Morrison neither overtly sympathised with nor elevated the poor in a form of fantastical positive discrimination. Many other commentators had represented ‘the poor as erotic objects of elite spectatorship.’⁵ Morrison’s purpose in writing of the East End was twofold. Firstly, he disregarded the accepted view of the East End as a single, extensive slum. Secondly, rather than suggesting ways that it might be improved, he attempted to account for its lasting presence. Where other writers treated the East End metonymically to describe the abject poverty of Victorian cities, Morrison required in his fiction that the East End simply represented itself. Further, while his predecessors had hoped to inspire change by tackling the problem of housing in their writings and presenting the moral case for interventions, Morrison’s detached narrative voice allots no moral judgment. He perceived change as always insufficient; indeed, problematic.

In his non-fiction sketches and particularly in his 1894 collection *Tales of Mean Streets*, Morrison located the sinister in the ordinary rather than in the extreme.⁶ *Tales* suggests that the place was governed by forces of concord which made very little of the fantastic or dramatic possible there. For Morrison, the East End was a site of everyday horrors: a place where poverty caused quiet desperation and silent suffering. Yet in his 1896 novel *A Child of the Jago*, Morrison unwittingly created a realist myth of the East End which has persisted in the cultural imagination, assisting in the perpetuation of a sense of the area as

⁵ Koven, *Slumming*, p. 283.

⁶ All future references will be as *Tales* and references will appear in the text; taken from *Tales of Mean Streets* (London: Faber, 2008).

both ‘intangible and geographical.’⁷ In *Jago* Morrison, using the established modes of slum fiction writers and social explorers, attempted to subvert the legendary nature of the nineteenth century East End. However, the reality of the slum he was fictionalising could not be agreed on either by his contemporaries or later by historians of the place. Morrison achieved a mythopeia of a slum which has lasted as long as Jack the Ripper legends and occupies a similar space in the public imagination.⁸ Morrison realised the replacement of history with literature: the sign Jago became, and remains, synonymous with the name of the real slum on which the novel was based, the Nichol.⁹

Morrison’s work engages with the central paradox of the East End in the Victorian imagination. A widespread fantasy accepted by non-slum dwellers that slums contained a more ‘real’ version of life meant that images projected onto the East End in fiction were believed in. As the city became modernised beyond recognition, the least modernised areas seemed to retain the greatest reality. Victorians imagined the East End concomitantly as more real than the London inhabited by the wealthy, and as a site of fantasy.¹⁰ This thesis interrogates how Morrison’s understanding of the situation of the East End in the cultural imagination – the knowledge that ‘what is there is what has been made by the specific practices of writing [and representation]’ – operates in his own writing.¹¹ Morrison believed that slum fictions had failed to represent the urban working class. His work demonstrates a self-conscious reaction to the sensational writings of the East End which had been incessant and increasing during his lifetime. A critical examination of Morrison’s work reveals intricate paradoxes about what it meant to represent the place of the city at the turn of the century.

⁷ Gilda O’Neill, *My East End*, (London: Penguin, 1999), p. xxii.

⁸ Further references will be to *Jago* and citations will appear in the text, taken from Peter Miles edn. *A Child of the Jago* (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2012).

⁹ Raphael Samuel, *East End Underworld: Chapters in the Life of Arthur Harding* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), and *Yelling Slums and Slum Clearance*, p. 117; London County Council, *Housing of the Working Classes in London: Notes on the action taken between the years of 1855 and 1912*, p. 35.

¹⁰ Nicholas Tingle, ‘Realism, Naturalism and Formalism: James and *The Princess Casamassima*’ in *American Literary Realism, 1870-1910*, 21.2 (Winter 1989): 54-66. (62).

¹¹ Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, (London: Fontana, 1976), p. 261.

Denying an artistic commitment to ‘realism’, Morrison nonetheless succeeded in conveying the East End with an unusual verisimilitude, using a spare, detached prose to portray the East End with ‘a new reality and an immediate presence.’¹²

I.

The idea of the late-Victorian slum encapsulated a fear of the poor which was:

No longer the fear and loathing of the riotous and criminal urban poor of the first Victorian age, or the anthropological curiosity of the second, it was a fear that an isolated, undernourished, diseased yet hedonistic and feckless working mass was dragging down the country and threatening the decline of Britain and the Empire.¹³

The worry was that the evolution of the city seemed to be matched by the devolution of its people – that the nation was ‘producing a degenerate, sickly race in the slums of the great cities.’¹⁴ In the East End, it seemed, the ‘fittest’ really were the ones who lived through disease and squalor: it was a place in which natural selection was in fact natural, unaltered by progress. The world beyond the Aldgate Pump was repeatedly described as a newly-discovered wonder, with language reminiscent of travelogues describing the furthest reaches of the empire – it was ‘darkest London’; the ‘depths’; the ‘abyss’.

The East End was represented as an uncomfortable reminder of the bygone in the modern city: ‘a spectacle of the slum London of the past.’¹⁵ The slum presented a particular problem for late-Victorian realism. Slums are urban places ‘characterised by overcrowding, poor or informal housing, inadequate access to safe water and sanitation, and insecurity of tenure.’¹⁶ Charles Annandale’s 1894 dictionary defined the slum as a ‘low, dirty, back street

¹² Arthur Morrison, ‘What is a Realist?’ in Miles edn. *Jago*, pp. 3-8 (p. 4).

¹³ Debra N. Mancoff and D.J. Trela, eds., *Victorian Urban Settings: Essays on the Nineteenth-Century City and Its Contexts* (New York and London: Garland, 1996), p. 19.

¹⁴ Michael Rose, *The Relief of Poverty 1834-1914* (London and Basingstoke: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1972), p. 31.

¹⁵ ‘Sunday in East London: Shoreditch and Bethnal Green West’, in *The Sunday at home: a family magazine for Sabbath reading* Jan 1st 1895, 243-248 (246).

¹⁶ Mike Davis, *Planet of Slums* (London: Verso, 2008), p. 23.

or lane of a city; a low neighbourhood.’¹⁷ Mike Davis, however, suggests that slums are essentially marked by segregation from the principal urban space.¹⁸ This spatial gap between slum dwellers and city dwellers inflects the realist imagining of the slum in the late-Victorian period.

As Charles Booth observed in his statistical study of London poverty, the segregation of the poor increased as the city grew. Sites already isolated were further detached when the new boulevard style streets were built, particularly in central London. Access to deprived places was cut off in favour of creating access for vehicles and technology – slums were ‘caught and held in successive railway loops’.¹⁹ Victorian priest the Reverend Cree noted that modernisation invariably meant less space for the poor: it entailed ‘a continual pushing back, back, down, down, of the poor.’²⁰ Slums were razed, or ‘improved off the face of the earth’, but the lack of appropriate new housing created greater overcrowding and increased prices.²¹ As London developed, the inhabitants of slums, the unrecompensed victims of clearance and progress, became isolated from modernity in a new topography.

Realist representations of slums alternately struggled with and exploited this spatial division. The late nineteenth-century slum was imaginatively located in the East End, beyond the familiar centre of the city, while West London was characterised as both artificial and recognisable. At the turn of the century, social explorer C.F.G. Masterman described the separation as ‘a phenomenon and a problem unique in the history of the world [...] segregation has reached its extreme limit’.²² The challenge of slum literature in the late Victorian period was not only to represent a place beyond that which was understood as

¹⁷ Charles Annandale, ‘Slum’ in *A Concise Dictionary of the English Language, Etymological and Pronouncing, Literary, Scientific, and Technical* (London: Blackie and Son, Limited, 1894).

¹⁸ Davis, *Planet of Slums*, pp. 22-23.

¹⁹ Charles Booth, *Descriptive Map of London Poverty*, 1889, (London: London Topographical Society, 1984), introduced by David A. Reeder. (n.p.)

²⁰ Rev. G.W.M. Cree cited in H.J. Dyos, ‘The Slums of Victorian London’ in *Victorian Studies* Vol. 11., No. 1. (Sep., 1967) 5-40. (35).

²¹ C.R. ‘The Methods of Mr Morrison’, *The Academy*, December 12th 1896, 531. (531)

²² C.F.G. Masterman, ed. *The Heart of the Empire: Discussions of Problems of Modern City Life in England, With an Essay on Imperialism* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1901), p. 11.

London, but beyond that which was understood as place.²³ Describing the decimation of an infamous Shoreditch slum, the Nichol, *Jago* captured a city space at the point of transformation. Representing the destruction as both futile and inevitable and writing just as the actual place was vanishing, Morrison's topographic novel appeared to replace the slum itself.

Notorious throughout the nineteenth century for its overcrowding and poverty, the Nichol was held up as the epitome of the necessity for slum clearance plans: it was said to contain the foulest housing in London.²⁴ Occupying approximately twenty streets just outside the City boundaries, the area was located in the corner made by the meeting of Bethnal Green Road and Shoreditch High Street.²⁵ It was closed off from the main thoroughfares. Another large road, the aptly named Boundary Street, running parallel to Shoreditch High Street, cut off the slum from the shops and traffic, while Church Street (now Redchurch Street) at the south was another boundary. The Nichol was isolated at the eastern borders of the City: as Pamela Fox states, it was 'a marginalised area within the already marginalised East End.'²⁶

One of the first districts of the Spitalfields area to be developed, the Nichol grew rapidly and chaotically.²⁷ It survived the Great Fire of 1666 and therefore had a boom in population unmatched elsewhere in London. The Nichol's housing developed haphazardly to cope with the growth: houses were quickly and shoddily built. The results of this poor building became more evident in the nineteenth century. In 1852 Thomas Beames explored the area and wrote that the houses were 'mere lath and plaster'.²⁸ Later investigators discovered that many houses in the Nichol were built using 'billysweet', a waste product of

²³ Miles argues that the East was in fact a global concept: 'The connotations of West and East thus oscillate between denoting parts of London and a larger ideological geography opposing the West, as Christendom, to a threatening 'other' along Europe's Eastern and Southern borders ...' Miles, *Jago*, p. 196. n. 18.

²⁴ Sanitary report by Mr Stewart, (1891) cited in Masterman, *The Heart of the Empire*, p. 70.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

²⁶ Pamela Fox, *Class Fictions: Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel, 1890-1945* (London and Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), p. 109.

²⁷ Millicent Rose, *The East End of London* (London: Cresset Press, 1951), p. 265.

²⁸ Thomas Beames, *The Rookeries of London: Past, Present and Prospective* (London: Thomas Bosworth, 1852), p. 15.

soap manufacturing. Billysweet was cheap but did not set as mortar does, so that the walls of the Nichol sagged and were perpetually damp.²⁹

The segregation of the Nichol persisted even when the arrival of Huguenot Protestants escaping persecution in France in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries made the area more crowded. The houses built by and for the Huguenots, many of whom were highly skilled weavers, however, had some architectural merits, particularly in the amount of light allowed in by the ‘weaver’s windows’ at the centre of the rooms.³⁰ Until 1831 the district at the Nichol’s southern boundary, Bethnal Green, was still being described as ‘a village, or large green’, but it changed ‘with astonishing rapidity’, as Vale and Snaith note, ‘from the ‘pleasant country village [...] into a crowded working-class district.’³¹ The overcrowding of the East End was further intensified by the arrival of Irish immigrants, particularly after the famine in the 1840s. At this point numerous featureless two-story houses were built quickly to house the poor.

Finer houses which had been built at the borders of Shoreditch by speculative builders for middle-class merchants in the eighteenth century, and larger properties dating from the sixteenth century, were alike ‘deserted’ in the nineteenth, as wealthier residents moved out.³² As it was necessary to live near places of work, the poor lived on land of high commercial value and paid accordingly. The desirability of living close to the City and to the manufacturing centres of the East End led to the development of ‘a separate shanty style development’ in the backyards and spaces between the houses, which historian Sarah Wise

²⁹ Sarah Wise, *The Blackest Streets: The Life and Death of a Victorian Slum* (London: The Bodley Head, 2008), p. 16.

³⁰ These windows, Morrison noted in *Jago*, were ‘the one good feature’ of the buildings destroyed by the slum clearance (93).

³¹ James Elmes, *A Topographical Dictionary of London and its Environs* (London: Whittaker, Treacher and Arnot, 1831), p. 51. George F. Vale, and Stanley Snaith, eds., *Bygone Bethnal Green: Handbook to an Exhibition held at the Bethnal Green Central Library May 29th to June 12th, 1948* (London: Bethnal Green Public Libraries, 1948), pp. 9-10; (p. 12).

³² Beames, *Rookeries*, pp. 15-17.

describes as ‘a parallel world of illegal courts, small houses, workshops, stables, cowsheds’.³³ These developments worsened the problems of overcrowding and sanitation: the provisions of clean water were entirely insufficient, and the houses were infested with lice. The impossibility of accurately recording these unregulated developments contributed to the understanding of the place as impenetrable: the close, unmapped spaces seemed to confirm the image of the East End as ‘darkest London.’³⁴

A great deal of philanthropic and charitable work centred on this parish. The Nichol loomed so large in the imagination of would-be reformers and philanthropists that it provoked affective responses: social investigator Charles Booth wrote in his study of *The life and labour of the people in London* (1902-03) that ‘the place deserved destruction.’ Booth described it as ‘a district of almost solid poverty and low life in which the houses were as broken down and deplorable as the unfortunate inhabitants.’³⁵

By 1891 ‘the average population per room was about two and a quarter, 107 rooms having five or more inhabitants each.’³⁶ The population of these twenty streets, ‘exclusive of those in lodging houses, was 5,566.’³⁷ Many of the cellars, which ought to have been used as ‘dustbin and privy’ were rented as ‘rooms’.³⁸ Sanitary Inspector Mr Stewart stated in 1891 that many of these were eighteen inches below the street.³⁹ These conditions, as would be expected, were deleterious to health. Although incidence of disease in the Nichol was similar to that in the rest of Bethnal Green, people were, as Wise has noted, less likely to recover from illness there.⁴⁰ In the cholera epidemic of 1848-9, 147 deaths were reported from 99

³³ Wise, *Blackest Streets*, p. 17.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

³⁵ Charles Booth, *Life and labour of the people in London*, (London: Macmillan, 1902), p. 68.

³⁶ Masterman, *The Heart of the Empire*, p. 70.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

³⁸ Hector Gavin, *Sanitary Ramblings: Being Sketches and Illustrations of Bethnal Green, A Type of the Condition of the Metropolis and Other Large Towns*, (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1971), p. 46.

³⁹ Masterman, *The Heart of the Empire*, p. 70.

⁴⁰ Wise, p. 9.

houses in the Nichol.⁴¹ The Report of the County Council of 1886-1888 presented the following statistics for the Boundary Street area: general mortality per 1000 people in Bethnal Green was 22.8 per annum; in Boundary Street it was 40.⁴²

Throughout the nineteenth century efforts had been made to legislate against such poor housing. The Lodging Houses Act of 1851; the Artisans' Dwelling Act (the 'Torrens Act') of 1868 and the Artisans' and Labourers' Dwellings Improvements Act (the 'Cross Act') of 1875, all attempted, and failed, to solve the issue of poor and insufficient housing for the working classes. Both due to flaws in their constitution and the context of the economic depression of 1874-1896 these endeavours proved difficult to enact.⁴³ Numerous fictional and non-fictional accounts therefore pointed to the success of, or necessity for, such interventions. However, Morrison's oeuvre points more clearly than most to the issue identified by historian J.A. Yelling: that under the terms of these acts, 'one geography would be replaced by another', and neither may prove propitious to urban working classes.⁴⁴

Prior to 1883, the rights of property owners had been recognised as superior to those of the inhabitants of the Nichol. For example, the Sanitary Act of 1866 would have allowed the Vestry to register their multiple-occupancy houses and enforce overcrowding laws. However, the Bethnal Green Vestry, many of whose members were landlords of houses in the Nichol, did not register any houses under this act.⁴⁵ The need for reform became more pressing as inhabitants of the slum sought suffrage, despite legislation aiming to prevent them from doing so. Nichol landlords could no longer be protected by their tenants' disengagement with legal developments and consequent housing developments that concerned them. New laws concerning residence meant to exclude those who lived in 'itinerant housing' but 'the

⁴¹ John Marriott, *Beyond the Tower: A History of East London* (London and New Haven: Yale UP, 2011), p. 144.; Alan Palmer, *The East End: Four Centuries of London Life* (London: John Murray, 2000), p. 61.

⁴² Masterman, *The Heart of the Empire*, p. 70.

⁴³ Roy Porter, *London: A Social History*, (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. 326-327.

⁴⁴ J.A. Yelling, *Slums and Slum Clearance in Victorian London* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1986), p. 9.

⁴⁵ Wise, *Blackest Streets*, p. 19.

1883 electoral register for the ward containing [...] [the Nichol] contained 473 voters who had not appeared in the 1882 register.’⁴⁶

After vigorous campaigning by the priest of the Holy Trinity church in the Nichol, Reverend Arthur Osborne Jay, the slum’s destruction began with the clearance of Orange Court, on which site Jay built his new church in 1889. The wholesale clearance of the entire slum was the first large-scale project operating under the auspices of the Housing of the Working Classes Act of 1890, and was begun by the nascent London County Council in 1891.⁴⁷ The Boundary Street Clearance Scheme reconfigured the slum’s isolating topography. It razed the courts and alleys of the slum and introduced wide boulevard style streets and Arts-and-Crafts inspired flats, designed by architect Owen Fleming. The flats were designed to be light, airy and hygienic: ‘every flat would receive sunlight at forty-five degrees to its windows’ and a large central laundry was built on Montclare Street.⁴⁸

The transformation of the slum ought to have been what historian Lisa Keller has called ‘a triumph of order.’⁴⁹ Jerry White describes it as ‘the greatest slum clearance scheme of the [nineteenth] century’, affirming that the Boundary Street Estate was ‘a significant step forward in the making of modern London.’⁵⁰ The project was completed in 1900. Opening the estate, the Prince of Wales cited Morrison’s novel, which he stated would linger as a memorial of the Nichol: ‘few, indeed, will forget this site who have read Mr Morrison’s

⁴⁶ Marriott, *Beyond the Tower*, p. 251.

⁴⁷ C. J. Stewart, London County Council, *Housing of the Working Classes in London: Notes on the action taken between the years of 1855 and 1912* (London: Odhams Ltd., 1913), p. 35.

⁴⁸ The Gentle Author, ‘Closed House Weekend’, *Spitalfields Life*, <http://spitalfieldslife.com/2015/08/07/closed-house-weekend/> accessed 7th August 2015.

⁴⁹ Lisa Keller, *Triumph of Order: Democracy and Public Space in New York and London* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

⁵⁰ Jerry White, *London in the Nineteenth Century: A Human Awful Wonder of God* (London: Random House, 2007), p. 59.

pathetic tale of *A Child of the Jago*.⁵¹ This statement, conferring the role of historical document onto the fictional text, is a conceit about *Jago* that has persisted.

By describing the process of destruction of the slum and construction of the estate at precisely the moment when these changes were actually taking place, Morrison's novel interfered with the historical removal of the slum. The Boundary Street Estate looks in towards a bandstand built upon the rubble of the Nichol. Iain Sinclair has described this bandstand as if it is layered over the novel, making the real place a palimpsest over the fictional site: he calls it 'a curious elevation, a mound from which roads radiate out, as if in answer to a riddle [...] Dreadnought flats that have replaced the rookeries of Arthur Morrison's *Jago*.'⁵² The absence of the place in reality and its presence in the text question the realism of the text because the reality no longer exists.

The sign 'Jago' steps into the lacunae of historical accounts. A dearth of historical studies of the area has been redressed in recent years, but Vale and Snaith suggest that it had so long been segregated that it had never been able to write its own history.⁵³ Morrison's novel both challenged and assumed the role of showing the reality of the cleared space. Peter Brooks has argued that 'realist fictions labour under the burden of accusation that they are lies that don't know it, lies that naively or mendaciously claim to believe they are truths.'⁵⁴ Morrison's fiction, however, is accorded the status of truth, while the actuality is purported to be imaginatively unreal.

The destruction described within the text questions any claims to truth made by the novel, as the place it describes is no longer there. Yet concomitantly, the representation of destruction taking place within the novel is historically accurate. The position of the

⁵¹ The Prince of Wales in his speech opening the Boundary Street Estate, 3rd March 1900, in London County Council, *The Housing Question in London 1855-1900* prepared under direction of C.J. Stewart, Clerk of the Council, (London: Truscott and Son, 1900), p. 211.

⁵² Iain Sinclair and Marc Atkins, *Liquid City*, (London: Reaktion, 1999), p. 126.

⁵³ Vale, and Snaith, *Bygone Bethnal Green*, p. 12.

⁵⁴ Peter Brooks, *Realist Vision* (London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 6.

Victorian East End both as historical and imaginative place is extraordinarily well-realised in *Outcast London*, historian Gareth Stedman Jones's renowned 1971 text, and Morrison's novel, though allotted only a footnote, expresses this intriguing duality. In Stedman Jones's words, *Jago* 'imaginatively revealed the *unreality* of the Boundary Street Clearance Scheme.'⁵⁵ The shock of transformation of the urban space was experienced as 'unreality': the unreliability of the urban space to tell its own history is at issue here. Morrison shows that that which is real can be more inexplicable than the realms of fantasy.

II.

In 1967, P.J. Keating mooted that 'Arthur Morrison's position in the history of the English novel is firmly fixed and is unlikely to enjoy any major re-evaluation.'⁵⁶ Keating's work on Morrison has itself provided a corrective to his statement. The timing of Keating's article was judicious: with the launching of the History Workshop helmed by Raphael Samuel, scholars explored the history and literature of the East End more fully as part of their aim to democratise history. These scholars took up many of the mysteries identified by Keating. Samuel, Bill Fishman and MEP Stan Newens contributed, in 1985, to a Radio 4 programme about Morrison and the *Jago*, presented by Andrew Whitehead. The laudable aims of this group were to re-examine the history of the East End with emphasis on lives lived by the poorer members of society, and to assert its interest and value. However, even this estimable group could not resist the conflation of the terms 'Jago' and 'Nichol'. In the Radio 4 programme, music in a minor key and language such as 'troglodytes' jar with the efforts to de-sensationalise the history of the place. Samuel, writing the history of Arthur Harding, who grew up in the Nichol, declares in the programme that when they first met, Harding had no record of his childhood beyond what was in novels like Morrison's. The

⁵⁵ Gareth Stedman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society* (London and New York: Verso, 2013) p. 221*n.* my emphasis.

⁵⁶ P.J. Keating, 'Who Knows Arthur Morrison?', *East London Papers* Vol. 10., 1967 43-47.

programme ultimately describes Morrison's depiction of the pervasive criminality of the site as 'monstrous and absurd libel'.⁵⁷ Nonetheless, the 'Jago' has, in part, been treated as historical by these scholars because of the lack of working-class histories and voices. The efforts of the History Workshop, then, demonstrate the paradoxes of the equation of Morrison's East End writings with actuality, even as they disputed the representation of that actuality. The difficulty, for scholars of working-class literature, is that realism has as its focus the 'ordinary' or everyday but that one errs to read it as a straightforward unmediated representation. As Raymond Williams avers in his definition of realism, we must not forget that 'to see [realism] as reality' is to deliberately exclude the work of the artist, and 'in extreme cases to pass off a fiction or a convention as the real world.'⁵⁸ Unless we view realism with these nuances, its sophistication can be missed.

Therefore despite efforts to rediscover and uncover Morrison, realism's reputation as unfashionable in the later twentieth century meant that his work was still of marginal interest. In recent years there has been a resurgence of interest in Arthur Morrison in literary studies.⁵⁹ This development was concomitant with the urban focus of cultural studies in the late 1990s and early 2000s, as well as the reclamation of realism by scholars. In 2007, Rachel Bowlby wrote that 'poor old realism' had been dismissed for too long by a literary criticism which viewed realism as an unfortunate interval between on romanticism and modernism, lacking historical significance and without 'formal innovation.'⁶⁰ Bowlby, Beaumont and others contributed to the correction of this bias in the 2007 book *Adventures in Realism*.

⁵⁷ Whitehead, Andrew, presenter 'The Jago: The Blackest Pit in London' 1985, Radio 4 produced by John Theocharis: available at <http://www.andrewwhitehead.net/history-workshop.html> [Last accessed 10 June 2011]

⁵⁸ Williams, *Keywords*, p. 261.

⁵⁹ Keating's work on Arthur Morrison includes: 'Arthur Morrison and the Tone of Violence' in *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), pp. 167-198.; 'Biographical Note' in Arthur Morrison *A Child of the Jago* (Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer., 1982), pp. 11-36.; *The Haunted Study: A Social History of the English Novel 1875-1914* (London: Fontana Press, 1991); *Working Class Stories of the 1890s* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971).

⁶⁰ Rachel Bowlby, 'Foreword' to *Adventures in Realism*, ed. by Matthew Beaumont (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. xi.-xviii, (pp. xiv-xv).

An interest in local history led a group of enthusiasts at Loughton, Essex, to found The Arthur Morrison Society in 2007 after a reading by Stan Newens.⁶¹ In 2008 Newens's short study *Arthur Morrison: The Novelist of Realism in East London and Essex* and Sarah Wise's history of the Nichol, *The Blackest Streets: The Life and Death of a Victorian Slum*, were published.⁶² Also in 2008, the Faber Finds imprint, which aims to rediscover laudable but out-of-print works of English literature, published some of Morrison's most popular works.⁶³ In academic circles simultaneously a quiet rediscovery was taking place. Predominantly, these studies have focused on *Jago*. This thesis aims both to account for this centrality and to remedy this lack by contextualising *Jago* within Morrison's oeuvre.

There is a persistent fascination with the enigma of the East End in both literary and cultural studies. A recent conference at Queen Mary University London, 'Interpol London', and 'The Malleable Spectacle: A London on Film Study Day', (BFI, 4th July 2015) suggest that we are still eager to ask, if unable to answer, the question Morrison asked in 1891: 'who knows the east end?' The 'Arthur Morrison and the East End' conference at Queen Mary in November 2013 marked the beginning of a coherent effort by the academic community to address the biographical mysteries and intricacies of style in Morrison's work. The current gentrification and concurrent housing issues in the area have prompted an increased interest in the questions he sought to answer. However, no full-length studies of Morrison's work have as yet been produced. The growing critical attention to Morrison, and accessibility of digital archives, allow some of the lacunae in Morrison's history and cultural moment to be redressed.

Although his Biographical Study in the 1969 edition of *Jago* relied, as Keating said, 'more on conjecture than established fact', it raised questions which are still fruitful for

⁶¹ The Arthur Morrison Society: <http://arthurmorrisonociety.vpweb.co.uk/>

⁶² Stan Newens, *Arthur Morrison: The Novelist of Realism in East London and Essex* (Loughton: Alderton Press, 2008).

⁶³ *A Child of the Jago*; *The Hole in the Wall* and *To London Town* were all published by Faber Finds (London: Faber, 2008). Although the editions are sound, these introductions are somewhat outdated.

Morrison scholars.⁶⁴ Further biographical studies such as Michel Krzak's have provided little beyond what Keating had already uncovered.⁶⁵ Through a concise biographical study this dissertation will reveal more about Morrison's life, so that assumptions need no longer be relied upon. Although Keating's work is extremely thorough, his insistence that all of Morrison's work is 'slum fiction' requires interrogation.⁶⁶ I argue that Morrison's work must be understood as a response to slum fiction rather than exemplary of such a school.

This thesis seeks re-evaluation of Morrison's work without, as Krishana Munoz-Hodgson intended in her 2012 dissertation, asserting he ought to be inserted into the canon.⁶⁷ Indeed his position at the boundary of the canon has never prevented his work from being discussed. Morrison's work has remained in print since its first publication, and has been regularly, though not frequently, the study of literary enquiries. Although this project aims to be critically rehabilitative, it by no means attempts to do what Audrey Murfin announced as her aim in a 2014 article on Morrison – to enact an 'apology' for him.⁶⁸

Morrison's near-contemporaries looked back with interest at a form of realism which they recognised as very specific to the 1890s. Sensitive to the accuracy or otherwise of his picture, Jane Findlater's examination of 'The Slum Movement in Literature' is a useful contextual study. Findlater situated Morrison at the latter stages of the 'slum movement', as one who expressed the slums not as a moral lesson but 'an object in pity and terror'. While Dickens wrote in 'that decent age when an author still thought that he owed his readers some apology for introducing them into low society' Findlater correctly observed that Morrison's

⁶⁴ Keating, Foreword and 'Biographical Study' in Arthur Morrison *A Child of the Jago* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 1982), p. 11.

⁶⁵ Michel Krzak, 'Preface' to Arthur Morrison, *Tales of Mean Streets* (London: Faber and Faber, 2008), pp. 7-17.

⁶⁶ Keating, *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction*, p. 167.

⁶⁷ Krishana Munoz-Hodgson, 'Reviving the Jago: A case for reassessing Arthur Morrison's *A Child of the Jago*' Thesis: MA, (California State University, Los Angeles, 2012).

⁶⁸ Audrey Murfin, 'Flashes from the Slums': Aesthetics and Social Justice in Arthur Morrison' *The Literary London Journal*, Volume 11 Number 1 (Spring 2014), 4-21, (4).

fiction had no such moral imperative.⁶⁹ Holbrook Jackson similarly recognised that Morrison was a ‘new realist’ who ‘depicted slum life as a thing in itself at a time when people still looked upon the slums, much as they had done in the time of Dickens, as a subject for romantic philanthropy.’⁷⁰

A lull in studies of Morrison ended after the Second World War, when one might expect work displaying sympathy for eugenic ideas of prohibiting ‘breeding’ among the ‘useless’ poor to have been particularly distasteful.⁷¹ V.S. Pritchett was surprisingly untroubled by *Jago*: for Pritchett its subjects should be admired as people, who ‘survive, for a time,’ showing that ‘man is the animal who adapts himself.’⁷² It was only with the hindsight of the later twentieth century that critics like John L. Kijinski expressed deep concerns regarding the eugenicism evident in Morrison’s work which, as Kijinski states, were ‘particularly frightening’ in light of the events of the Second World War.⁷³

In his perception of the *Jago* as ‘a foreign city’ with a ‘racy odour’, Pritchett, more than Morrison himself, engages in the conceit of the East as other.⁷⁴ Pritchett commends Morrison’s work but without Keating’s biographical information he is biased by a view of Morrison as a ‘spectator’ of the East End.⁷⁵ However, in his later essay ‘An East End Novelist,’ a revision of his introduction to *The Hole in the Wall*, Pritchett realises that Morrison’s stories are ‘written from the inside and they have extraordinary merit.’⁷⁶

⁶⁹ Jane Findlater, ‘The Slum Movement in Literature’, *The National Review*; May 1900; 35:207, 447-454. (448).

⁷⁰ Holbrook Jackson, *The Eighteen Nineties: A Review of Art and Ideas at the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (London: Pelican, 1939), p. 39.

⁷¹ Eugenics were a pseudoscientific response to Darwin’s theories of natural selection, whereby it was believed that the human race could be improved by selective breeding, that is, by inhibiting the reproduction of ‘undesirable’ types. Francis Galton, a cousin of Charles Darwin, was a proponent.

⁷² V.S. Pritchett, *The Living Novel* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1949), p. 155.

⁷³ John L. Kijinski, ‘Ethnography in the East End: Native Customs and Colonial Solutions in *A Child of the Jago* in *English Literature in Transition 1880-1920* Vol. 37, No. 4, 1994, 490-501 (500)

⁷⁴ Pritchett, Introduction to *The Hole in the Wall*, p. v; *The Living Novel* p. 152.

⁷⁵ Pritchett, Introduction to *The Hole in the Wall*, p. vii.

⁷⁶ Pritchett, *The Living Novel*, p. 153.

It was Vincent Brome who enabled the view of Morrison as an insider. In *Four Realist Novelists* (1965) Brome revealed that Morrison was born in the East End.⁷⁷ This discovery enabled a re-examination of Morrison as a working-class writer who disguised his roots.⁷⁸ Brome revived Morrison's centrality to realist fiction, situating him alongside William Pett Ridge, Edwin Pugh and Richard Whiteing, drawing unusual conclusions and approving Morrison's lack of sentimentality.⁷⁹ However, Brome has a tendency not to cite his sources and gives some incorrect dates, rendering his account somewhat unreliable.

The late twentieth century periodically rediscovered the appeal of Morrison. Even before the 'spatial turn' in literary studies, the importance of place in Morrison's work was appreciated. Anita Ramasastry's BA thesis, supervised by Seth Koven, convincingly suggests the importance of Morrison's playfulness with boundaries in the text, contextualising these with examinations of the architectural project for the Boundary Street Clearance scheme. This study is brief but thorough, and is particularly interesting in its engagement with its discussion of Charles Booth's poverty maps in relation to *Jago*.⁸⁰

The rise in interest in history 'from below' allowed for further investigation of Morrison's work in the late-twentieth century. Keating, Stedman Jones and Raphael Samuel contributed to the revival of marginal figures including Morrison. Samuel's oral history of Arthur Harding, who had been brought up in the Nichol, provides an intriguing insight into the pervasiveness of the term 'Jago'. Used in the text as a metonymy for the inhabitants, the 'Jagos', 'Jago' also became interchangeable with the term 'Nichol' for the slum's real inhabitants, as Harding confirms.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Vincent Brome, *Four Realist Novelists* (London: Longman's Green and Co., 1965), p. 7.

⁷⁸ Koven, *Slumming*, p.296. n32.

⁷⁹ Brome, *Four Realist Novelists*, p. 16.

⁸⁰ Anita M. Ramasastry, 'Alternative Construction: The Use of Space in Arthur Morrison's *A Child of the Jago*' BA Hons, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, March 1 1988).

⁸¹ Arthur Harding uses the name 'Jago' interchangeably with 'Nichol' in Samuel's *East End Underworld*.

The continuing interest in Morrison at the turn of the twenty-first century was aided by the publication of excellent cultural histories interested in the East End, particularly Judith Walkowitz's *City of Dreadful Delight* (1992), Koven's *Slumming* (2004) and Pamela Fox's *Class Fictions: Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel, 1890-1945* (1994). In the 2000s, work by Jessica Maynard, Dan Bivona and Roger Henkle returned Morrison to the academy for discussion. Henkle's instructive essay on 'Morrison, Gissing and the Stark Reality' provides a Marxist insight into Morrison's work, as well as studying its presentation of gender relations.⁸² Maynard's 2008 essay 'Arthur Morrison, The Floating World and the Pictorial Method in *A Child of the Jago: Painters of the East*' yokes together seemingly contradictory interests of Morrison's – his slum fiction and his Japonisme. Maynard displays how Morrison's interest in Ukiyo-e or 'Floating World' images reflects both the everyday nature and the unreality of that everyday experience in the East End.⁸³

In *Class in Late-Victorian Britain* (2007) Kevin Swafford usefully identifies the cultural role of the signifier of the East End for the Victorians.⁸⁴ However, I take issue with Swafford's claim that the Jago is created as a site of 'absolute difference'.⁸⁵ Tim Youngs and Roger Henkle have also pointed to the Jago as a place in which customs of the outside world are 'inverted.'⁸⁶ The alterity of the Jago is discussed in slightly differing terms by Richard Benvenuto, who presents graphs to illustrate the contrasting impressions of the characters' rise and fall as they are interpreted inside and beyond the Jago. Benvenuto's conclusion, that the Jago is a 'self-contained, self-enclosing world', fails to recognise Hannah Perrott's attempts – admittedly insufficient – to keep the family 'respectable' and to accord with

⁸² Roger Henkle, 'Morrison, Gissing and the Stark Reality', *Novel*, Spring 1992, 302-320 (308), 319.

⁸³ Jessica Maynard, 'Arthur Morrison, the Floating World and the Pictorial Method in *A Child of the Jago*', *English Literature in Transition (1880-1920)*, 51.1 (2008): 44-56.

⁸⁴ Kevin Swafford, *Class in Late-Victorian Britain: The Narrative Concern With Social Hierarchy and its Representation* (New York: Cambria Press, 2007), p. 91.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁸⁶ Tim Youngs, *Beastly Journeys: Travel and Transformation at the fin de siècle* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), p. 49.

external norms.⁸⁷ It is essential to recognise that the Jagos and the inhabitants of the Mean Streets do not turn norms and values inside out, but attempt to imitate them.

There has been, in criticism, a lack of understanding of Morrison's heavily ironic tone which has led to errors in reading his work. Both William C. Frierson and Matthew K. McKean use ellipses in reading Morrison's sketch 'A Street', thereby losing the rhetorical nuances of his language. The text is manipulated by these critics to say 'The East End is a vast city [...] a shocking place [...] an evil plexus of slums' whereas in the text it is clear that Morrison is reporting received rumours about the East End – the actual text reads 'who knows the East End? It is a shocking place, *one will say*.'⁸⁸

Simon Joyce's *Capital Offenses* (2003) makes the intriguing statement that 'metaphors harden into beliefs in the 1890s': what follows enquires further into this issue as it relates to Morrison's work.⁸⁹ Joyce's identification of the 'apocalyptic nihilism' of the Jago is important to my study of that novel. I accord with the reading of the Jago as 'apocalyptic' – indeed, such a reading is almost unavoidable – but I investigate this in the paradoxical representation of the quotidian nature of the hellish to effect what I call the 'apocalyptic everyday'. Joyce's work takes an interesting literary geographical approach. However, Joyce relies, I feel somewhat too heavily, on the work of Franco Moretti in his analysis of Morrison. Moretti's method in understanding this is useful only up to a point. Comparing the representation of space in late-Victorian slum fictions, I will use not Moretti's distant reading methods but close readings, which will equally validly draw to light forgotten literature, though without the capability of studying the vast quantities used as Moretti's samples.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Richard Benvenuto, 'The Revealing Structure in *A Child of the Jago*' in *English Literature in Transition*, Vol. 31, No. 2., (1988) 153-161. (157).

⁸⁸ William C. Frierson, *The English Novel in Transition 1885-1940* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1942), p. 89.; Matthew K. McKean, 'Rethinking Late-Victorian Slum Fiction: The Crowd and Imperialism at Home', *English Literature in Transition*, Vol. 54 No. 1., 2011, 28-55. (35) Emphasis added.

⁸⁹ Simon Joyce, *Capital Offenses: Geographies of Class and Crime in Victorian London* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2003) pp. 225-226.

⁹⁰ Forthcoming projects of Moretti's Stanford Literary Lab include 'A Geography of Nineteenth-Century English and American Fiction', which will analyse data from 4,000 novels.

Mary Burgan's essay 'Mapping Contagion in Victorian London: Disease in the East End' is also useful in suggesting the relations between uses of space by Morrison and George Gissing.⁹¹

Lynda Nead's *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (2005) also uses spatial theories, notably Michel de Certeau's analysis of perspective in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1988).⁹² Nead's study is useful on mapping and discusses the arrangement of spaces of power, control, cleanliness and hygiene. Nead's study is concerned with the mid-Victorian period so does not engage specifically with the material included in this dissertation; nonetheless it is both contextually and conceptually useful.

Wise's engaging history, *The Blackest Streets*, importantly divorces Morrison's novel from the reality of the Nichol, asserting the general respectability of the historical place.⁹³ Wise argues that *Jago* 'suffers' because of Morrison's 'unwillingness to consider Jago dwellers as fully human.'⁹⁴ Her discussion of Morrison's relationship with Osborne Jay is intriguing but uses somewhat sensational language: she calls Morrison Jay's 'willing slave'.⁹⁵

Two recent editions of *Jago* have been produced. Peter Miles's critical edition, first published by Everyman in 1996, was reissued by Oxford World's Classics in 2012.⁹⁶ Miles's critical selections are illuminating. Diana Maltz's edition of the novel was published in 2013 by Broadview Press, coinciding with the 150th anniversary of Morrison's birth. Maltz introduces a different range of contextual material to Miles, so that each work is valuable in

⁹¹ Mary Burgan, 'Mapping Contagion in Victorian London: Disease in the East End' in Debra N. Mancoff and D.J. Trela, eds, *Victorian Urban Settings: Essays on the Nineteenth-Century City and Its Contexts* (New York and London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1996) pp. 43-56. (p. 51.)

⁹² Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005); Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* trans. by Steven Rendall (London: University of California Press, Ltd, 1988).

⁹³ This has also been suggested by Yelling, *Slums and Slum Clearance*, p. 112 and Samuel, *East End Underworld*, p. 286.

⁹⁴ Wise, *The Blackest Streets*, p. 230.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 226.

⁹⁶ This edition omits some good sources from the 1996 edition, however, such as Krishnan Kumar, 'Versions of the Pastoral: Poverty and the Poor in English Fiction', *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 8, I, (1995), 1-35 in Miles 'Morrison and His Critics' in *A Child of the Jago* (London: Everyman, 1996), pp. 216-252 (p. 251).

its own right. The closeness of their publication demonstrates the increasing commercial as well as academic interest in Morrison.

Maltz has written about *To London Town* (1899) and *The Hole in the Wall* (1900) in Emma Francis and Nadia Valman's 2013 edition of *19* journal. Maltz locates Morrison's sensibility as firmly centred on the wharves of his childhood. Valman and Francis have noted that 'for Morrison, a historical geography of the East End was the key to understanding its distinctive ethos.'⁹⁷ Maltz's similarly sensitive understanding of the geographies which Morrison was depicting is valuable in responding to and confirming his claims about the hierarchical geographical separations in the East End.⁹⁸ Maltz's critical discussions of *To London Town* (1899) and *The Hole in the Wall* (1902) clarify the importance of reading beyond *Jago*.

Murfin's recent article examines the relationship between Morrison, Dickens and Jacob Riis, focusing on *Jago*. Though her understanding that Morrison was both 'deeply invested in the visual arts' and deeply contemptuous of his readers is accurate, Murfin falls into the semantic traps of describing Morrison's work as 'very real' or 'more real' than other practitioners. She also describes the links between Morrison's artistic practice and that of urban slum photography, particularly Riis's, as 'inseparable', which although intriguing, is not entirely convincing.⁹⁹

Fox's *Class Fictions* (1994) draws on Keating's biographical information, describing Morrison as 'a working class writer who felt compelled to mask his class background.'¹⁰⁰ Fox understands Morrison as one of the working-class writers of the fin-de-siècle who faced

⁹⁷ Emma Francis and Nadia Valman, Introduction: Revisiting the Victorian East End. *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, [S.l.], n. 13, Jan. 2012. Available at: <http://www.19.bbk.ac.uk/article/view/635/748>. [Last accessed: 17 Aug. 2015].

⁹⁸ Diana Maltz, 'Arthur Morrison, Criminality and late-Victorian Maritime Subculture' in 'Revisiting the Victorian East End' *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 13, 2011 Available at: <http://www.19.bbk.ac.uk/article/view/ntn.624/742>. 1-25 (3). [Last accessed: 20 Apr. 2012].

⁹⁹ Murfin, 'Flashes from the Slums', 16.

¹⁰⁰ Fox, *Class Fictions*, p. 110.

the difficulty of 'Exposé as (Self) Exposure.'¹⁰¹ Engaging with Morrison's 'intra-class' position, Fox provides an illuminating reading of *Jago*.¹⁰² Morrison's class position in relation to the text is also discussed by Koven, who discusses Morrison's secrecy regarding his class position in relation to his distancing narrative technique.¹⁰³ This position has also been of interest to Ramasastry who equates the spaces of the *Jago* to Morrison himself whom she identifies as uniquely placed between the interior and the exterior: between the middle and the working classes.¹⁰⁴

The above selection demonstrates the persistent interest in the place of the East End as described in the work of Arthur Morrison. My intention is to avoid some common approaches to Morrison's work. Firstly, I challenge the contention that he ought to be categorised as a 'slum fiction' writer. Such a deduction relies heavily on readings of *Jago* to the exclusion of his other works. Indeed, *Jago* is the only one of his works which confronted outright and at length the Victorian dilemma of the slum. Rather, I present his East End work as a response to the slum fiction that preceded it. Although deliberately drawing on many tropes and motifs of earlier writers, Morrison fundamentally rewrites the East End in his work. I attempt to produce a more rounded vision of Morrison's work whilst also acknowledging the centrality of *Jago* to his reputation and stylistic development.

Secondly, I reject the critical approach whereby Morrison is appraised as a proto-sociologist, with his primary value as historical sociology. As C.H. Peake wrote in 1967, reading Morrison's work one encounters 'the dangers of confusing fiction with sociology or social history.'¹⁰⁵ Commentators from Morrison's contemporaries onwards (notably the Prince of Wales, above) have repeatedly fallen into this snare. As Nicholas Tingle suggests,

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p. 109.

¹⁰² Ibid, p. 94 ; pp. 109-112.

¹⁰³ Koven, *Slumming*, p.296. n. 32.

¹⁰⁴ Ramasastry, 'Alternative Construction', p. 50.

¹⁰⁵ C.H. Peake, 'Re-readings: *The Hole in the Wall*: A. Morrison, 1902' in *East London Papers* Volume 10 1967 35-42 (35).

the way to avoid such unproductive analyses is ‘to assert that the value of a literary work is not dependent on its “real” content.’¹⁰⁶ Many previous approaches assess Morrison’s value in terms of his correspondence to apodictic truth. However, this thesis aims to understand his writing in relation to the reception of realism in late-Victorian literature and culture, which greatly complicated the idea that the closer a fiction came to truth the more successful it could be as a fiction.

In recent years the bias of literary studies to move beyond assessing whether or not a realist place was ‘real’ as such, and into discussions of how the actuality of places was complicated by their fictive representations, has been mirrored in the work of cultural historians. Koven has claimed that the imagining of the Victorian slum ‘opened up a gap between facts and fantasies into which elite men and women could and did project their own needs, desires, and values.’¹⁰⁷ This conceit has also been interrogated by historian Andy Croll who argues that many historians ‘no longer seem willing to contemplate the underworld as a social reality, preferring instead to conceive of it as a “mythical”, “imagined” construct.’¹⁰⁸ The value of many social explorers and slum fiction writers has in recent years been located in how the fantasy of the ‘real’ functions in their texts. This enables a challenge to analyses such as Krzak’s, which suggests that Morrison’s value lies in his stylistic and topical faithfulness to a historico-sociological foundation.¹⁰⁹ Krzak’s conclusion, that ‘because the contemporary picture, with its rhetoric, is so consistent, we may infer that Morrison’s fiction is based on reliable facts, and insist on his first-hand knowledge of the places he describes,’ is no longer germane.¹¹⁰ The pursuit of what is ‘real’ in Morrison’s fiction should not be allowed to occlude Morrison’s rhetorically nuanced language.

¹⁰⁶ Tingle, ‘Realism, Naturalism, and Formalism’, 55.

¹⁰⁷ Koven, *Slumming*, p. 285.

¹⁰⁸ Andy Croll, ‘Who’s Afraid of the Victorian Underworld?’ *The Historian*, Winter 2004, 30-35 (30).

¹⁰⁹ Michel Krzak, ‘Arthur Morrison’s East End of London’ in *Victorian Writers and the City* edited by Jean-Paul Hulin and Pierre Coustillas (Lille: Publications de L’Universite de Lille, 1979), pp. 145-182. (p. 153).

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

III.

In this thesis I demonstrate the impossibility of a monolithic categorisation of Morrison as a realist. Such a judgment is made impossible by the variation within his oeuvre, which exemplifies generic mobility. It is urban and parochial, realist and symbolic, folkloric and modernist. Writing in the wake of aestheticism, and sharing many of its influences, Morrison's ultimate aim was not to censure or improve. Like his aesthetic friends, he believed that the only responsibility of the writer was to write of life 'as he sees it.'¹¹¹ He shifted genres throughout his career, refusing to fix his practice into one mode. Even within his East End work, his shifts of address and tone are too enormous to conform to a single category, no matter how complex the category itself.

Realism requires definition nonetheless, despite the oft-noted quandary that any definition of realism itself reaches pitfalls at the earliest interrogation. Ostensibly the simplest form of representation, realism shows 'things as they really are.' But this always prompts the question, 'but how *are* they?'¹¹² Even the most successful attempts to provide an exhaustive definition of realism as such are always broad; for example Pam Morris's definition of realism as 'any writing that is based upon an implicit or explicit assumption that it is possible to communicate about a reality beyond the writing.'¹¹³ Such definitions always prompt further questions.

The capacious category must be narrowed down to its cultural context. Realism was the movement in literature away from a focus on grandiose subjects and romantic or implausible plotlines. Realist writers intended to focus on the lives lived by the majority, rather than an aristocratic minority. They endeavoured to represent in art and literature, with

¹¹¹ Morrison, 'What is a Realist?', p. 3.

¹¹² Robert Blatchford, *My Favourite Books*, (London: Walter Scott Ltd., 1900), p. 222.

¹¹³ Pam Morris, *Realism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 6.

specificity of place and time rendered in exhaustive detail, the lives of ordinary people.¹¹⁴

Realism used pared-down descriptions of the ordinary and banal to objectively and accurately express quotidian human life. It drew on naturalism in the influence of natural history and the natural sciences, and in the acknowledgement of materialism. The late-Victorian mode of realism self-consciously enacted a ‘facing up to things’, daring to confront the actual, rather than writing about the ideal.¹¹⁵

English literary realism was both a repudiation of earlier Victorian notions of ‘purity’ and an embrace of artistic developments in Europe. In France, ‘réalisme’ had been used since 1857.¹¹⁶ Writers determined to treat of ‘life as it is’ were inspired by French naturalism, led by Emile Zola.¹¹⁷ In England, Frierson notes, ‘naturalism called attention to the evils of restraint and taboo, and it revealed the world of everyday affairs as being of marvellous interest if viewed in the critical spirit and treated with honesty.’¹¹⁸

Naturalism was the effort to render literature with scientific causality. Prompted by Zola’s essay on ‘Experimental Fiction’, the aim was to examine the impact of heredity and environment on characters, using the omniscient narration of the earlier century to describe the effects. Naturalism demonstrated the determinist view of humanity; the fixedness of human patterns of life ascribed not to destiny but to the combined effects of heredity and environment. In light of the recent developments in natural history and the natural sciences, naturalism sought truth about the material human condition through literature. Zola’s method relied on an exhaustive investigative process when researching novels, so that naturalism claimed an ability to convey apodictic truth.

¹¹⁴ Ordinary people being in the nineteenth century definition, the working-class, that is, people without inherited wealth and property.

¹¹⁵ Williams, *Keywords*, p. 259.

¹¹⁶ Jules Champfleury’s *Le Réalisme* appeared in this year.

¹¹⁷ Eliza Lynn Linton in ‘Candour in English Fiction’, [1890] excerpt in Sally Ledger with Roger Luckhurst (eds.) *The Fin de Siecle: A Reader in Cultural History c. 1880-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 113-116 (p. 113.)

¹¹⁸ Frierson, *The English Novel in Transition*, xiii.

Miles suggests that in the late-Victorian period:

The rise in influence and authority of natural philosophy and the social sciences effectively worked to confirm and amplify the claim of realism to be the inevitable mode of representation and analysis of a responsible literature.¹¹⁹

This slightly over-simplifies the responses to realism, which were by no means a straightforward acceptance of realist literature as truthful, but instead revealed an ontological crisis over what could be known to be true, and depicted as such. Morrison's focus on the East End and the ordinary lives lived there accorded him the title 'realist' but his intent was in fact to challenge this location of the 'real' in representing lives which were often extraordinary, and which could never be 'real' to those who stood outside them. Morrison was not a social realist, but his work is critical of structures which condemn ordinary people and he was writing at a time when he believed literary interventions into ordinary lives had already failed.

Realism in England was also a response to the expansion of democracy, which enforced an encounter with the consciousness of working people. Late-Victorians were 'conscious of something wrong underneath modern progress, they realised that free trade, reform bills, philanthropic activity and missions had made neither health nor wealth.'¹²⁰ The economic depression of 1874-1896 led to new social problems, and new social fear, particularly as it coincided with efforts to expand suffrage. As Edmund Gosse wrote in 1893, 'we have this huge mass of individuals around us, each item in the coagulation struggling to retain and to exercise its liberty.'¹²¹ There were members of society who now counted as never before. Rachel Bowlby has averred that realism developed in response to this: 'in the spirit of the democratising movements of the nineteenth century, bringing into literary or

¹¹⁹ Miles, Introduction, *Jago* p. xxii.

¹²⁰ Rose, *The Relief of Poverty*, p. 32.

¹²¹ Edmund Gosse, *Questions at Issue*, (London: William Heinemann, 1893), p. 35.

painterly view common worlds of experience that had previously been aesthetically unseen, disregarded, or out of bounds.’¹²²

The increasing democratisation of the literary landscape, however, did not make for an acceptance of realism *qua* realism. Rather, as I show in Chapter 4, it changed the perception of the audience. When the critic H.D. Traill read *Jago*, he declared it a failure of realism. By the time of publication the estate had been redeveloped, so that the place was no longer a slum. Traill observed that Morrison’s research had indeed taken place during the destruction of the Nichol, and declared that his supposedly objective methods therefore could not provide an accurate picture: ‘as Mr Morrison has described it, [the Jago] never did and never could exist’.¹²³ Morrison observed that his depiction of the Jago was objected to for being simultaneously too real and not real enough; for recording the truth and for exaggerating the truth, for telling unnecessary realities; for writing of a place that once existed, that never existed, and that no longer exists. Morrison responded to Traill’s criticism with an East End joke:

There is a story current in the East End of London, of a distracted lady, who, being assailed with a request for the loan of a saucepan, defended herself in these words: ‘Tell yer mother I can’t lend ‘er the saucepan, consekince o’ ‘avin’ lent it to Mrs Brown, besides which I’m a’usin’ of it meself, an’ moreover it’s gone to be mended, an’ what’s more, I ain’t got one.’ In a like spirit of lavish objection, it has been proclaimed in a breath that I transgress:- because (1) I should not have written of the Jago in all the nakedness of truth; (2) my description is not the least like; (3) moreover, it is exaggerated; (4) though it may be true, it is quite unnecessary, because the Jago was already quite familiar, and everybody knew all about it; (5) the Jago houses have been pulled down; and (6) that there never was any such place as the Jago at all.¹²⁴

¹²² Bowlby, ‘Foreword’, *Adventures in Realism*, p. xiii.

¹²³ H.D. Traill, *The New Fiction and Other Essays on Literary Subjects* (London: Hurst and Blackett, Limited, 1897), p. 13.

¹²⁴ This joke is also made by Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899) and *The Joke and Its Relation to the Unconscious* (1906), although Freud refers to a kettle. Peter Miles hopes that the explanation is to be found in Freud having read *A Child of the Jago*: ‘A Child of the Jago, Freud, and youth crime today’, <https://blog.oup.com/2012/05/child-jago-arthur-morrison-youth-crime/> [Last accessed 1st February 2014]. Arthur Morrison, ‘What is a Realist?’ (1897) reprinted as the ‘Preface to the Third Edition’ in Miles, *Jago*, pp. 3-8 (p. 6). Further references will appear in the text.

Traill's criticism paradoxically suggests that he was never prepared to believe in the reality of the realist text, yet insisted upon realism being observed. He deemed realism an artistic failure when it did not correspond with actuality. In their debate, the necessity of reflecting with minute accuracy the reality of urban lives and places is revealed. The discussion between Morrison and Traill discloses the peculiar responsibility realism was ascribed: that is, to reflect or represent life precisely, even in the midst of change.

Anxieties surrounding readers, reception and responsibility were prompted by the democratisation of literature. As Henkle has stated:

The late nineteenth-century English debate over realism and naturalism [...] embodies the effort by the cultural establishment to assure that all depiction and expression of lower-class life will be kept within the power of the middle class to assimilate it and represent it.¹²⁵

The debates between Traill and Morrison are representative of the debates surrounding realism at the time. Morrison's reaction to Traill illustrates the shifting boundaries between authors and critics. In Chapter 4 I consider the implications of the debates for Morrison's relation to his readers, an issue that has been of interest to recent critics including Maltz and Hunter.

English realism was often dismissed by critics as unpleasant and dull due to its concerns with the everyday. Gosse, for example, regretted that many realist novels of the period expressed 'the same obsequious attitude towards a suppositious public clamouring for the commonplace.'¹²⁶ The late-Victorian outpouring of documentary realism, however, suggests that the 'clamouring' was real. The strict, spare form of late-Victorian realism responded to the earlier depictions of the chaos of the slum, neutering its fantastic elements and rendering the inhuman human. The writer of the late-Victorian slum 'builds a written city

¹²⁵ Henkle, 'Morrison, Gissing and the Stark Reality', 308.

¹²⁶ Gosse, *Questions at Issue*, p. 23.

to control the urban wilderness around him.’¹²⁷ Representing the destruction of the city, Morrison troubled the ability of the realist writer to account for and control the chaos represented by the slum.

Morrison was a writer operating at the limits of late-Victorian realism. He was writing when fictional realism was thought to be giving way to factual accounts of the city space, but he also recognised and challenged the problem that the nineteenth century had “‘imagined” [the East End] into existence’ and rendered it spectacular.¹²⁸ His work pushes against the boundaries of the representation of the slum, the boundaries between author and critic, and the boundaries of realism.

IV.

Morrison wrote supernatural stories, detective fiction, plays, novels and short stories. This study focuses on Morrison’s East End work, not because he is best understood as a slum novelist, but because his understated style is best expressed in these works: they constitute his most important contribution to literature. The paradoxes between reality, history and myth thrown up by *Jago* form the core of this interrogation, and his other London writings are looked at in relation to this and to his brief but fervent engagement in the realist debates of the 1890s. Fiction and non-fiction are examined, with particular emphasis on the East End ‘trilogy’ of *Tales*, *Jago* and *To London Town* (1899). His 1902 novel *The Hole in the Wall* is discussed as well as selected stories from *Divers Vanities* (1905).

In the first chapter I examine Morrison’s life and artistic development. I demonstrate that Morrison was involved with many prominent figures of literary production in his youth, and uncover his reluctance to promote himself in the literary world, despite his aptitude. Morrison’s progress from an East End street to the literary circles of the West End was, if not

¹²⁷ William Chapman Sharpe, *Unreal Cities: Urban Figuration in Wordsworth, Baudelaire, Whitman, Eliot and Williams* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 13.

¹²⁸ Paul Newland, *The Cultural Construction of London’s East End: Urban Iconography, Modernity and the Spatialisation of Englishness* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2008), p. 18.

unique, certainly uncommon at this time. He occupied an unusual space between East and West as a workingman of literary sensibilities, a prominent figure who eschewed the possibilities for literary celebrity available to him and common among his peers.

The second chapter establishes Morrison's East End writings as confrontations to the representations of the East End produced by his predecessors, from his sketch 'Whitechapel' (1888) to his generically unstable collection *Tales* and finally to his most well-known novel, *Jago*. In *Jago* Morrison confronts both the sensational and the cathartic visions of the slum produced by his predecessors. Mindful of Findlater's caution, that to attempt to demonstrate an 'exhaustive knowledge' of the slum movement in literature would be to demonstrate 'wicked pride', I attempt to provide an overview of the slum as it appeared in fiction and non-fiction throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, with a particular focus on novels by writers whose visions of the slum influenced Morrison most profoundly: Charles Dickens, George Gissing and Walter Besant.¹²⁹ I identify Morrison's differential approach to the East End as sides of the same coin: the horror of the *Jago* is matched by the zealous pursuit of respectability in the mean streets, in which no lengths are too far to ensure the good reputation of individuals and streets, and thus the maintenance of their separation from slums. *Tales*, I assert, is not a slum fiction, but a response to the slum writings which preceded it. The chapter considers the particular problem presented by the Nichol slum in fiction: it examines why, of three novels written about the Nichol from 1895-1897, Morrison's is the only one which achieves historical significance.

Chapter 3 looks further at *Jago* in relation to the sketch map which precedes it, discussing how this relates to both the historical destruction of the place and the position of the slum in the popular imagination. The mapped text draws attention to the instability of cartography as a measure of place. This chapter investigates Morrison's relationship to social

¹²⁹ Findlater, 'The Slum Movement', p. 447.

explorers and journalists writing about slums by focusing on their differential uses of mapping. Endeavouring to challenge the accepted view of the incontrovertible Charles Booth, I demonstrate the rhetorical status of Booth's poverty maps. The second section of Chapter 3 focuses on maps of the Nichol. The sketch map of the Jago exemplifies the situation of the novel at a new boundary in fictive realism, between fantasy and empirical reality. The chapter concludes by reading *Jago* as a mapped text which exhibits the effects of urbicide – that is, the violent destruction of the city – on its characters. As Marshall Berman notes, urbicide turns place into space, the familiar into the uncanny.¹³⁰

In the final chapter I observe the reception of Morrison's early work, with a specific focus on the discussion of Morrison's flawed realism by H.D. Traill. The mixed but often impassioned reception of Morrison's writings demonstrates the concern as to how far realist literature can be understood to accurately represent the urban space. Reading Morrison's essay 'What is a Realist?' (1897) brings to mind Brooks's assertion, that:

Any label such as "realism" is inadequate and that great literature is precisely that which understands this inadequacy, which sees around the corner of its own declared aesthetics, sees what may make its house of cards come tumbling down.¹³¹

Morrison's later fiction was greatly affected by the criticisms of Traill and others: I locate these changes in his representation of readers and literacy.

Morrison's writing is a response to the late-Victorian location of the real at the margins of the city, among the poorest and most desperate inhabitants. His work shows how the daily horrors of ordinary poverty are perpetuated not only despite but often because of good intentions and well-meaning interventions. Morrison denied the effectuality of efforts by outsiders to assuage the problems of the East, while presenting East Enders as desperately incapable of helping themselves. Morrison's work entirely disproves the conceit that slum fictions could cure the problem of the slums in the East End of London in the late-nineteenth

¹³⁰ Marshall Berman, 'Falling' in Matthew Beaumont and Gregory Dart, eds., *Restless Cities* (London: Verso, 2010), pp. 123-137.

¹³¹ Brooks, *Realist Vision*, p. 20.

century, denying ‘the promise [...] that again and again, from the garbage, the scattered feathers, the ashes and broken bodies something new and beautiful may be born.’¹³² His work provides a vigorous challenge to the fictionalised East End created by his predecessors.

The realist myth of the Jago persists. Writing slightly after Morrison, Thomas Burke, author of *Limehouse Nights* (1912), explained the nature of the East End in the popular imagination thus: ‘facts fade away and die, but legends are invulnerable and immortal, and the East End legend, I suppose, will last as long as there is any East End.’¹³³ At issue in this thesis is the way in which Morrison unwittingly created through an apparently uncontrived prose style one of the most enduring legends of the East End.

¹³² John Berger cited in Davis, *Planet of Slums*, p. 199.

¹³³ Thomas Burke, *The Real East End* (London: Constable and Co., 1932), p. 2.

1

THE LIFE OF ARTHUR MORRISON

(1863-1945)

In 1901, Arthur Morrison, aged 38 and the published author of several works, was invited to submit a passage on his life and writing for the book *Twentieth Century Authors*. This he did, coming out of a ‘long, self-imposed silence’ to record his birth in Kent to a father born at Blackheath.¹ In obliging the editors, Morrison created one of the greatest fictions of his life: as Vincent Brome later discovered, Morrison was not born in Kent at all, but in Poplar, East London, as his father was before him.² Morrison was a successful man of very ordinary origins, which he sought to distance himself from now that he had risen above them.

Morrison has been frequently described in literary memoirs, usually in passing and almost invariably inaccurately. Fictional Morrisons masquerading as factual ones include Martin Priestman’s ‘socialist Arthur Morrison’ and the ‘Oxford University Scholar Arthur Morrison’ of George G. Lensing.³ The claim made in a 1902 interview by Guy Carleton Lee that Morrison had attended King’s College London is also false.⁴ Many of these false histories were encouraged by Morrison himself. As Seth Koven notes, the enigma of the writer was furthered because in his fiction Morrison constructed a ‘complex web of authorial poses [...] to complicate his relationship to his own working-class origins.’⁵

Morrison’s greatest literary achievement was in rendering the turn-of-the-century city with ruthless lucidity: he related truths about East End life that had proved incomprehensible to other writers working in the same vein. Yet his writing style, one of irony, bleak comedy and extreme authorial self-effacement, meant that in writing of the East End, he never revealed himself. None of his East End characters ventriloquized Morrison, and though we can see his greater sympathy for some – in particular the boy protagonists who were, like

¹ Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft, eds, *Twentieth Century Authors: A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature* complete in one volume (New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1942), p. 989.

² See also P. J. Keating, Biographical Study, *A Child of the Jago* (London: Panther, 1971).

³ Martin Priestman, *Crime Fiction: From Poe to the Present* (Plymouth: Northcote House, 1998), p. 17.; George G. Lensing wrote this in: ‘Stevens and New York: The Long Gestation’ in Lisa Goldfarb and Bart Eeckhout, eds. *Wallace Stevens, New York, and Modernism*, (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2012) pp. 21-36 (p. 30).

⁴ The falsity of this claim was verified for me by King’s College Archives.

⁵ Koven, *Slumming*, p.296. n.32.

Morrison, orphaned – it is rarely possible to state where Morrison himself is situated within a given text. This is one of his great skills as a writer and one of the qualities of his work that most intrigued and troubled contemporary readers. The diversity of his output adds a further complication to asserting who Morrison was through his writing. He was an essayist; an urban observer; a stark realist; one of the most important slum fiction writers of his time but also a detective story writer, a playwright and an expert in Japanese art. This biography attempts to penetrate the life of a writer who, though successful and popular, endeavoured in his personal life and in his written work to remove himself from the account.

Throughout his life, Morrison was reticent, and sometimes deliberately misleading, about his origins. This seems peculiar given the general admiration for the self-made man at this time. In his memoir *Twenty Years of My Life* (1914), Douglas Sladen, the author of *Who's Who* and an acquaintance of Morrison, remarked admiringly of another friend, Joseph Shaylor, author of *The Pleasures of Literature and the Solace of Books* (1889): 'he has told us himself that he is a self-made man – i.e. he has had nothing but his own intelligence and grit to help him.'⁶ Even in this context of admiration for the self-made among his peers and acquaintances, Morrison was unwilling to expose himself as such. This was perhaps due to concerns that such a revelation about his origins would compromise his position as an artistic inventor, but there are suggestions that his reluctance to reveal anything about his early life was owing to something more intimate. His instruction to his wife to burn all his papers after his death implies secrecy.⁷ However, Morrison exhibited discretion throughout his life, in the simplicity of his habits and the dourness of his dress which belied his cosmopolitanism and interest in 'aesthetic' hobbies. His self-effacement was a characteristic both of his work and his character.

⁶ Douglas Sladen, *Twenty Years of My Life* (London: Constable and Company, 1914), p. 301.

⁷ Keating, 'Biographical Study', p. 9.

So much is lost to the record that any biography of Morrison lacks his voice: he must be drawn through the memories of those who knew him. Indeed, although the enduring picture of Morrison due to his reticence and marginality from the canon is one of isolation, he was fully involved in the literary and artistic life of London throughout his early adulthood. He lived through two world wars and witnessed the reigns of five monarchs, one of whom he counted as a ‘brother’ through his Gentleman’s Club and the Freemasons (he noted to *The Bookman* in 1905 that he had ‘a weakness for “royalties”’).⁸

The biographical study of a man who was surrounded by ‘a cloud of self-induced obscurity’ is certainly a challenge.⁹ In 1985 Robert Lorin Calder wrote of Morrison that ‘it is unlikely that a full account of his life will ever be written.’¹⁰ However, whilst the deliberate obfuscations he encouraged during his lifetime are interesting in the secretiveness they suggest, the increasing availability of digital archives makes it possible to access previously unknown details about Morrison’s life.

I. Early Life: 1863-1887

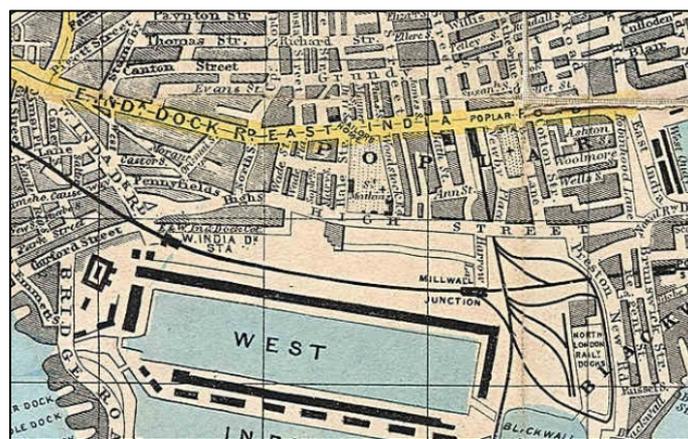


Fig. 1. Section of Reynolds’ New Map of London and Environs, 1882, showing Grundy Street, intersecting with Chrip Street, located between East India Dock and West India Dock

⁸ Anon., ‘Arthur Morrison’, *The Bookman*, Vol. 28. Issue 166. July 1905, 115.

⁹ Brome, *Four Realist Novelists*, p. 7.

¹⁰ Robert Lorin Calder, ‘Arthur Morrison: A Commentary With Annotated Bibliography of Writings About Him’ in *English Literature in Transition*, Vol. 28, No. 3. (1985) 276-297 (276).

Arthur George Morrison was born at home on 1st November 1863. His parents were then living with Morrison's maternal grandparents at number 14 John Street, Poplar (which later became 4 Grundy Street).¹¹ His father, George Richard Morrison, an engine fitter, and mother Jane Morrison (née Cooper) had married on 18th January, 1863, when they were both twenty-three, at St Peter's in Mile End. George Richard was the son of George Morrison, a lighterman, and was baptised at St. Dunstan's, Stepney, on 8th December 1839.¹² The family gave their address as 'Ratcliff' in the baptismal register and would likely have been living in the area at the time of the 'Ratcliff Highway Murders'.¹³ Ratcliff Highway had been disreputable from the eighteenth century, and was made more so at the beginning of the nineteenth, when it came to be understood not only as a place of 'highly organised plunder' [but also] violent murder.'¹⁴ The murders of the Marr and Williamson families in 1811 made Ratcliff notorious throughout England, and encouraged the area's literary exploration, most famously in Thomas de Quincey's essays, 'Second Paper on Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts' (1839) and 'Postscript' (1854). In 1811, it is alleged, Ratcliff Highway was 'one of the worst streets in London.'¹⁵ Yet its reputation prior to the murders seems no worse than many other streets in London – its population was as disparate as any other area, though more unsettled due to the proximity of the docks. Like the Nichol, the Highway's poor reputation was secured by its literary representation.

Morrison's mother Jane was also born in the area. George and Jane had six children in total, only three of whom survived beyond the earliest infancy according to census records.¹⁶ These losses were most likely between the birth of Arthur and his sister Ada, who were five

¹¹ It was listed as such from 1867 in the Post Office Directory – Newens, *Arthur Morrison*, p. 18.

¹² The position of lighterman was one of dubious reputation – it involved moving goods between ships and quays and therefore provided opportunities for theft – O'Neill, *My East End*, p. 22.

¹³ Baptismal Register, London Metropolitan Archives, Saint Dunstan, Stepney, Register of Baptism, P93 DUN 19, 1839, London, England, Births and Baptisms, 1813-1906.

¹⁴ P. J. Keating, 'Fact and Fiction in the East End' in Dyos and Wolff, *The Victorian City*, pp. 585-602. (p. 587).

¹⁵ Catharine Arnold, *Underworld London: Crime and Punishment in the Capital City* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2012), pp. 135-136.

¹⁶ The 1911 Census record shows that Jane had six live births but her only known children are Morrison, Ada and Frederick, suggesting that the other children died very young.

years apart in age. Morrison was the oldest of the couple's three surviving children. His sister Ada Jane was born at 15 Knighton Terrace, Charlton on 2nd December 1869. His brother Frederick William followed on 25th May 1870, at which date the family were living at 44 Hind Street, Poplar.

Morrison's childhood was marred by the early death of his father. George died of phthisis (tuberculosis of the lung) on 14th October 1871, when the family were living at 10 Bath Street, Poplar. This event finds its way into each of his important fictions. Dicky Perrott of *A Child of the Jago* (1896), Johnny May of *To London Town* (1899) and Stephen Kemp of *The Hole in the Wall* (1902) all suffer the early loss of their fathers. The survival of the May family in *To London Town* is due entirely to the assiduity of Nan May, who, like Morrison's mother, runs a haberdashery shop from her home.

After George Morrison's death, Jane and the children lived with her mother above her haberdashery in Grundy Street, the house in which Morrison had been born. Although the death of his father affected him profoundly, the family in some senses gained stability after his father's death. The records no longer show the frequent moving – a practice commonly known as 'flitting' – between areas of East and South East London indicated by the children's different birth places.¹⁷ Jane never remarried, and in 1911 was living with Ada Jane and Frederick, neither of whom ever married. The census for that year suggests that Frederick was the only member of the household working at that time.¹⁸ Like his brother, Frederick had been able to find work outside the unstable family traditions of working in the docks. Frederick had moved into the realms of the lower middle class as a librarian for the Charity Organisation Society. The brothers were the first in their family to make their living through literature. The COS, established in 1869, endorsed discriminating charity activities

¹⁷ The Gentle Author, 'Don't Do it Magazine: Interview with Stephanie Boland', *Spitalfields Life* July 4th 2015, <http://spitalfieldslife.com/2015/07/04/dont-do-it-magazine/> accessed July 4th 2015.

¹⁸ Census, 1911, Piece 9401, Schedule 279.

driven by, as Rose has observed, ‘stern insistence on individualism and self-help, its rejection of state aid except in a minor role and its distinction between the deserving and the undeserving poor.’¹⁹ One wonders, given his involvement with the COS, what Frederick’s thoughts were on Morrison’s provocative writings about the ‘Sentimental-Cocksure’ advocates of philanthropy.²⁰

Morrison’s primary education was at Hale Street Wesleyan School, which had opened in the year of his birth and closed in 1906.²¹ Frederick, born in the era of nationalised education, went to the local Board School.²² Poplar, together with the parishes of Stepney, Wapping, Bethnal Green, Limehouse, Mile End and Bow, was one of the Tower Hamlets. The borough was named, in 1832, for their provision of yeoman to become Tower of London guards. It contained the London docks and therefore had a vital part in the history of the city.²³ The proximity to the docks made it one of the most diverse areas of the city, but it was also, and remains, one of the poorest.

The docks suffered from a depression in the shipbuilding industry throughout Morrison’s early childhood. The effects of this were enormous, and, combined with the decline of the weaving industry which had provided employment for hundreds of thousands in the East End, devastating. Gareth Stedman Jones records that following the crash of the shipbuilding firm Overend and Gurney in 1866, ‘30,000 were destitute in Poplar alone’ by January 1867.²⁴ Roy Porter observes that the failed launch of Isambard Kingdom Brunel’s *Great Eastern* in 1857 and the crash of another major company, Ditchburn & Mare, were

¹⁹ Rose, *The Relief of Poverty*, p. 25.

²⁰ Morrison, (Miles edn., 2012) *Jago*, p. 76.

²¹ Newens, *Arthur Morrison*, p. 18.

²² *Census Returns of England and Wales, 1881*. Kew, Surrey, England: The National Archives of the UK (TNA), 1881. RG11/505 p. 25.

²³ Rosemary Taylor and Christopher Lloyd, *The Changing East End in Stepney, Bethnal Green and Poplar 1860-1960*, (Gloucs.: Sutton Publishing, 1997). pp. 6-7.

²⁴ Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, p. 102.

principal catalysts in the destruction of the docks in this period.²⁵ In this environment, Jane Morrison's survival as a shopkeeper is particularly remarkable.



Fig. 2. Sir Walter Raleigh's house at Blackwall, 1890. National Maritime Museum.

There were however some extremely wealthy companies, grand buildings and a rich history in the area. The docks, though suffering decline, remained lively, with pubs and factories as well as the imposing shipyards. Philanthropic effort was changing the area. In the 1860s, during Morrison's early childhood, Burdett Road was built. It was named after Baroness Angela Burdett-Coutts, the heiress to Coutts bank, who had frequently taken advice about how best to help poor Londoners from her friend Charles Dickens.²⁶ The new broad road allowed light and traffic to pass between the docks and Victoria Park.²⁷

The new streets, however, were not the most appealing to Morrison. He was fond of London's older streets. In 1907, Morrison contributed to a collective piece in *The Strand Magazine* which asked 'Which is the Most Interesting London Street?' (*The Strand*, 34, 314-322). While Morrison's opinion was asked for many such collective editorials, he rarely expressed himself with as much assurance as he does in this piece. Morrison's response described, unexpectedly, streets notorious for both brutal crime and petty theft:

²⁵ Porter, *London: A Social History*, pp. 231-232; O'Neill, *My East End*, p. 31.

²⁶ Claire Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life* (London: Penguin, 2011), p. 238.

²⁷ O'Neill, *My East End*, p. 61., Taylor and Lloyd, *The Changing East End*, p. 76.

The most interesting street – to me [...] that I ever saw in London was Ratcliff Highway in its old days. It is interesting to those who remember it in its glory and can still detect the scattered and blackened traces of its ancient state. I have a prejudice in favour of Petticoat Lane, although they have been sadly interfering with that, too.²⁸

As a young man whose family had always lived in the area, his fond, nostalgic relationship to the infamous Highway would have challenged the preconceptions of the majority of *The Strand's* readers. The area would be further transformed by the opening of the Blackwall Tunnel in 1897, but by that date Morrison had written himself out of the East End.

II. At the Palace, looking West (1881-1889)

Morrison took the route of many bright but disadvantaged youths and became a clerk after leaving school. In 1881, the census shows Morrison working as a clerk to the chief architect of the School Board, E.R. Robson.²⁹ Robson's imposing red brick designs for the new Board Schools were transforming the East End of Morrison's childhood, with towering buildings designed to create aspiration – and perhaps the proper amount of terror – in young people.³⁰ Morrison's sentiment towards Board Schools was equivocal. His later writing suggested that the movement towards nationalised education was a mark of decline as it removed independence – people had been too proud to send children to Board Schools when they first opened – reflecting perhaps the shape of his own education. When Robson left the School Board, Morrison followed him. Robson's next project was on the People's Palace at Mile End.³¹

1886 was a turning point for Morrison. In that year, in which he turned 23, he had his first work – some humorous verses on cycling – published in *Cycling* magazine. He described the verses in a 1907 letter to Walter J. Roberts, noting with uncharacteristic pride that 'my

²⁸ 'Which is the Most Interesting London Street?' *Strand*, Vol. 34, 1907, 314-32 2 (321).

²⁹ Newens, *Arthur Morrison*, p. 20.

³⁰ Jerry White, *London in the 19th Century: A Human Awful Wonder of God* (London: Vintage, 2008), p. 63.

³¹ Jacqueline Banerjee, 'Edward Robert Robson, Pioneering Architect of State Schools', Victorian Web, <http://www.victorianweb.org/art/architecture/robson/index.html>

first effort was accepted.’³² In the same year, Morrison was appointed the secretary of the Beaumont Trustees, a position which Oscar Wilde had unsuccessfully applied for.³³ The Beaumont Trustees administered the funds for the People’s Palace, so it is likely that Robson had some influence in Morrison’s appointment. In *The Decay of Lying* (1891), Oscar Wilde uses the People’s Palace as an example of literature producing effects in life, and justifiably so: the project was inspired by Sir Walter Besant’s 1882 novel *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* (1882).³⁴ This novel had a significant impact on Morrison’s life, though in his art he repudiated many of its messages.

Besant’s story is of two young philanthropists of private means who exert themselves to deal with what they see as the great problems facing East Enders in the 1880s – the lack of ambition and amusement. The young people devise an incredible – or, as Besant later called it, ‘impossible’ – scheme for the improvement of the East End: a ‘Palace of Delight’, to be built at Stepney Green, which would provide evening classes, lectures, leisure and sporting facilities as well as music and art.³⁵ The subtitle of the novel was ‘An Impossible Story’, and Besant’s explanation of the subtitle is characterised by his relentless idealism: ‘

I have been told by certain friendly advisers that this story is impossible. I have, therefore, stated the fact on the title-page, so that no one may complain of being taken in or deceived. But I have never been able to understand why it is impossible.³⁶
All Sorts and Conditions of Men inspired the trustees of the Beaumont Trust, with

money left from philanthropist John Barber Beaumont, to aid in the development of just such an institution as the novel describes. Appealing for funds in 1885, the trustees projected the ambitions of the Palace in very similar language to that employed in Besant’s novel. As

³² Miles, ed. ‘Morrison and His Critics’ in *A Child of the Jago* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 166-187. (p. 166). The magazine *Cycling* was in fact launched in 1891 so Morrison must be misremembering either the date or the title of this publication.

³³ Isobel Murray, ed., *Oscar Wilde, The Major Works*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) p. 595. Also mentioned in Neil McKenna, *The Secret Life of Oscar Wilde*, (London: Random House, 2003) p. 104. and in Iain Ross, *Oscar Wilde and Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 155.

³⁴ Oscar Wilde, ‘The Decay of Lying’ in *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde* (Hertfordshire, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1997), pp. 919-943. (p. 934).

³⁵ Murray, *Oscar Wilde*, p. 230.

³⁶ Besant, ‘Preface’ to the first edition, *All Sorts and Conditions of Men: An Impossible Story* [1882] (London: Chatto and Windus, 1891), p. viii.

Besant notes with satisfaction in his *Autobiography*, this book was used almost as a blueprint in creating the People's Palace at Mile End: 'Sir Edmund Currie, [Chairman of Trustees] trying to create such a place, used the book as a text-book.'³⁷ Calling for the recognition of the appalling 'heritage of dullness and dreariness, of unlovely and monotonous existence', the trustees echoed Besant who had described the greatest problems of the East End as dullness, the place itself as 'the Home of Dull Ugliness.'³⁸ The trust requested funds on the basis that the Palace would be beneficial not only in providing 'intellectual improvement and rational recreation and amusement' to East End workers, but also to render 'a true service [...] to our manufacturers'.³⁹ However well-intentioned, the ideology behind this is reminiscent of Lord Henry Wootton's caustic statement in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) that these projects do not work because poverty 'is the problem of slavery, and we try to solve it by amusing the slaves.'⁴⁰

However, the trustees conceived and promoted the establishment of the building as an alternative approach to philanthropy, one which focused on improving the inner life, not the living conditions, of the poor.⁴¹ They were sufficiently successful in this that in 1886 the building of the People's Palace was begun on Mile End Road. Although his vision was realised, Besant's dream was thwarted later as the Palace became less a 'Palace of Delight' and more a technical college. This was funded by the Drapers' Company who became involved after 1890, when funds from the Beaumont Trustees began to run low. Besant was disappointed in the evolution of the Palace, lamenting in his autobiography that

³⁷ Walter Besant, *Autobiography of Sir Walter Besant* ed. by S. Squire Sprigge (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1902), p. 244.

³⁸ E. Hay Currie, (Chairman of Trustees), *Beaumont Trust – A People's Palace in East London (An appeal for funds)* (July, 1885), np.; Besant, *All Sorts*, p. 111.

³⁹ Currie, *Beaumont Trust*, np.

⁴⁰ Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, (London: Penguin, 1994), p. 50. Similar sentiments are expressed by Wilde in 'The Soul of Man Under Socialism', (1891).

⁴¹ Currie, *Beaumont Trust*, np.

‘unfortunately a polytechnic was tacked on to [the Palace]; the original idea of a place of recreation was mixed up with a place of education.’⁴²

The Palace was naturally a bastion of self-help and the obsession with ‘Men who had Risen’, like so many balls of dough, is revealed in a column of this title in early editions of *The Palace Journal*. The column stated that ‘everybody must help himself.’⁴³ Yet Morrison never ascribed to the self-flattery that could come about by indicating how he had risen. Phillip Waller suggests that many writers of this time cultivated ‘a selective reminiscence which featured them winning fame against the odds.’⁴⁴ Morrison rejected this ‘selective reminiscence’ but chose another.

III. From the Palace to the Club 1888-1899

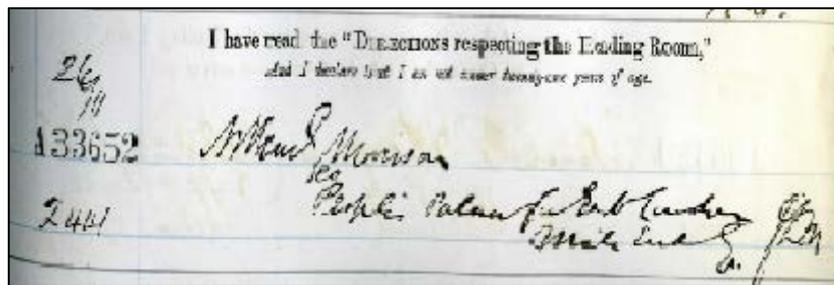


Fig. 3: Morrison’s signature in the British Museum Reader’s Register, 26th May 1888.⁴⁵

Morrison obtained his reader’s pass to the British Museum Reading Room on 26th May 1888. Interestingly, he gave his address at this time as the People’s Palace, Mile End, as the signature above shows. This is the first instance where Morrison is clearly reluctant to reveal his origins. Obtaining his readers’ pass shows his aspiration to the resources of the West. The Reading Room of the British Museum, situated in the centre of the city, was identified by the feminist writer Amy Levy as a place of equality and accessibility. The People’s Palace Library was modelled on the Reading Room of the British Museum, with its

⁴² Besant, *Autobiography*, p. 247.

⁴³ ‘Men who have risen’ in *The Palace Journal*, Vol. 1. No. 1. 16th November 1887, 5.

⁴⁴ Philip Waller, *Writers, Readers and Reputations: Literary Life in Britain 1870-1918* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 417.

⁴⁵ Thanks to Lyn Rees, Central Archive, British Museum for sending me this image.

distinctive circular shape. Its users, however, were not professional or aspiring writers. While the British Museum's reading room cited 'respectability' as a necessary qualification, the Palace Library was said by Levy's friend, the People's Palace Librarian Constance Black, to contain 'rough readers.'⁴⁶ Morrison's choice to reach literature beyond that supplied at the People's Palace Reading Room whilst giving the Palace as his address demonstrates his concomitant connection to, and aspiration to reach beyond, the East End.

1888 was an extraordinary year for Morrison. Later in the year the Whitechapel murders would transform impressions of the East End he knew, rendering it more terrifying, shocking and Other, and inspiring the introduction of expansive philanthropic models into the area. In this year, as Bill Fishman argues, the East End was transformed in the public imagination, so becoming 'a national institution: a reservoir of constant fantasy, to be drawn upon, with profit...' It was in 1880, as one of Fishman's sources extrapolates, that the term 'East End' came into the public consciousness; by 1888 it had become a term expressing notoriety, baseness, savagery.⁴⁷ It was in this atmosphere that Morrison began writing.

While the struggles of the Palace were ongoing, Morrison began to develop his unique voice in writing observational sketches of London. Between 28th October 1888 and 20th January 1889, Morrison contributed thirteen sketches on London and surrounding areas to *The People: A Weekly Newspaper for all Classes*. This conservative newspaper, established in 1881, was a precursor to *The Sunday People* and today's *Mirror*. It is certainly an obvious antecedent to those publications, prefiguring the sensationalism with which events are reported in those newspapers.

In 1888, *The People*, based at 110 Strand, was replete with stories of murders, highway robberies, 'romantic suicides', elopements and stabbings: it evoked a terrifying but

⁴⁶ Susan David Bernstein, 'Reading Room Geographies of Late-Victorian London: The British Museum, Bloomsbury and the People's Palace, Mile End' in *19: Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, Issue 13 (2011) Available at: <http://19.bbk.ac.uk/index.php/19/article/view/632>. Date accessed: 28 Apr. 2012. p. 2.

⁴⁷ William J. Fishman, *East End 1888: A year in a London Borough among the labouring poor* (Five Leaves: Nottingham, 2008), p. 9.

always 'exciting' London. It gave full pages to police reports and inquests. Headlines for the first few months of 1888 include 'Wild Wolves in Westminster' alongside 'Vampire Superstition in Serbia' (19th Feb). In January *The People* reported on the shocking entity of 'A Man with Two Mouths', on 25th March 'Another Convent Scandal'; in April, 'Escape from a Lunatic Asylum'. In January, a husband was sold (for £20); in April, a wife (£2). In the same month, a woman is reported as having been 'Too Fond of Cats' (2nd April). Other headlines include 'Probably Born to be Hanged', telling the story of a sixteen year old boy, and 'He Lived in a Perambulator.' There are several instances of vitriol throwing, prostitution, assaults, and numerous horrible murders, many in the East End of London. All this was long before the Whitechapel murders, which began in August.

From the end of February, however, the tone of the newspaper altered slightly. It reported more frequently on issues of political importance, examining the plight of workers in sweatshops at length, and considering the impact of the London School Board. As the full significance and horror of the murders became clear, the newspaper again shifted in tone. It simultaneously became more serious and more sensational. A whole page was devoted to 'LONDON HORRORS' in the October 7th issue. Larger font was used in the October 14th issue, describing with maps and illustrations, also recent introductions, 'THE SCENES OF THE RECENT MURDERS.' Alongside these, articles on the improvement of housing appeared, as well as articles on the openings of many new Institutions for working men and women around the East End.

Morrison's 'Cockney Corners' replaced, in the Literary Column, James Greenwood's 'Chronicles of the Crooked Club.' The sketches described sites including Poplar, Clerkenwell, Soho, Epping Forest, the London Hospital, The Polytechnic Institution and The People's Palace. The tone of these pieces varies from humorously overwritten descriptions of sheep's trotters in the first of these sketches, 'Chrisp Street, Poplar' to nostalgia and

earnestness – often these shifts take place within a single article. Throughout, however, the intent behind Morrison’s contributions is clear. In ‘Chrisp Street’, the street which intersected with the one on which he had been born, writing in the aftermath of the brutal attacks still being reported only two miles away, Morrison opens the series boldly and defiantly, as if challenging the murderer himself: ‘Poplar’, he wrote, ‘is a place which won’t be trifled with. It has a will of its own.’⁴⁸ In this piece he also relates the unsuccessful introduction of a designated market-place which failed. This seems likely to refer to Baroness Burdett Coutts’ notoriously unsuccessful design of the Columbia Road market. In ‘Chrisp Street’, therefore, Morrison suggests East End resistance to influences from both above and below.

In another ‘Cockney Corner’ of 25th November 1888, Morrison wrote of the crowds of young men outside the Polytechnic Institute: ‘the pavement outside [is] almost filled by a bustling crowd of young men at that time of life when a man has most in his hands the power of raising himself up or pulling himself down.’⁴⁹ Morrison, aged 25 at the time, could certainly have had himself in mind as he wrote these words.

Morrison’s penultimate piece in *The People* was ‘The People’s Palace’, published on January 13th, 1889. The piece opens with the quotation from Besant’s Preface about the ‘impossible’ nature of the story, affirming that Besant ‘foreshadowed the Mile End reality of to-day.’ It seems probable that this article led to Morrison’s appointment as Besant’s sub-editor, with some of the editorial responsibilities at *The Palace Journal*. He mentions the *Journal* in this article as ‘the yellow-covered paper so many people carry’ – it is ‘the literary organ of the palace.’ The article praises Besant’s ‘sympathetic novels’ of the East End. It also extolls the philanthropic work of Sir Edmund Hay Currie: ‘to mention Sir Edmund is to call

⁴⁸ Arthur Morrison, ‘Cockney Corners I. Chrisp Street, Poplar’, *The People, A Weekly Newspaper for All Classes* 28th October 1888, 2.

⁴⁹ Arthur Morrison, ‘Cockney Corners V: The Polytechnic Institute’, *The People, A Weekly Newspaper for All Classes* November 25, 1888, 2.

to mind not only the People's Palace, but the whole of the East-end, with its London Hospital, its schools, its asylums, and its every good agency.'⁵⁰

The title of his sketches, 'Cockney Corners', was reminiscent of collections of 'penny dreadfuls' published earlier in the century under the title 'Cockney Adventures'. There is little adventure in Morrison's sketches, however, and none of the sensationalism that marked the 'dreadfuls' or 'bloods'. Although his focus on the streets of London aligned these sketches thematically to *The Mysteries of London* (1844-5), G.W.M. Reynolds's enormously successful penny dreadful serial novel, Morrison's were markedly different in their focus on the ordinary East End. Their tone was austere, but they did not disregard the violence and poverty of the East End. Indeed the use of 'Cockney' in the title is more usefully understood from Morrison's point of view as allying him with 'the shop-keeping class', an understanding of the term deployed by Barnes in 1813.⁵¹ Although Morrison must have been aware of its more provocative connotations, he uses the term in this earlier nineteenth-century sense. The alliterative title of Morrison's sketches suggested both the cosiness of the 'Corners', as well as the filth to be found in East End corners. Morrison's formal austerity added significantly to the perception of reality conjured by the sketches. Morrison developed his shrewd, languid tone in response to the sensational reporting at the time. In 'Cockney Corners', Morrison established his voice as the chronicler of actual life in the East End.

As the sub-editor of *The Palace Journal*, Morrison diversified his literary output. Taking his cue from Besant's desire to enhance the literary aspects of the Palace, Morrison wrote about literary events and publications alongside issues of more general interest. This was in effect his literary training, and he used the opportunity well. *The Palace Journal* editions of which he was the sub-editor (from March to October 1889) reveal something of

⁵⁰ Arthur Morrison, 'Cockney Corners XII. The People's Palace', *The People: A Weekly Newspaper for All Classes* 13th January 1889, 2.

⁵¹ Gregory Dart, *Metropolitan Art and Literature, 1810-1840: Cockney Adventures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 8.

Morrison's political, literary, and social sympathies at this time. As the sub-editor in September 1889, Morrison wrote about the Great Dock Strike. He stated that writing itself seemed futile, and yet did not withhold his own observations. Although not wholly unsympathetic to the strikers, Morrison attempted to be even-handed in his approach, and believed that assistance from other workers towards the strike fund was in itself ultimately ill-fated.⁵²

In October 1889 Morrison wrote an obituary of Wilkie Collins. He was moderate in his praise of Collins, asserting that he 'was not perhaps a giant of letters – such a giant as Thackeray or Fielding', but that posterity would remember the 'cleverness' of plotting in *The Woman in White* (1859) and *The Moonstone* (1868).⁵³ In the same issue, Morrison noted his admiration for George Meredith, calling *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (1859) 'his masterpiece'. Morrison observed the common mistake that Meredith was "above the heads" of ordinary people, saying that he could not 'understand any reasonably intelligent man or woman failing to appreciate and enjoy [Meredith's] stories. They must not be floundered through in the stupid fashion so many people adopt in disposing of (it isn't reading) a novel' (242). In this article he rejected the novel conceived as an object of consumption, expressing the personal enrichment he had gained from literature as well as his own superiority as a reader.

In the *Palace Journal*, Morrison gained confidence in his writing style. Equally significantly, it is at the Palace that Morrison met his wife, Eliza Adelaide Thatcher, a teacher from Forest Gate, a suburb of East London.⁵⁴ Eliza was, like Morrison, born in Poplar. She was two years his junior. They were married at Forest Gate in 1892. In 1893 his only child,

⁵² The Sub-Editor, 'Notes of the Week', *The Palace Journal*, Wednesday, 4th September 1889 (IV – No. 95) 193-194.

⁵³ The Sub-Editor, 'Notes of the Week', *The Palace Journal*, Wednesday 2nd October 1889 (IV – No. 99) 241-242 (p. 241.)

⁵⁴ Diana Maltz, 'Introduction' to *A Child of the Jago*, (Ontario: Broadview, 2013), p. 13.

Guy Arthur Morrison, was born at Chingford, Essex.⁵⁵ Aside from Besant and Eliza, the most significant relationship Morrison developed at the Palace was with Harold Parlett. Parlett, like Morrison, became an expert on Japanese art in later life, and Morrison's wife bequeathed a painting of him to Parlett's wife, Lady Ethel, after his death.⁵⁶

After leaving the Palace in 1889, Morrison embarked upon his career as a full-time journalist, writing for the *Globe* and contributing to *The Strand* and other periodicals.⁵⁷ His first long collection of stories was published in 1891. This was a book of ghost stories entitled *The Shadows Around Us: Authentic Tales of the Supernatural*. The subtitle works with Morrison's unembellished prose to convey the plausibility of the paranormal. The synergy of verisimilitude and the supernatural in *Shadows* was also explored by Morrison in the story 'The Legend of Lapwater Hall', which he first published in *Macmillan's* in 1892. This was a legend invented by Morrison, which was 'taken seriously in a very solid article in a daily paper on the traditions of ghosts, and discussed as a matter of recognised folklore.'⁵⁸ In the Preface to *Shadows*, Morrison states that 'for many of the stories the compiler is indebted to the investigations of the Society for Psychical Research' (founded 1882).⁵⁹ He was one of many writers of the period to be linked to the Society.⁶⁰ Mesmerism and other practices of the occult were certainly often treated with suspicion, but the Society endeavoured to objectively prove or account for supernatural phenomena, demonstrating their impartiality by rejecting for publication many 'popular' ghost stories in favour of those that

⁵⁵ *Birth Marriage and Death Index*, [1893], 1837-1915 Volume 4a p. 362.

⁵⁶ Newens, *Arthur Morrison*, p. 31.

⁵⁷ Miles asserts that Morrison's first contributions to the *Globe and Traveller* were made in 1885, p. xxxii.

⁵⁸ Anon., 'New Writers: Mr Arthur Morrison' in *The Bookman*, Jan. 1895; 7, 40; 107.

⁵⁹ The Society for Psychical Research during this period had many well-known intellectual members. Today, however, the group are evidently eccentrics – their 'Report an Experience' website page requests that if wishing to report a premonition, 'please note that these should be: Made in advance of the premonition's outcome' <http://www.spr.ac.uk/page/paranormal-experience> [Last accessed 1 August 2015]

⁶⁰ See George M. Johnson, *Mourning and Mysticism in First World War Literature and Beyond: Grappling with Ghosts* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

were 'the best authenticated.'⁶¹ The tension between the incredible and the actual were therefore present throughout Morrison's published works: transcending boundaries is an aspect of his writing which was established early.

The 'Preface' to *Shadows* declares that its stories are 'as completely testified to as written facts may well be.'⁶² Though it seems unusual now to write of the supernatural in a matter-of-fact tone, Morrison's treatment of the supernatural in 1891 represents the complex position of spiritualism in the late nineteenth century. The fast-broadening boundaries of science at this time seemed capable of making the inexplicable explicable. In this context, belief in the supernatural was, for some, a belief that extraordinary phenomena such as ghosts could in time be empirically understood. Such things could eventually, it was supposed, come to be explained: the supernatural could become the natural. This is the practical, considered tone that Morrison's collection implies.

Nevertheless, in later life, as Keating has observed, Morrison 'longed to disown' *Shadows*.⁶³ However, he returned to the theme of the supernatural, rather more successfully, in the short story 'The Thing in the Upper Room', published in *The Story-Teller* in 1910. This story seems to have been influenced by Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) and by the works of Edgar Allan Poe.⁶⁴ 'The Thing', a phantom demon that haunts the Paris garret of a poor young artist, is either a real phantom or the artist himself, and the ending is ambiguous, not, as in *Shadows*, decided and verified. Morrison's unvarnished style is still evident in 'The Thing' but it is far more effective in this story, which engages with the city space to create a Poe-esque tale of mental disarrangement. Morrison embellished this story with a Japanese legend of a possessed mirror and a Malay dagger;

⁶¹ A. Taylor Innes, 'The Psychical Society's Ghosts', *The Nineteenth century: a monthly review*, Mar. 1877-Dec. 1900.177 (Nov 1891): 764-776. (766).

⁶² Arthur Morrison, *The Shadows Around Us* (London: Simpkin Marshall Hamilton Kent and Co., 1891), p. 4.

⁶³ Keating, 'Biographical Study', p. 20.

⁶⁴ Stevenson was a great friend of W.E. Henley, basing the character of Long John Silver on him: Damian Atkinson, ed., *The letters of William Ernest Henley to Robert Louis Stevenson* (Bucks: Rivendale Press, 2008), p. 196.

evidence of his learning and embroilment in those histories and tales. Morrison's development as a writer is clear in a comparison of these two supernatural texts, and suggests the value of his engagement in the traditions of East Asia to his art.

From 1889 to 1892 when he married, Morrison worked as a journalist, and lived a happy bachelor existence at chambers in the Strand. He later recalled sardonically how he felt his rooms to be a sanctuary in the city: 'I found the stout outer door of my chambers a sufficient protection against the bastille of the town. Perhaps a married man could not avail himself of so good a defence.'⁶⁵

By 1892 Morrison was making frequent contributions to *The Strand*. Launched in 1891 by George Newnes, it was an immensely popular illustrated monthly which became 'familiar to two generations of readers in every part of the English-speaking world.'⁶⁶ The magazine prided itself on the production of 'cheap, healthful literature' aimed at an aspirational middle class.⁶⁷ It was, Christopher Hilliard has suggested, a mark of prestige to be published in *The Strand*, which was at the forefront of pictorial publication.⁶⁸ Today, *The Strand* is remembered primarily for being the first magazine to publish the 'Sherlock Holmes' stories but at the time it was also known for its informative articles, which described the lives of popular figures in literature and music, and demystified the arts for its bourgeois readers. Morrison later expressed his pride at having worked at 'the old *Strand*.'⁶⁹

One of his earlier pieces, 'In Leadenhall Market' published in 1892, sets up his characteristic technique of contrasting the present day with the past, expressing nostalgia for

⁶⁵ Anon., 'Authors at Work: The disadvantages of working in London – and out of it' *The Bookman*, Nov. 1908; 35, 206, 83-88 (86).

⁶⁶ Reginald Pound, *The Strand Magazine: An Illustrated Monthly 1891-1950* (London: Heinemann, 1966), frontispiece. Morrison had already worked with Newnes on *Tit-Bits* – Keating, *The Haunted Study*, p. 38.

⁶⁷ John Greenfield, 'Arthur Morrison's Sherlock Clone: Martin Hewitt, Victorian Values, and London Magazine Culture, 1894-1903' in *Victorian Periodicals Review* Vol. 35, No. 1 (Spring, 2002), 18-36. Christopher Pittard, "'Cheap, Healthful Literature": *The Strand Magazine*, Fictions of Crime, and Purified Reading Communities' in *Victorian Periodicals Review*, Volume 40, Number 1, Spring 2007, 1-23.

⁶⁸ Christopher Hilliard, *To Exercise Our Talents: The Democratisation of Writing in Britain* (Cambridge, Mass., and London: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 18.

⁶⁹ Pound, *The Strand Magazine*, p. 38.

the London of his childhood. This nostalgia vanishes in *Tales* and *Jago*. ‘In Leadenhall Market’ is uncharacteristically effusive, when Morrison notes with gratitude that ‘Dear old Ship Tavern Passage!’ was not destroyed by the development of the animal market. It is a charming, if slightly saccharine, Dickensian sketch. The humour is gentle, rather than, as usual, dark, as when he says; ‘what living thing, short of a Hippopotamus, have I not bought there?’⁷⁰ The article is illustrated by Shephard, who later illustrated Morrison’s *Zig Zags at the Zoo*, (1894) a similarly frivolous and light work.

Morrison’s successful publication in such a wide variety of periodicals is indicative of his literary adaptability. Keating, discussing the inclusion of various writers in periodicals at this period remarks that ‘viewed retrospectively [...] the associations and conjunctions between novelists and periodicals at this time can appear startling.’ He notes that Morrison contributed to the magazine *Tit-Bits* (founded by Newnes in 1881) which ‘Conrad, Woolf and Joyce all submitted work to, and had it turned down by’. Morrison, today considered so much lesser a writer, was commercially successful from the beginning of his career, and at the same period as the others were being rejected, was ‘commissioned by *Tit-Bits* to write a story for one of its treasure-hunt competitions.’⁷¹ Morrison was uniquely able to strike the popular tone.

Morrison met W.E. Henley, (1849-1903) in 1892, when Henley was the editor of *The National Observer*, a conservative newspaper. William Ernest Henley was a poet and critic. He is principally remembered today for the poem of self-mastery and free-will, ‘Invictus’ (1875) which Nelson Mandela recited to other prisoners while incarcerated on Robben Island. Henley’s influence on Morrison, both personally and professionally, was profound. Their shared interests in boxing, Japanese Art, and literature made them, as Kennedy Williamson

⁷⁰ Arthur Morrison, ‘In Leadenhall Market’, *The Strand* Vol. 3 No. 16 1892, 361-368 (361).

⁷¹ Keating, *The Haunted Study*, p. 38.

recounts in his memoir of Henley, kindred spirits.⁷² Around this time Morrison met the novelist Arnold Bennett, who had also previously contributed to *Tit-Bits*, at a boxing match. Bennett, recalling this meeting, later described Morrison as ‘small and shrewd.’⁷³

Henley had assembled a group of promising young writers under his mentorship. The group included Rudyard Kipling, Kenneth Grahame, J.M. Barrie, Thomas Hardy, W. B. Yeats and Morrison. Henley’s protégés were, as both Keating and Derek Stanford observe, known as ‘Henley’s Regatta’, a term coined by Max Beerbohm.⁷⁴ Sladen later called Morrison ‘one of Henley’s most incisive young men.’⁷⁵ Under Henley’s editorship, Morrison contributed a great many pieces to the *National Observer*. He honed his banal style of prose at this time. Henley’s influence upon his writing was so significant that Jocelyn Bell has observed, not without some justification, that Morrison never again achieved the clarity of purpose and voice that he did under Henley’s tutelage. Bell has remarked that Henley was ‘an exacting editor; he demanded brevity, incisiveness and finish’ and these qualities are evident in the work Morrison produced under his vigilant editorship.⁷⁶ Writing in 1968, Stanford called the *National Observer* ‘a fiery forum of Imperialism and a deadly enemy to the cult of Wilde.’⁷⁷ However, Morrison and Henley shared with Wilde’s set a great many interests, particularly Oriental art, which Morrison began collecting in the early 1890s.

In 1894 Morrison became a member of the Savage Club. The Club, which still exists, was sometimes known as ‘the Salvage’, for people who could not get into the Savile.⁷⁸ Many of its members were, as Morrison was, Freemasons.⁷⁹ Its motto, adapted from a line in

⁷² Kennedy Williamson, *W.E. Henley: A Memoir* (London: Harold Shaylor, 1930), p. 144; p. 152.

⁷³ Tim Clark, ‘Japanese Paintings at the British Museum’ in *British Museum Magazine*, Spring 1993, No. 13. 15-18 (18).

⁷⁴ Derek Stanford, *Short Stories of the Nineties: A Biographical Anthology* (John Baker: London, 1968), p. 10.; Keating, ‘Biographical Study’, p. 21.

⁷⁵ Sladen, *Twenty Years of My Life*, p. 276.

⁷⁶ Jocelyn Bell, ‘A Study of Arthur Morrison’ in Arundell Esdaile, ed., *Essays and Studies collected for the English Association* (Vol. 5) (London: John Murray, 1952), pp. 77- 89. (p. 79).

⁷⁷ Stanford, *Short Stories of the Nineties*, p. 10.

⁷⁸ Edwin A. Ward, *Recollections of a Savage* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1923), p. 1.

⁷⁹ Morrison left £1,000 to the Freemasons’ Hospital in his will (Newens, *Arthur Morrison*, p. 31).

Hamlet, suggests its affability to the self-made: ‘we know what we are, but know not what we shall be.’⁸⁰ The Club was located in the Adelphi, an area which, David L. Pike notes, ‘was associated both with London’s underworld and its respectable population and occupied an equivocal place in contemporary imagination.’ Pike suggests the Adelphi’s role in the city’s spatial imaginary to be the ‘cultural icon of a vertically stratified London’. Making appearances in work by Dickens and in popular theatre, the Adelphi ‘epitomised the genre of low life and urban mystery.’⁸¹ Simultaneously above and below, respectable and sordid, both geographically and organisationally, the Club was located at an intersection and so was remarkably apt as a site for the East Ender Morrison to begin his reinvention as a gentleman.

One of the founding members was the journalist George Augustus Sala, author of *Twice Around the Clock* (1864), and many members were literary men and artists. The club’s atmosphere and ethics were an amalgamation of free-spirited Bohemianism – epitomized by the noted *bon vivant* Sala – and hard work.⁸² It was, somewhat paradoxically, a West End club for Working Gentlemen. Saturday nights at the Savage were raucous affairs but the members were not men of leisure.⁸³ Rather, as Edwin Ward observed in his memoir, The Savages ‘knew how to play, [but] they knew also how to work. They were vigorous people who ate well, drank well and stuck to their job, whatever it was.’⁸⁴ In this atmosphere of hard work and self-help tempered by pleasure, Morrison thrived. The environment spoke to his interests as well as to his attitude towards writing, which he always approached as work. Ward’s fond recollections record just the sort of place where a young man of aspiration but no pretension would flourish:

⁸⁰ Tom Catling, *A Savage Club Souvenir* (London: Savage Club, 1916), p. 1.

⁸¹ David Pike, ‘Down by the Dark Arches: A Cultural History of the Adelphi’, *The London Journal* Vol. 27, Issue: 1, May 2002, 19-41.

⁸² P. D. Edwards, ‘Sala, George Augustus (1828–1895)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2005 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/24526>, accessed 14 Jan 2015]

⁸³ Ward, *Recollections*, p. 60.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 2.

I have never mixed in any community where such absolute equality reigns. Famous or neglected, rich or poor, shabby or elegant, you hang up your halo with your hat in the hall. Any man who presumes on his wealth, or fancies himself for better or worse, would be wise to keep away; the Savage Club is no place for him.⁸⁵

The Savage Club however was not universally well-thought-of: 'The Savage Club', observed J.B. Priestley 'is the place where dirty stories go when they die.'⁸⁶

1894 was an enormously productive year for Morrison. In this year, Sally Ledger has observed, 'the hegemonic vehicle of Realism, the three-volume novel, died [...] the romance is propagandistically revived...'⁸⁷ Morrison experimented, in his way, with both of these forms. In 1894 he published his group of short stories, *Tales of Mean Streets*, which had a great impact on his career and reception. Morrison's *Martin Hewitt* detective stories, often denounced as imitations of Sherlock Holmes, appeared in both *The Strand* and its own imitator, the *Windsor Magazine*, and were published in full in 1894. Morrison was not the only 'slum fiction' writer to produce detective stories. Both L.T. Meade and Israel Zangwill published detective fiction as well as East End slum stories.

Where his *Tales* and *Jago* demystified the East End, *The Dorrington Deed Box* (1897) demystified the criminal detective, transfiguring Sherlock Holmes's remarkable insight into the actions of his criminal prey as unambiguous rascality in Horace Dorrington. Martin Priestman has made the claim, based particularly on reading *The Dorrington Deed Box*, that Morrison was a socialist. Dorrington, as Priestman correctly observes, 'unscrupulously robs, blackmails or even murders his way to whatever is in the offing, blithely repeating his view that, in a world of ruthless capitalist competition, 'everybody does it.'⁸⁸ However, Priestman overreaches in asserting that this is a representation of socialism on Morrison's part. Indeed,

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 1.

⁸⁶ Priestley cited in Waller, *Writers, Readers*, p. 514.

⁸⁷ Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst, eds, *The Fin de Siecle: A Reader in Cultural History c. 1880-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. xiv.

⁸⁸ Priestman, *Crime Fiction*, p. 17.

as the *Times* reviewer noted, Dorrington works ‘for his own hand’, not for social good.⁸⁹ Christopher Pittard succinctly notes of the *Martin Hewitt* stories that ‘Hewitt’s everyman persona is read as a conscious response to Holmes’s aloof intellectualism.’⁹⁰ As Pittard suggests, such analyses are reductive, and from what we know of Morrison the simplistic asseveration of a desire to create an ‘everyman’ is just so. The appeal of the *Martin Hewitt* stories, however, has been more enduring even than Morrison’s East End fiction – they remained in print when his other novels did not.

Tales was published on 15th November 1894. Morrison dedicated the volume to Henley, whose encouragement was instrumental in producing the collection. Responses to *Tales* were various. However, the collection brought Morrison to the attention of many important literary people who would later become acquaintances, including G.K. Chesterton. The socialism Priestman identified seems doubtful on a reading of *Tales*, but there is certainly evidence of social concern. Morrison’s sympathy for the new landlords in ‘All That Messuage’ is not unequivocal, but neither does he align himself with the socialist Joe who he presents as opportunistic and vindictive. The brutal and parasitic husband of Lizerunt, Billy Chope, attends radical and socialist meetings, and uses them to reason that he is not to blame for his violence and unemployment. In ‘Without Visible Means’, a fellowship of striking Dockers is divided first by disloyalty and then by disease. Morrison is not wholly sympathetic to the Dockers, yet the pathos of the story is profound and affecting. Likewise his story of Mrs and Miss Perkins, the widow and her unmarried adult daughter who die unseen by the gossiping street in ‘Behind the Shade’, is deeply moving, but the narrator is so distant as to offer no didacticism. In this story Morrison damns rather than praises the collectivity of the East End which later, particularly autobiographical, commentators

⁸⁹ Anon., ‘Recent Novels’, *The Times*, (London, England), Monday, Dec 27, 1897; Issue 35397; 4.

⁹⁰ Pittard, ‘Cheap, Healthful Literature’, 15.

revered.⁹¹ Throughout *Tales* Morrison's compassion for his characters is tempered with wry humour.

In some *Tales* the humour is explicitly directed at those with radical sympathies. In 'The Red Cow Group' Morrison observes and mocks contemporary concerns about the rise of anarchism in London with the inanity of a group recruited by a feckless and cowardly radical. The aspirant anarchist Sotcher is eventually arrested, drunk and tearful, with a fake homemade bomb which one of his recruits has mixed to deter him, once for all, from blowing up the local gas works. In this story the anarchist is thwarted by the lack of sympathy for his cause among other working men. Morrison's position is revealed further in other stories of the collection. In 'Lizerunt' and 'All That Messuage', Morrison identifies tragic victims of the ill-absorbed socialist ideals of others. In 'Squire Napper' resistance to socialism is portrayed as due to deep ignorance and the suspicion that arises therefrom. Socialism in *Tales* is both derided and shown to be dangerous and parasitic. Morrison represents East Enders as political victims subject to systems and ideologies they cannot ever wholly grasp. He suggests that both indolence and ignorance ensure that they can only ever ineffectually fight the forces that govern them.

Henley's response to Morrison asking permission to dedicate the book to him was kind but wary. Henley wrote:

You do me proud and I'm very much obliged to you. My opinion as to the virtues of the work has been high from the first, and the association gives me sincere pleasure. But – I warn you seriously [...] I don't bring luck to any man [...] We held our heads too high, we Observers, while we lived, and now that daring costs the beggars nothing, there are not a few that will take it out of us all they know.⁹²

The introversion expressed by Henley here is a characteristic Morrison seems to have imitated.

⁹¹ See O'Neill, *My East End*.

⁹² Williamson, *W.E. Henley*, p. 192.

Aside from Henley, the other great influence upon Morrison's *Tales* was the French writer Guy de Maupassant. George J. Worth wrote in 1957 that William C. Frierson's naming of Morrison et al as 'the Maupassant school' in England was misleading because 'in the first place, none of them, as far as I have been able to determine, publicly expressed any sort of artistic allegiance to Maupassant or praised the supposed chef d'école in print.'⁹³ This is incorrect: in a symposium in *The Bookman* on the subject of 'How to Write a Short Story' in 1897 Morrison used Maupassant as the pre-eminent example of short story writers. Although stylistically Morrison's work differs markedly from Maupassant's, he felt the formal methods of the older writer to be important to his own technique. Maupassant had died four years previously, and after his death his work was increasingly, but certainly not uncritically, discussed in the English press.⁹⁴ Morrison, however, saw a great deal of worth in Maupassant, one 'distinguished by the perfection of his workmanship – none could be better.' In writing short stories, Morrison stated, one could not do better than to examine how 'the unessential is rejected' in Maupassant's work. Indeed, in writing on the importance of 'severe' editing, the piece on 'How to Write a Short Story' enacts its own lesson: it is brief, but not unilluminating. Morrison's ability to write spare and indirect prose to convey great pathos indicates that he had long held the primary belief of this piece in mind: that is, that 'the first lesson is to reject.'⁹⁵

III.i Father Jay and the Jago: 1894-1896

In his next major project, Morrison was greatly influenced by the absorbing personality of the priest of a notorious Bethnal Green slum district. Belonging to the High

⁹³ George J. Worth, 'The English "Maupassant School" of the 1890's: Some Reservations' *Modern Language Notes*, Vol. 72, No. 5 (May, 1957), 337-340 (338).

⁹⁴ See for example, 'Count Tolstoi: Guy de Maupassant' in *Review of Reviews* 11. Jan. 1895, (36), which aligns with Tolstoy's views, agreeing that de Maupassant was lacking in 'the right moral attitude'.

⁹⁵ Robert Barr et al, 'How to Write a Short Story', *The Bookman*, 5.1. March 1897, 45-46. <http://gaslight.mtroyal.ca/howshort.htm> accessed 21 October 2014. Morrison in turn had an influence, it has been suggested, on another writer of short stories – Hunter has observed the influence of Morrison upon James Joyce in *Dubliners*. Hunter, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Short Story in English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 50.

Anglican order, the Reverend Arthur Osborne Jay was priest of the Nichol, a parish located between Bethnal Green Road and Shoreditch High Street, from 1886 to 1921. A skilled publicist and networker, Jay was a favourite, historian Sarah Wise suggests, among ‘many a West End society lady (and not a few gentlemen).’⁹⁶ This popularity enabled him to raise over £25,000 to develop the church and the area during his first ten years at the parish through private subscribers and his university, Magdalen College, Oxford. His efforts began the transformation of the infamous slum, demolishing one of its most noxious courts in order to build an extraordinary working men’s club-cum-boxing ring-cum-casual sleeping area, with the church on the first floor (illustrated below). Jay was popular among West London philanthropists, and greatly admired by the popular novelist Hall Caine. Caine described Jay as his ‘intimate friend’, a man almost Christ-like in his modest beginnings, whose ‘first Church was a stable in the Old Nichol.’ Caine suggests that Jay’s efforts in the area embraced the community in which he found ‘various habits of Life, some harmless, some harmful.’⁹⁷ Fostering those he found ‘harmless’ such as pugilism, Jay ingratiated himself into the area. This balanced view however was not shown in Jay’s own writings. Indeed these emphasise the infamy of the area, acting as aids in his efforts to raise funds.



Fig. 4. Reverend Jay’s boxing ring. The sleeping shelves for casual lodgers are visible to the right of this image. ⁹⁸ The church was above the club, on the first floor.

⁹⁶ Wise, *The Blackest Streets*, p. 190.

⁹⁷ Hall Caine, ‘The Son: Arthur Osborne Montgomery Jay’ in *Father and Son: A Study in Heredity* compiled by D.N. (1914), p. 9.

⁹⁸ Picture from Sarah Wise, ‘Inside the skin of a slum’, *Church Times*, 4 July 2008 <http://www.stgite.org.uk/library/jay.pdf> [Last accessed 1st September 2012].

Accounts of Jay suggest that he was extremely charismatic. He seemed to be the epitome of the ‘muscular Christian’ – he was known as the ‘boxing parson’.⁹⁹ His building was the architectural manifestation of muscular Christianity. This term, first used by author Charles Kingsley in 1857, described the use of self-control and discipline to express one’s Christianity through ‘manliness’, making the male body the site of human perfectibility. It was ‘an association between physical strength, religious certainty, and the ability to shape and control the world around oneself.’¹⁰⁰ In his efforts to transform the slum that was his parish, as Lynne Hapgood has argued, ‘Jay was a crucial part of the communication system: he offered himself, his physical presence and behaviour, as a counterpointing set of values to those informing slum life.’¹⁰¹ His forceful personality and prodigious talent for fundraising meant that he was discussed in many fictional and non-fictional accounts during his time in the parish, including *The Christian* (1897) and *A Princess of the Gutter* (1895).¹⁰² He wrote three non-fiction texts about the area: *Life in Darkest London: With a Hint to General Booth* (1891), in which the subtitle refers to his disagreement with the founder of the Salvation Army, William Booth, about the cure for poverty; *The Social Problem: Its Possible Solution* (1893); and *A Story of Shoreditch: A Sequel to Life in Darkest London* (1896).

These ostensibly authentic accounts, based on his personal knowledge of the area, bore however some suspiciously close similarities to the fictional description of slum life in London in Gissing’s *The Nether World* (1889). In 1893 Gissing wrote to *The Times* alleging plagiarism, having ‘recognised whole sentences [in Jay’s *The Social Problem*] taken bodily from *The Nether World*.’ Jay responded in *The Times*, with what Gissing called ‘the lamest

⁹⁹ Caine, ‘The Son: Arthur Osborne Montgomery Jay’, p. 9.

¹⁰⁰ Donald E. Hall, ed., *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), p. 7. See also Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1978), p. 204.

¹⁰¹ Lynne Hapgood, ‘Urban utopias: socialism, religion and the city, 1880-1900’ in Sally Ledger with Scott McCracken (eds) *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) pp. 184-201. (p. 192.)

¹⁰² Rosemary O’Day, ‘Jay, (Arthur) Osborne Montgomery (1858–1945)’ at Oxford Dictionary of National Biography <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/56342> Jay also appeared in non-fiction accounts written by Frederick Greenwood, as Hapgood notes: *Urban Utopias*, p. 192.

excuse': 'that he of course meant to quote me, that by some mistake he did not see the proofs of his book, etc.' Jay's claims were supported in a letter to *The Times* by his proof-reader, who took the responsibility upon himself. This was greeted with understandable incredulity by Gissing. He wrote in his diary, 'indeed, it is remarkable enough.' Jay's admiration for Gissing had become, whether dishonestly or not, flagrant imitation. Yet in 1895, Gissing accepted an invitation from his admirer to witness Jay's work in Shoreditch. Gissing seems, if only briefly, to have fallen under the spell of Jay's personality: following the visit he envisaged his 'way to a big book' based on the Nichol. However, he missed a further meeting with Jay in July 1895.¹⁰³

Having failed to achieve his hope of using Gissing's literature to aid in his own fundraising efforts, Jay invited Morrison, the less experienced writer, to visit the slum.¹⁰⁴ Morrison spent eighteen months in the area, which was already undergoing demolition. Inspired by Jay, the newly formed London County Council was razing the area to build the landmark estate designed by Owen Fleming. This process, and the impact of Jay's efforts on a family of slum dwellers, is the central narrative of the *Jago*, which Morrison dedicated to Jay.

The precision with which Morrison replicated Jay's observations of local language in the novel was used to accuse him of plagiarising Jay; a charge Jay vehemently disputed. There are, however, exact repetitions in Morrison's novel. Jay's *In Darkest London: A Hint to General Booth* observes the idiom of "I wish I were dead," is a common aspiration, "and kept a coffee-house" – a vision surely of peace which should touch the hearts of all the well-fed, who can get all they want as soon as they ask for it' (Jay, 118). This phrase is repeated in Morrison's *Jago* by Kiddo Cook: "I wish I was dead: an kep' a cawfy shop" (12). Yet it seems that Morrison took pains to investigate the language naturalistically, through

¹⁰³ Miles, 'Morrison and His Critics', pp. 174-175.

¹⁰⁴ It is probable that they made contact through the publisher Simpkin Marshall Hamilton Kent and Co., who published Morrison's *Shadows* in 1891 and Jay's *The Social Problem* (1893).

interviewing Nichol residents at his home in Loughton. The resulting novel was a peculiar mix of naturalism and melodrama. *Jago* forced a new vision of the slum and the East End upon the reader; one unmediated by aesthetic or romantic figures. From the vivid and hellish opening of the novel, Morrison immersed the reader directly in the everyday horror of life in a slum.

Such immersion proved unpalatable to one of Morrison's most vociferous critics, H.D. Traill. Traill described finishing the novel as if waking from a nightmare:

[The reader] comes out from the *Jago* with the feelings, not as he had expected, of a man who has just paid a visit to the actual district under the protection of the police, but of one who has awakened from the dream of some prolonged sojourn in some fairyland of horror.¹⁰⁵

Traill assigned the novel to what he calls the school of 'New Realism' yet claimed that the novel was unrealistic, insisting that the Nichol had never been as bad as Morrison described it. Uncharacteristically provoked from his usual reticence, Morrison responded with an article entitled 'What is a Realist?' (1897) in which he claimed not to adhere to any school of literature; leaving classification to the 'tabulators and watersifters' (8). The novel, he nonetheless claimed, told the truth. It was also seen as dangerous – in 1896, Oscar Wilde was in Reading Gaol, and there he requested, and was refused, Morrison's books, as the criminality they described was seen as a form of criminology. The novel's emphasis on environment and heredity as causes of criminal activity were seen as repudiating blame for crime by locating it beyond the individual's responsibility.¹⁰⁶

The publication of Morrison's single-volume novel of life among the poorest inhabitants of the East End accorded well with the spirit of the time. As the *Times* expressed in 1896, 'the three-volume novel has almost disappeared' and novels were far more

¹⁰⁵ H. D. Traill, *The New Fiction and Other Essays*, (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1897), p. 10. Further references will appear in the text.

¹⁰⁶ Wilde later had *Jago* sent to him in Paris: Joseph Bristow, ed., *Oscar Wilde and Modern Culture: The Making of a Legend* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2008), p. 37. On the emergent science of criminology, see Cesare Lombroso, *Criminal Man*, ed. by Mary Gibson (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006).

frequently focused on ‘public life [...] the relations of rich and poor rather than [...] those between husbands and wives.’¹⁰⁷ After the publication of the novel, Morrison was frequently asked his opinion about the best way to solve urban poverty – the novel itself proposing no clear solution. Charity and the churches were failing to address the housing problem in Victorian London. Without legislation to provide social housing, acts of charity ‘scarcely touched’ those who suffered most.¹⁰⁸ Morrison stated that he believed Jay’s clearance scheme was the only possible solution, yet he had proved in the novel that the scheme for reconstructing the area devoured anything good that could have existed there in the process.

In his book *The Social Problem*, the Reverend Jay voiced his plan for penal settlements, which Morrison later claimed to support. Like Morrison, Jay had witnessed not only the failure of institutional and individual philanthropy and Christian charity, but the failure of the razing of the slum. In a letter to the Editor of the *Fortnightly Review*, Jay clarifies the failure of the slum clearance:

The place is cleared away certainly – or nearly so. But the people still exist, and it was the people who made the place bad, not the place that degraded the people. The problem still exists.¹⁰⁹

Legislation would not work, Jay said, because ‘laws [...] cannot root out human nature.’¹¹⁰ Jay blamed his own disillusionment on the slum he had intended to conquer, stating that ‘nothing produces bitterness of mind so much as living in a locality as I was in.’¹¹¹ In his earlier works, Jay suggested that poverty causes vice, but years of futile self-sacrifice (as one of his admirers termed it) had made him desperate.¹¹² In Jay’s internment camps the poor would be locked up for life and the sexes kept apart so that no more propagation of poverty

¹⁰⁷ Anon., ‘Literature in 1896’ *The Times* (London, England), Saturday, Jan 09, 1897; Issue 35096. p. 4. Interestingly for the purposes of the current project, historical topography was also discussed as having immense popularity in that year.

¹⁰⁸ H.J. Dyos, ‘The Slums of Victorian London’, *Victorian Studies* Vol. 11., No. 1. (Sep. 1967) 5-40. (39).

¹⁰⁹ Jay, Letter, ‘The New Realism’ to editor of *Fortnightly Review*, Miles, ‘Morrison and His Critics,’ (1996), pp. 216-252. p. 236.

¹¹⁰ Jay, *The Social Problem* p. 61.

¹¹¹ Reverend Arthur Osborne Jay, *Life in Darkest England: A Hint to General Booth* (London: Webster and Cable, 1891), p. 51.

¹¹² Jay, *The Social Problem* p. 11

could happen: the inmates were ‘never to be allowed to return to the outside life for which their natures entirely unfit them.’¹¹³ In an interview with the *Daily News* in 1896, Morrison declared too that the hereditary nature of poverty and vice was inescapable. He therefore voiced his support for Jay’s penal settlement plan, arguing that:

It would be far cheaper than our present prison system. Why not confine them as lunatics are confined? Let the weed die out, and then proceed to raise the raisable. That is why I killed Dicky Perrott. He could not escape his environment, and, had he lived, would have become perforce, as bad as his surroundings.¹¹⁴

Jay’s understanding of the possible objections to this scheme are inadvertently comical: in *The Social Problem* he states that the only arguments he can imagine against his plan are ‘that the scheme is wrong in itself.’ ‘This scruple I admit’, he says, ‘to be a serious and well-founded one.’¹¹⁵

On first visiting his parish, Jay said, ‘I saw on all sides of me poor, weary, tired, erring, straying beings, whom I could only call human beings because God originally intended them for such.’¹¹⁶ These conceits show the influence of Francis Galton, who coined the term ‘eugenics’ in 1869 to describe how the human race could be improved, if humanity were to quell its ‘mistaken instinct of giving support to the weak’, which Galton believed would ‘prevent the incoming of strong and hearty individuals.’¹¹⁷ The conversation between the doctor and Father Sturt (modelled on Jay) in *Jago* suggests Morrison’s sympathy with these beliefs:

Is there a child in all this place that wouldn’t be better dead – still better unborn? [...] Here lies the Jago, a nest of rats, breeding, breeding as only rats can; and we say it is well. On high moral grounds we uphold the right of rats to multiply their thousands (133).

¹¹³ Jay *The Social Problem* p. 95.

¹¹⁴ Anon., ‘The Children of the Jago: Slum-Life at Close Quarters: A Talk with Mr Arthur Morrison,’ *Daily News*, (12 Dec. 1896), 6. Cited in Miles, ‘Morrison and His Critics’, (2012), p. 172.

¹¹⁵ Jay, *The Social Problem*, p. 101.

¹¹⁶ Jay, *Life in Darkest London*, p. 14.

¹¹⁷ Francis Galton, *Hereditary Genius*, (New York: Prometheus, 2006), p. 321.

Morrison was not alone in expressing such ideas. William Booth also combined an understanding of the perils of a bad environment with eugenic language, describing ‘dwarfish, de-humanised inhabitants [...] it is the inevitable and inexorable destiny of thousands of Englishmen to be brutalised into worse than beasts by the condition of their environment.’¹¹⁸ They ‘die and make no sign, or, worse still, they continue to exist.’¹¹⁹ The weakest, the poor, are not meant to survive: ‘no amount of assistance will give a jellyfish a backbone.’¹²⁰

In the *Saturday Review*, H.G. Wells wrote that Morrison was not only incorrect in his application of eugenics but that his novel, in allowing some Jagoes to survive and succeed, did not support this view:

The Jago people are racially indistinguishable from the people who send their children to Oxford, and the rate of increase of the Jago population is entirely irrelevant to the problem. The Jago is not a ‘black inheritance’, it is a black contagion – which alters the whole problem. And Mr Morrison knocks his surgeon’s case entirely to pieces by his own story; for he shows, firstly, in Mrs Perrott that to come into the Jago is to assimilate oneself to the Jago; and secondly, in Kiddo Cook, that a vigorous, useful citizen may come out of it.¹²¹

In an interview cited by *The Spectator* in December 1896, Morrison allegedly stated that ‘the Jago is a plague-spot’ in the East End which was otherwise ‘respectable to the gloomiest point of monotony.’¹²² This statement supports Wells’s assertion of the Jago as a ‘black contagion.’ Perhaps Morrison’s equivocation on this issue also was inspired by Jay, whose opinions seemed to alter drastically within a few years – Sarah Wise has aptly described Jay as ‘intellectually [...] a feather for each wind that blew’(205).

Indeed Morrison’s eugenicist sympathies were unremarkable at the time. He shared these views with socialists and progressive thinkers like Charles Booth, George Bernard

¹¹⁸ William Booth, excerpt from *In Darkest England and the Way Out* in Keating, *Into Unknown England* pp. 141-173 (p. 150).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

¹²¹ H.G. Wells, ‘A Slum Novel’, *Saturday Review*, 82 (28 Nov. 1896), 573.

¹²² Anon., ‘A Child of the Jago’, *The Spectator*, 26 December 1896 Vol. 77 Issue 3574, 942-944 (943).

Shaw, Havelock Ellis and Karl Pearson. The eugenicist opinions Morrison seemed to voice in 1896 had apparently dissipated by the following year. In 1897 Morrison wrote an article for *The Saturday Review*, 'A County Council Improvement', describing the actual circumstances of the destruction of the Nichol and the rebuilding of the area. Conceding the abject inhumanity of the place before the clearance, he nonetheless criticised the Council for its 'clearance' programme:

The position is this. The London County Council takes a poor wretch by the collar and turns him and his family into the streets. It says, 'You shall no longer live in this squalid place – I shall provide you a new habitation [...] But lest you should abuse these privileges I will keep you off the premises by doubling your rent, and I will get me a decent tenant who could easily find a home elsewhere.'¹²³

The inconsistencies of Morrison's position, identified in Wells's review of the novel, are clarified in this article. Although he uses the common trope of introducing a traditional tribal society as a comparison to the East End in this piece, Morrison does so to state that the Nichol would be 'unfit for the use of human creatures of higher condition than Ainu', (a Japanese hunter-gatherer society); he never claims that the inhabitants of the Nichol were *like* Ainu. Stating that 'the plan of the streets and courts, and their situation relative to the main thoroughfares of the district, gave the place singular advantages as a residence for habitual criminals', Morrison's final word on the Nichol clearly asserts the predominance of environment over heredity.¹²⁴

The serialisation of the first thirteen chapters of *Jago* in *The New Review* began in August 1896, the novel as a whole being published in November. *The Bookman* reported that the first thirteen episodes (which take us to the death of Looney and the end of the early period of Dicky's life, the fourteenth chapter beginning four years later) operated reasonably well as

¹²³ Arthur Morrison, 'A County Council Improvement', *The Saturday Review*, 8 May 1897, (505).

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 505.

a 'complete episode'. It was also noted in *The Bookman*, however, that the unusually short period of serialisation was due to Morrison's own keenness to expedite the publication.¹²⁵

In September, between the beginning of serialisation and the publication of the novel, Morrison contributed to an article on 'The Fiction of the Future' in *The Ludgate* magazine. The article, compiled by editor Stanhope Sprigg, asked young writers, including Wells, what they believed would be the fiction of the future. Morrison's response is typical of the reticence he demonstrates when asked to comment on literature. Future literature, he states somewhat evasively, will depend for the most part upon 'the current of popular fancy.' Although Morrison does not firmly identify the future manifestation of literature, he does assert his own repugnance for "'movements' or 'tendencies'", which he encloses in scare quotes to emphasise his disdain. These so-called 'movements', he states, are often misinterpreted as demonstrations of the natural advancement of human expression, but should be understood as fashions, effected by other successes – 'a great success in art begets emulation and imitation.' His disparagement of such acquiescence and worship of 'movements' is clear – literature, he believes, ought 'to give expression to [writers'] diverse individualities.'¹²⁶

Voicing his opinions was not something Morrison took to easily. In 1896 in a jovial letter to his U.S. publisher Herbert Stone, Morrison makes a joke that reveals his simultaneous joy and fear of exposure. The success of *Jago* in the U.S. delighted Morrison and he praises Stone gratefully but says 'If only you had stretched the 397 pages into 400 I should have been a foot higher and got my hat broken.'¹²⁷ Elongating the novel would have made a more impressive show for the already successful writer, but he immediately notes the inevitable fall that follows pride. Morrison here equates success with retribution, and through humour conveys that the raising of the raisable was an isolating experience.

¹²⁵ Anon., 'News Notes', *The Bookman* 10.59 (Aug 1896), 129.

¹²⁶ Stanhope Sprigg, 'The Fiction of the Future' in *The Ludgate* Vol 2 Sept 1896 457-466 (462).

¹²⁷ Letter, Arthur Morrison to Herbert S. Stone, 9 Dec 1896, in Miles, (2012), p. 167.

In 1899 Morrison published *To London Town*. The novel is a Bildungsroman describing the development of Johnny May, who moves with his widowed mother and younger sister from Epping Forest to the London docks. It is an unusual contribution to the urban literature of the period, and it stands out in Morrison's oeuvre, which though variegated, relies so often, in various ways, on urban horrors. Locating the unfortunate murder of Grandfather May in Epping Forest, *To London Town* reminds the reader that the city was once considered a place of safety from the 'beautiful and savage' forests surrounding it.¹²⁸ The changes to the forest itself at this time are described with care. The novel describes admiringly the assiduity and perseverance of Johnny's mother, who, like Morrison's own mother, runs a general store. Mrs May makes a great success of her store and is sufficiently independent to allow Johnny to train as an engineer. The novel also reimagines the purpose and effectiveness of the local Institute. In *Jago*, the 'East End Elevation and Pansophical Institute' cannot provide what it aspires to. Its pretensions to convey to East Enders the 'Higher Life, the Greater Thought [...] and other radiant abstractions, mostly in the comparative degree' mean that it entirely fails to minister to the material needs of local people like Dicky Perrott (19). In *To London Town*, however, the Institute aids the hero Johnny personally and professionally – he meets and falls in love with the seamstress Nora Sansom there, and attends night classes to assist him in his career.

Morrison's attention to place is apparent in this novel, which affectionately describes the Essex forests he loved. Johnny explores the city in intimate detail, discovering a London somewhat decayed since his parents moved away from the city when he was a young child. Nevertheless, there is wonder there, hopefulness, and a true sense of community, which, in the May's neighbourhood of Harbour Lane, is expressed comically through the exchange of paint:

¹²⁸ Sara Maitland, *Gossip from the Forest: The Tangled Roots of Our Forests and Fairytales* (London: Granta, 2012), p. 10. See also Lucy Worsley, *A Very British Murder: The Story of a National Obsession* (London: BBC Books, 2013), p. 17.

As thus, to make a simple case: “Ullo, Bill, what about that pot o’ paint?” “Well, I was goin’ to bring it round to-night.” “All right. But don’t bring it to me – take it to George. Ye see, I owe Jim a bit o’ paint, an’ ‘e owes Joe a bit, an’ Joe owes George a bit. So that’ll make it right all round. Don’t forget!” With many such arrangements synchronising, crossing and mixing with each other, and made intricate by different degrees and manners of debit and credit between Bill and George and Jim and Joe, the unlikely subject of paint became involved in a mathematical web of interest.¹²⁹

Like Morrison’s Jago, this place operates on its own terms, but here the terms are friendly and precise. Kindness manifests itself in the secret aid of a neighbour with the painting of Mrs May’s shop front, who comes secretly in the night to paint the bits of cornice that Johnny isn’t tall enough to reach.

In *To London Town* Morrison portrays the docks as a place of quiet fascination, situating as he does one of his only successful romantic relationships beneath the lowered skies in the grey, straight streets of Blackwall. The novel was received with praise: Henley noted that, ‘[Morrison’s] critics hailed his conversion to optimism in *To London Town* as fluently as they had bewailed his plunge into pessimism in *A Child of the Jago*.’¹³⁰ Yet the two novels are equally innovative. The return to the city at the close of the tale is both a reversal of the traditional romance and a respectful acknowledgement of it: with the resolution of the novel’s marginalised mystery, youth and right prevail, and the city and adventure await.

¹²⁹ Arthur Morrison, *To London Town*, (London: Methuen, 1899), p. 87.

¹³⁰ W.E. Henley, ‘Some Novels of 1899’, *The North American Review*, Vol. 170, No. 519 (Feb., 1900), 253-262 (258).

IV. Nostalgia at the Turn of the Century



Fig. 5. John Constable: 'Hadleigh Castle. The mouth of the Thames – morning, after a stormy night', 1829. Paul Mellon Collection at the Yale Center for British Art

In 1900 Morrison published *Cunning Murrell*. Set in 1854 during the Crimean War, the novel was based on Morrison's own encounter with a local 'cunning man' or folk magic practitioner. The novel opens at the ruins of Hadleigh Castle, and takes in the quaint villages and surroundings of Hadleigh, 'thirty-seven miles away from London by road, but a century away in thoughts and manners.'¹³¹ Morrison wrote it after his holidays in Essex around 1890, when he met the family of James Murrell, a practicing white wizard. Although ostensibly very different from his other works, as it is concerned with folk magic and tales of smuggling, the novel takes as its starting point the fantastic reality Morrison had observed in his sketches and stories of the East End. As he wrote to his friend the artist John Louis Wimbush in the foreword:

when some tell me, as they will, that such a man as Murrell and such beliefs as he lived on were impossible in the time and place I give them, I shall know that you, at least, are better informed: for indeed you know Murrell's doings as well as I, and you have handled the amazing (and grimy) heap of documents that he left behind him.¹³²

After the publication, Morrison exerted himself to defend the truth of his account, as he had done for *Jago*. He wrote an article in *The Strand* describing in detail his visit with Wimbush to Hadleigh, where they met one of Murrell's children, Edward, known as Buck, who told

¹³¹ Arthur Morrison, *Cunning Murrell: A Tale of Witchcraft and Smuggling* (Ipswich: Boydell Press, 1977), p. 6.

¹³² *Ibid.*, Foreword, (np).

them stories about his father. Morrison compares the belief systems in London and beyond in order to anticipate the reactions of his readers to the story. When Morrison first decided to write about Murrell, he said, he was concerned that readers:

[would] find it hard to believe that such a man, practising such arts and exerting such influence, could have lived so recently within so short a distance of London. [...] But that was ten years ago, or more, so that perhaps my necromancer will not be voted an impossible monster, after all.¹³³

Buck asserted that Murrell's books would be impossible for Morrison to read: "that's a bit beyond ye, I'll bet. Doctors can't read he, nor nobody. That's witchcraft, sir, that book" (437). Morrison informs his reader that it is in fact astrology, thus demystifying Murrell's 'magic' books. Further books of Murrell were studies of geomancy, or divination; mathematics and botany. Morrison copied some of Murrell's diagrams and reproduced them in his article, elucidating the 'farrago of trickery and real knowledge' that had made Murrell so sought after (439).

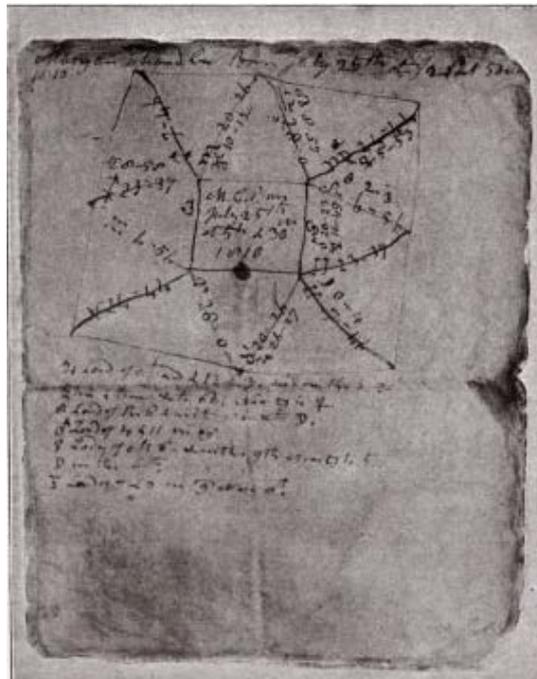


Fig. 6. One of Murrell's horoscopes, copied by Morrison for *The Strand* (438).

¹³³ Arthur Morrison, 'A Wizard of Yesterday' in *The Strand* October 1900, vol. 20. illustrated by JL Wimbush, 431-442. Further references will appear in the text.

To some it seemed that in 1900 a coda was placed on the era that had promised so much and caused so much anxiety. W.B. Yeats joked that:

In 1900 everybody got down off his stilts; henceforth nobody drank absinthe with his black coffee; nobody went mad; nobody committed suicide; nobody joined the Catholic Church; or if they did I have forgotten.¹³⁴

In Morrison's work this notion of an ending seems to have had a real effect. As Kenneth Graham identified in 1965, the year 1900 did not represent any greater security for the status of fiction than the turbulent inventive years that had preceded it.¹³⁵ Perhaps exhibiting this persistent insecurity, Morrison looked backwards, setting *Cunning Murrell* and his 1902 novel *The Hole in the Wall* in the 1850s and 1860s. This is one of the reasons why, when Morrison is remembered, he is always recalled as a Victorian rather than as an Edwardian writer.

These novels are more accessible than some of his earlier work and more obviously crafted for consumers of popular fiction. *Cunning Murrell* is a historical adventure story. The novel's smuggling subplot demonstrates the influence of Robert Louis Stevenson, which is also evident in Morrison's short horror story 'The Thing in the Upper Room'. *Cunning Murrell* anticipated the turn towards rural romances in the next decades of the twentieth century. It bears similarities, for example, to the work of Mary Webb, whose popular historical novel *The Precious Bane* (1921) also features a cunning man, Wizard Beguildy. It is indeed more similar to Webb's work than to Morrison's contemporary, Thomas Hardy, because as in *Jago* and in Webb's writing, the working-class characters of *Cunning Murrell* are not merely a foil to the exploits of the upper-class heroes and heroines. No characters 'lift' the social scene above that of the 'rude mechanicals'. *Cunning Murrell* is about the chorus.

¹³⁴ John Stokes, *In the Nineties*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), p. xix.

¹³⁵ Kenneth Graham, *English Criticism of the Novel: 1865-1900* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), p. 1.

Cunning Murrell is the novel that most fully explores Morrison's fondness for Essex. It realises his desire, expressed in a later interview, to write a romance of the county.¹³⁶ In its rendering of the past, and the ruins and drama of the landscape, the novel adheres to Nathaniel Hawthorne's definition of romance. Hawthorne, who was much admired by Morrison, observed that the nature of a romance 'lies in the attempt to connect a bygone time with the very present that is flitting away from us.'¹³⁷ Yet Morrison later revisited some of the characters that appear in the novel. Roboshobery Dove, in particular, is seen again in *Divers Vanities* (1905). This is a habit of Morrison's – the reintroduction of characters, and places which, like the Jago, operate as characters in his works.¹³⁸ Comparable to Hardy's practice in relation to the place of Wessex throughout his novels, this repetition adds something metatextually realistic to Morrison's works, as if each novel or short story is an observation of a period in each person's life, a passage in the existence of a place merely. The implication is that his stories have a real life of their own; that they persist beyond the margins of the page.

The 1901 census shows Morrison, Eliza and Guy living at 157 High Road, Loughton, with two servants. In this census Morrison gives his birthplace as Blackheath and Eliza's is recorded as Bow. There is however a place name given before Bow, crossed through several times and with a cross beside it.¹³⁹ Once again the couple are attempting subtly to obscure their origins. At this time Morrison's mother, sister and brother were still living above the shop in Grundy Street. Jane, aged sixty-one, was still working as a haberdasher, Ada Jane, aged thirty-one, was 'haberdasher's assistant' and Frederick, thirty, was working as a clerk for a charitable organisation.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ Guy Carleton Lee, 'Day with Arthur Morrison', *Los Angeles Times*, Nov 23 1902, (10).

¹³⁷ Nathaniel Hawthorne, Preface, *House of Seven Gables*. As Sub-Editor, Morrison published Hawthorne's short story 'Dr Heidegger's Experiment' in *The Palace Journal*, 8 August 1889, 148-150.

¹³⁸ The Jago is revisited in 'Teacher and Taught', *Divers Vanities* (1905).

¹³⁹ Census, 1901, Piece 1639, Folio 51, Schedule 151, p. 24.

¹⁴⁰ Census, 1901, Piece 1603, Folio 43, Schedule 113, p. 20.

Morrison's 1902 novel *The Hole in the Wall* returned to the docks of his childhood, and again there are autobiographical elements in the early loss of the protagonist Stevy's parents. The novel has correctly been identified as the most palpably Dickensian of Morrison's works – the clear influence of Dickens on his work is another reason why Morrison is seen as a Victorian novelist. One reviewer, for example suggested that the fiddler 'Blind George' is a double of Dickens's Stagg in *Barnaby Rudge* (1840).¹⁴¹ However, this novel is also in many ways his most assured. In 1947, John Betjeman included it in his review of 'Bad Old Days, but Good Old Books.'¹⁴²

The Hole in the Wall is also reminiscent of Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852-53) in its use of a dual narrative technique.¹⁴³ Morrison uses this to represent the duality of the mid-century docks as both fantastic and dangerous. It is something between a crime novel and a historical realist novel. Though it seems Morrison did not collect *The Hole in the Wall* imaginatively with the three prior East End fictions which he asserted should be read together, reviewers saw the same spirit at work in the text. The reviewer in the *New York Times* suggested that the preoccupation of Morrison with 'London Low Life' revealed that 'A man must love his race to seek for good so diligently in its worst representatives.'¹⁴⁴ Elia Peattie in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* also saw the novel as an extension of *Tales* and *Jago*, but it is markedly different in its combination of nostalgia with a criminal plot. The novel, Peattie states, describes 'hideous, sinister, monstrous London', a city reminiscent of the London of *Oliver Twist* (1838). Peattie finds the central character 'pallid' and uninteresting.¹⁴⁵ He overlooks the comedy and nostalgia of the novel, particularly in the sections narrated by Stevy.

¹⁴¹ T.B. Aldrich, 'Some London Low Life' *New York Times* Sep 27, 1902, 2-3 (3).

¹⁴² John Betjeman, 'Bad Old Days, but Good Old Books', *Daily Herald*, 16 April 1947 (4).

¹⁴³ Benvenuto also notes this, 'The Revealing Structure', 154.

¹⁴⁴ Aldrich, 'Some London Low Life', 2.

¹⁴⁵ 'Elia W. Peattie Calls Morrison's Novel "In Darkest London"' in *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1872-1922); Oct 25, 1902; 17.

Stevy's reminiscences are grimly amusing, such as his recollection of an uncle so emasculated by his 'hard-featured' Aunt Martha that although Stevy 'cannot remember to have heard his name, [he] cannot invent him a better one than Uncle Martha' (19). Stevy's aunts display a lack of maternal care, and reject him after his mother's death due to the lack of respectability of his father. They suggest that Stevy ought to live at his paternal grandfather's Wapping pub, 'with so many openings as there is in the docks here, quite handy.' This is misunderstood by the child, who 'could think of no other openings in the docks but those between the ships and the jetties [...] I gathered a hazy notion that I was to make things comfortable by going out and drowning myself' (22).

The novel is remarkable for its depiction of the romance of the notorious Ratcliff Highway transformed by the eyes of a child into a place of wonder. More significant, however, is the use of first-person in this novel which contrary to Peattie's judgment does make Stevy a sympathetic character. As Stevy reveals himself to be the author of the story at the close of the novel, it is the only novel of Morrison's to feature the voice of a novelist.¹⁴⁶

The novel created such interest in America that Guy Carleton Lee of the *Los Angeles Times* visited Morrison at home in 1902. Carleton Lee's picture of Morrison, though in some places incorrect, is one of the closest glimpses available of Morrison's everyday writing life. Carleton Lee was impressed by Morrison's personal unpretentiousness. He quotes Morrison as saying that 'old clothes, like old friends, are the best' and recalls a story that Morrison once bought a new coat and sold it to his brother Frederick to wear until it had 'attained the proper degree of age.'¹⁴⁷ 'This peculiarity' Carleton Lee notes, 'does not mark but rather hides one of London's literary celebrities.'¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ Two other writers of note appear in his work - the sidekick to Martin Hewitt, the Detective, is Brett, a working journalist. A muckraking journalist features in *Divers Vanities*.

¹⁴⁷ The giving of this coat and then taking it back from his less successful brother also seems guided by a reluctance to 'pauperise the poor.'

¹⁴⁸ Lee, 'Day with Arthur Morrison', 10.

Contemporary interviews, like Carleton Lee's, suggested that Morrison had been a visitor to the East End, not a native. Although we cannot know for sure whether Morrison encouraged these falsehoods, it seems likely, considering his false responses to census returns, that he did not correct these errors. This is supported by his letter to a Mr Butler written on November 22nd 1896, in which Morrison respectfully declines to be interviewed by Butler's (unnamed) friend regarding *Jago*. Morrison states that it is the book, and not himself, that is 'offered for criticism and comment.' Morrison's aversion to being interviewed is initially explained by his insistence on the autonomy of the text:

As a matter of fact, I prefer my private concerns not to be written about. They are my own business, and a book is best reviewed just as this book has been already by many others, with the information the book itself affords, and no other. [...] A man has only to make a very small success to make a great many enemies, and the less they know of him, the less harm they can do.¹⁴⁹

The errors regarding his education provided an obvious benefit to the young writer suggesting that he was educated to a higher level than is probable. Yet the rejection of his actual birthplace is more contrary. His claims aligned him, a writer deeply concerned with the East End, to the Gentleman Slummer. In reality, he was 'passing' as middle class. In Carleton Lee's interview it is the idiosyncrasies, such as the remark about his clothes, which are likely to be accurate.

The Hole in the Wall shares a legacy with *Jago*. Morrison donated the copyright of the novels to the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, which was founded in 1884. This applies to *The Hole in the Wall* in its 2008 edition, and to the 1969 Macgibbon and Kee and 2008 Faber Finds editions of *Jago* as well as the 1977 edition of *Cunning Murrell*.¹⁵⁰

In 1901 Morrison published a short, sociological piece in *The Cornhill Magazine*

¹⁴⁹ Letter, Arthur Morrison to Mr Butler, November 22nd 1896, in Newens p. 37.

¹⁵⁰ The NSPCC were unable to provide any further information on this, but it seems that Morrison donated the profits of these novels to the lost children he so often described.

entitled 'A Workman's Budget'. This piece is for the most part in the tenor of Charles Booth, but it incorporates the ironic tone characteristic of Morrison's work. It represents, though obliquely, an opportunity to reflect on how Morrison viewed his own occupation. He states in the introduction to the piece that he uses the term 'working man' reluctantly, seeing it as maladroit that the only understanding of the term is he 'who labours with his hands.' It seems clear here that the values of the Savage Club were fully embodied in Morrison – he was always a working writer, a man who worked at writing. His wife observed after his death that Morrison's steadfast character translated into his writing practice, stating that 'I have seen him spend hours over a manuscript to help a lame dog over a stile as he put it.'¹⁵¹

Morrison's friend and mentor W.E. Henley died in 1903. Recalling Henley's influence, Morrison said, 'the like of it I never saw elsewhere, and never expect to see again. It moved not only his nearer friends, not a man of whom but would give his last breath in Henley's service and memory to-day, but every honest man who came near it.'¹⁵² Henley had suffered from tuberculosis of the bone and had his left leg amputated in the 1870s. He continued to suffer from tuberculous illness and pain throughout his life.¹⁵³ Morrison had, it seems, been a frequent visitor, rendered distraught by Henley's incapacity and his own inability to alleviate his friend's discomfort:

Morrison recalls visits to the house when he would find Henley in the study [...] in the throes of pain and weakness. He would put out his hand and grasp his friend's without looking up, and with a "I'm no good to anybody to-day, Arthur", the distressed but helpless caller would be regretfully dismissed.¹⁵⁴

Williamson, writing Henley's memoir in 1930, noted his thanks to Morrison, so that these recollections must in many instances have come directly from Morrison himself.

¹⁵¹ Letter, Eliza Adelaide Morrison to Miss Rudston-Brown, Feb 25 1945. RSLIT Archives, University of Cambridge Library.

¹⁵² Williamson, *W.E. Henley*, p. 215.

¹⁵³ Ernest Mehew, 'Henley, William Ernest (1849–1903)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2006 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33817>, accessed 15 Jan 2015]

¹⁵⁴ Williamson, *W.E. Henley*, p. 156.

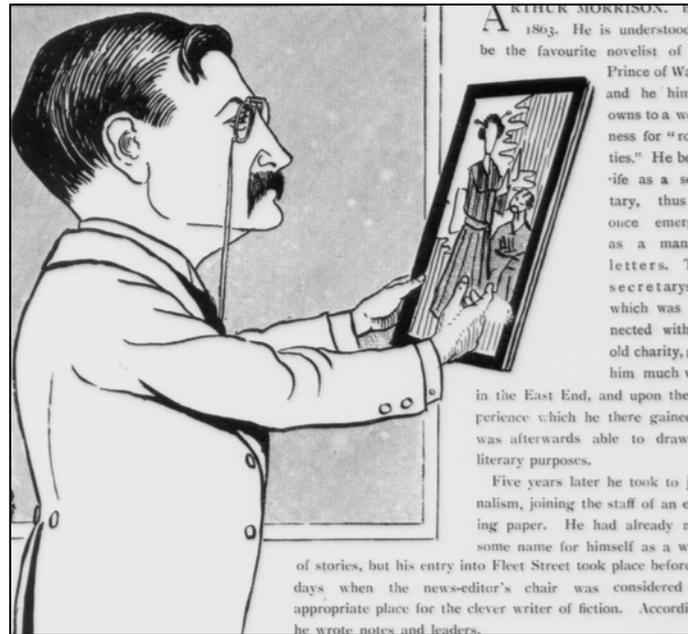


Fig. 7. Caricature of Morrison by Stuart Boyd in *The Bookman*, July 1905.

A biography of Morrison appeared in *The Bookman* in July 1905. At this point he had already distanced himself from literature and was focusing on collecting art. Nonetheless, *The Bookman* wrote admiringly of his writing, stating that he was ‘understood to be the favourite novelist of the Prince of Wales.’¹⁵⁵ This seems possible based on Bertie’s mention of *Jago* when he opened the Boundary Street estate in 1900. He referred to Morrison’s novel, stating ‘that nobody who had read [the book] would ever forget the conditions of that place before the clearance.’¹⁵⁶

Morrison was elected to the Dickens Fellowship (founded in 1902) in 1906. He later expressed his fondness for Dickens in *The Bookman*, stating that he found all of Dickens’s work ‘delightful’.¹⁵⁷ In 1907, Morrison sold his art collection to the British Museum. Arnold Bennett’s journal entry for Tuesday 17th December 1907 reads: ‘Dined with [author, William] Pett Ridge at the Garrick. Pett Ridge said Arthur Morrison had sold his Japanese

¹⁵⁵ Anon., ‘Arthur Morrison’, 115.

¹⁵⁶ Stanley J. Kunitz, and Howard Haycraft, eds, *Twentieth Century Authors: A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature* (New York: The H.W. Wilson Company, 1942), p. 989.

¹⁵⁷ G. K. Chesterton et al., ‘Charles Dickens: Some Personal Recollections and Opinions’, *Bookman*, Feb. 1912, 41:245 246-255 (253).

pictures to the British Museum for £4,000, and bought a motor-car.’¹⁵⁸ Morrison therefore in 1907, the sixth year of the Motor Car Show at Olympia, and the year of the Peking to Paris motor race, had one of the most ostentatious markers of wealth and success.

In 1907, Morrison collaborated with Richard Pryce to rewrite one of his 1905 short stories, ‘Chance of the Game’, as a play, *The Dumb Cake*. The plot is a bathetic variation on the myth of St Agnes Eve. The play was performed at Hicks Theatre (now the Gielgud), Shaftesbury Avenue, on 19th June and was produced by Charles Frohmann. In the same year, another short story from the same collection, *A Stroke of Business: The Seller of Hate*, was revised as a play produced with Horace Newte, a novelist from Loughton. *Divers Vanities* (1905), the collection from which these stories were taken, was not received particularly well in the press. *The Bookman*, usually approving of Morrison’s work, stated that the collection would ‘add nothing to Mr Morrison’s reputation.’¹⁵⁹

The 1911 Census shows the Morrison family living at Salcombe House, Loughton. They had two servants: a cook and a housemaid. Eliza Adelaide had by now adopted Adelaide as her given name. Guy was aged seventeen and still at school, altogether living a very different life to that of his father, who had been working as a clerk at the age of seventeen. Morrison and Adelaide both gave their birthplaces as ‘Kent’ – Blackheath for Morrison, Dover for Adelaide. In this year the East End the couple had both been born in was the site of much industrial turbulence, with strikes extending even to the schoolchildren for a time. The events of the year were referred to ‘the great unrest’ as strikes were taking place nationally.¹⁶⁰ Morrison’s life, meanwhile, was settling into the calm of the suburban middle class.

¹⁵⁸ Newman Flower, ed., *The Journals of Arnold Bennett 1896-1910*, Vol. 1, 1896-1910, (London: Cassell, 1932), p. 272.

¹⁵⁹ Anon., ‘Divers Vanities’, *The Bookman*, 29.170 (Nov 1905) 91.

¹⁶⁰ Lindsey German and John Rees, *A People’s History of London* (London: Verso, 2012), pp. 173-177.

V. 'The Farthest East': 1911-1924

In 1911, Morrison published the second volume of *The Painters of Japan* to great admiration. Introducing the first volume of this compendium of Japanese art, Morrison observed that:

we have in English no such resource as has the Japanese writer, who can evoke shades of inexpressible meaning by poetic allusions well understood among his educated country-men; allusions which supply a common language among the arts, a set of ideograms [...] of the subtlest meaning.¹⁶¹

In his essay 'What is a Realist?', Morrison had mentioned Japanese art, outlining the challenges to representation and reception prompted by its innovations. Yet as his studies of the works advanced, it seems he thought that the poetry of Japanese language made it capable of conveying shared meanings far beyond what English could convey. The limitations of the English language troubled him when compared to the capacity of Japanese for communication. It is not clear exactly when Morrison learnt Japanese, but he certainly had a good knowledge of it by 1899.¹⁶² In that year Morrison reviewed a book by Mrs Hugh Fraser, *A Diplomatist's Wife in Japan*, revealing that he had a firm mastery of the language. He wrote to the commissioning editor, W.E. Helm, insisting upon seeing proofs before the review went to press, 'as every printer and printer's reader makes ludicrous blunders with Japanese names and words.'¹⁶³

The Painters of Japan was reviewed favourably by Laurence Binyon, the poet, playwright, art historian and in later life Professor of Poetry at Harvard.¹⁶⁴ Binyon opened his review with the question:

What was it that first lured Mr Arthur Morrison from the squalors and passions and humours of the populous East End, from the grimy Thames wharves and the Essex

¹⁶¹ Arthur Morrison, *The Painters of Japan* Vol.1 (London: T.C. & E.C. Jack and Edinburgh: MCMXI), p. v.

¹⁶² Noboru notes that Morrison was an Honorary Member of the Japanese Art Association (p. 550).

¹⁶³ Letter from Morrison to W.E. Helm, March 14th, 1899, British Library, MSS Eur C880. Morrison's review was published in the *Morning Post* on Thursday 23rd March 1899.

¹⁶⁴ John Hatcher, 'Binyon, (Robert) Laurence (1869–1943)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/31890>, accessed 13 Oct 2014]

marshes, of the life of which no man has written with more curious and intimate knowledge, to the painters of the Farthest East?¹⁶⁵

Whatever the reason, Binyon notes, it is done with a remarkable sympathy for the nuances and contexts of the works discussed so that ‘it is from the Japanese point of view that [Morrison] interprets and expounds.’¹⁶⁶ The book was lavishly illustrated: a mark of the publishers’ faith in Morrison, as the expense must have been great. One of the compliments Binyon directs at this work could have been equally reasonably levelled at Morrison’s East End fiction: ‘he does not flinch’, Binyon observes, but writes with ‘scrupulous candour’.¹⁶⁷

This review was the beginning of a friendship that continued until Binyon’s death in 1943, two years before Morrison’s. Letters between Morrison and Binyon suggest a strong sympathy between the two men. In more than one letter, Binyon excuses himself for not having been available to see Morrison, yet Binyon’s tone is one of confidence. On one occasion he tells Morrison: ‘I have been fretting all this past year because I have had to do nothing but write articles & lectures on Chinese art & the more I write the less I feel I know about it.’ In the same letter, thanking Morrison for a volume of short stories, Binyon observes an aspect about Morrison’s work that came from attentive reading; he states that the stories are characterised by ‘the forcible economy’ of Morrison’s prose.¹⁶⁸ This relationship was affectionate and respectful, perhaps with a little more hero worship on the part of Morrison.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ Laurence Binyon, ‘The Painters of Japan’, *The Saturday Review*, 112, 2918; 30th September 1911, 427-428 (427.)

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 427.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 428.

¹⁶⁸ Letter, (undated), Laurence Binyon to Arthur Morrison, MSS. Lilly, Indiana

¹⁶⁹ Letters from the Binyon collection, Lilly Library Indiana, Binyon Mss.



Fig. 8. Minamoto No Yoshiye warned by the flight of wild geese
From a Kakemono by Kikuchi Yosai
The Arthur Morrison collection

Morrison's interest in Japanese art, which began in the 1890s, anticipated a growing trend among decadent aesthetic writers and artists, most famously Oscar Wilde. It was an interest he shared with many of his friends, including Henley, Parlett, and Sladen, who remarked that Japanese Art was 'a bond of sympathy which used to bring him to our house. We had a collection of very unusual Japanese curios.'¹⁷⁰ Morrison's interest in these artworks was not simply prompted by his time spent with literary and artistic followers of fashion at his West End club. Rather, it was the East End roots that he tried to disguise which enabled him to begin his collection with less expensive prints directly sourced at the docks. It was eventually art collecting, not writing, which enabled Morrison to make his fortune. After the publication of *The Painters of Japan* in two volumes (1910-1911) he effectively retired from writing fiction. Henley was equally delighted in Japanese Art at this time, and Williamson states that:

When [Morrison] had found a new choice specimen in some dingy marine-store in Wapping or Limehouse, he would return so agog with his discovery that the Henley

¹⁷⁰ Sladen, *Twenty Years of My Life*, p. 276.

household would be roused from their slumbers to rejoice with him, even though it was past midnight.¹⁷¹

Although Morrison did not visit Japan, he made friends with several Japanese Art dealers during their visits to London. He became particularly close to a Japanese scholar named Minakata Kumagusu (1867-1941), who arrived in London in 1892. From 1895, Minakata spent time at the British Museum Reading Room where he read widely on many subjects, including philosophy, natural history and folklore. It was probably in the Reading Room that Morrison made his acquaintance. In November 1897, Morrison defended and vouched for Minakata, who beat up another reader in the Museum after being racially abused by him. Morrison prepared a petition and asked for signatures from the Prince of Wales, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Lord Mayor of London. Minakata was allowed back in to the Reading Room after two months' ban, but left London after another similar incident in 1898.¹⁷² Morrison and Minakata's friendship endured the separation. They assisted each other, Morrison editing some of Minakata's articles in the English academic press and Minakata advising Morrison on his translations of some seals.¹⁷³

Minakata's influence on Morrison proves that Morrison's Japonisme is not antithetical to his practice of art. As Noboru Koyama has documented, Minakata's notes show that the contrary is true. Minakata recorded that during an evening at the Savage Club, he spoke to Morrison on the depiction of reality, arguing that the stylised form of Japanese Art comes closer to representing reality than 'a Western artist's attempt to draw "realistically"'. Minakata's reminiscences of Morrison are some of the clearest images of him. At the Savage Club, Minakata remembered, he was surprised to find that the Prince of Wales had belonged to the same club because Morrison was 'such an apparently unimportant

¹⁷¹ Williamson, *W.E. Henley*, p. 144.

¹⁷² Carmen Blacker, 'Minakata Kumagusu: A Neglected Japanese Genius' *Folklore* Vol. 94, No. 2 (1983), 139-152 (143).

¹⁷³ With thanks to Noboru Koyama for sending me his article: 'Arthur Morrison (1863-1945): Writer, Novelist and Connoisseur of Japanese Art' in Hugh Cortazzi, ed., *Britain & Japan: Biographical Portraits*, Volume 7, (Leiden: Global Orientals, 2010), pp. 540-552.

person [...] now I am surprised to realise that he is a famous person.’ To Minakata Morrison conveyed some of his origins and perhaps the reason for his humble demeanour. He told Minakata that he was ‘on the level of a shop-assistant at a greengrocer’s’, and Minakata noted that indeed, ‘he dressed like the chief clerk of a shop.’¹⁷⁴

Minakata left England in September 1900. Morrison had another important Japanese friend in Shimomura Kanzan. Binyon met Shimomura through his work at the British Museum, and was the means of introducing him to Morrison. Some letters from Morrison to Kanzan survive, and demonstrate that by the early 1900s Morrison could speak and write ‘passable’ Japanese, as Noboru notes.¹⁷⁵ Morrison made quite an impression on Kanzan, as Kanzan’s work did on him – Kanzan named his son Hidetoki, meaning ‘The time in Britain.’ Kanzan’s painting ‘Gallop Horse’, which Morrison donated to the British Museum, has an inscription on the back written by Morrison: ‘Painted for my son Guy when a boy and given to him by the painter.’¹⁷⁶ Hidetoki visited Morrison in 1926, when he was grieving the loss of his own son.¹⁷⁷

In 1903, reviewing the work of Kikuchi Yosai for *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Morrison adopted the assertive tone that would come to characterise all his writing on Chinese and Japanese art. The artist Togawa Shukotsu was impressed that Morrison could read Japanese easily ‘despite his never having visited Japan.’ From these friendships Morrison became what Noboru describes as ‘almost a port-of-call for Japanese visitors to London’; indeed he was included in a travel journal by Togawa, *A Journal of 23,000 Miles Through Europe and America*.¹⁷⁸

Stanford has argued that Morrison’s interest in Japanese Art was evidence that ‘outside his fiction Morrison yielded to at least one aspect of greenery-yallery [that is,

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 547.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 548.

¹⁷⁶ Clark, ‘Japanese Paintings’, 18.

¹⁷⁷ Noboru, ‘Arthur Morrison’, p. 550.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 549; 550.

affected and Aesthetic] fashion.’ However, the arrival of these artworks via Limehouse demonstrates Morrison’s practicality and opportunism in beginning his collection. Further, an unpublished letter between Morrison and Robbie Ross, Wilde’s executor, is suggestive of a close and humorous friendship between the two, disproving Stanford’s belief in Henley’s protégées as ‘deadly enem[ies] to the cult of Wilde.’¹⁷⁹ Writing to ‘Dear Ross’ from Loughton, Morrison discusses the absence of a mutual friend, McDougall, calling him ‘a wild bird’. Though brief, the letter implies familiarity and intimacy between the two men.¹⁸⁰

Morrison’s 1908 article for *The Burlington* on ‘Chinese and Japanese Painting’ reveals the allure of these artworks for him. He wrote that:

The student of Chinese and Japanese pictorial art has the opportunity, not only of receiving an astonishing revelation of the minds of the painters of those countries, but, incidentally and indirectly, of studying the European mind from a new point of view.¹⁸¹

The pre-existing point of view was characterised by a ‘certain Caucasian arrogance [...] which has’, Morrison expresses with some slight satisfaction, ‘received its correction politically in very recent years.’¹⁸² This refers to the increasing admiration for Japan which had emerged as a consequence of the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, in which British Intelligence had been allied with Japan.¹⁸³ The Anglo-Japanese Alliance was signed in 1902 and renewed in 1905. In 1908 the Japan-British Society was founded.

It was as much the variety of approaches taken as any other quality of Japanese Art that Morrison admired. A country so relatively small that in 1904, Morrison claims, it was predicted it would soon be wiped off the map by the advances of Russia, nonetheless produced an incredible spectrum of genres, ‘each manner differing from the rest almost as

¹⁷⁹ Stanford, *Short Stories of the Nineties*, p. 10.

¹⁸⁰ Letter, Arthur Morrison to Robbie Ross, May 28th 1918, British Library 81739.

¹⁸¹ Arthur Morrison, ‘Chinese and Japanese Painting’, *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol. 14, No. 69 (Dec., 1908), 158-160 (158).

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 158.

¹⁸³ ‘British Assistance to the Japanese Navy during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5’ *The Great Circle* Vol. 2, No. 1 (April 1980), 44-54.

much as any one of them from the manner of Europe.’¹⁸⁴ It is intriguing that someone relatively reticent on the subject of his own discipline, literature, should be so firm in his opinions about a subject in which he was entirely self-schooled. This was perhaps due to the methods of advance in this subject – unlike literature, where without a scholarly background Morrison could not always compete with his contemporaries, his assiduity for knowledge was sufficient in his pursuit of artworks less well-known in England. He is therefore secure in this piece, attaining the confident tone of criticism seen perhaps only in two of his pieces concerning literature – ‘Authors, Libraries and the Public’ (1895), and ‘What is a Realist?’ (1897). It is noteworthy that Morrison here praises Chinese and Japanese Art as containing ‘a less gross and material view of art than that which is in the European habit’.¹⁸⁵ For Morrison, Chinese and Japanese art were *bunjin-gwa*, ‘painted poetry.’¹⁸⁶

Morrison’s art criticism was highly regarded. The poet Wallace Stevens visited the exhibition of Japanese Prints at the Fine Art Society for which Morrison wrote the catalogue in 1910, and wrote in a letter to his wife Elsie, ‘Frankly, I would give last winter’s hat for a copy of that catalogue.’ He kept it all his life and it is held at the Stevens archive in Huntington library.¹⁸⁷ Similarly, Morrison’s assistance at the Whitechapel Exhibition of Japanese Art in 1902 was said by Charles Lewis Hind to be ‘testimony to its excellence’.¹⁸⁸ In recent years, however, experts have queried ‘the authenticity of many of the “earlier” items in [Morrison’s] collection, particularly the paintings of the Muromachi period.’¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁴ Morrison, ‘Chinese and Japanese Painting’, 159.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 159.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹⁸⁷ George S. Lensing, ‘Stevens and New York: The Long Gestation’, in Lisa Goldfarb and Bart Eeckhout, eds. *Wallace Stevens, New York, and Modernism*, (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2012) pp. 21-36. (p. 30).

¹⁸⁸ Charles Lewis Hind, (C.L.H.) ‘Japanese Pictures in Whitechapel’, *Academy and Literature*, August 2, 1902, 140-1.

¹⁸⁹ Clark, ‘Japanese Paintings’, 18.



Fig. 9. Shimomura Kanzan, Galloping Horse 1903-1905, Ink on silk:
Bequeathed to British Museum,(1946).
Inscribed: 'Given to my son Guy when a boy: AM'



Fig. 10. Morrison at home, 1913. Some of his
Japanese prints are displayed on the wall behind him.

V.i. 1914 and War

1914 began auspiciously for Morrison. In 1914 Morrison, Eliza Adelaide and Guy moved to Arabin House in High Beech, Essex. The house was one of the grandest the family ever lived in. In January, Morrison was able to enact a real literary detective fantasy as a member of the Jury for the ‘Trial of John Jasper’. As part of the ‘Jury’ alongside George Bernard Shaw and presided over by the corpulent G.K. Chesterton, Morrison watched actors speak the roles of characters in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), the novel which one of Morrison’s favourite authors, Dickens, left unfinished at his death. In the ‘Trial’, Judge, Jury, and actors playing the roles of the characters met at King’s Hall, Covent Garden, to decide once for all who murdered Edwin Drood, the disappearance of whom is the central mystery of the novel. The jury included Hilaire Belloc; Morrison’s acquaintance the realist writer William Pett Ridge; and Morrison’s friend and neighbour in Loughton, W.W. Jacobs. Edwin, who vanishes in the course of the novel, is usually presumed by literary critics to have died at the hands of his envious, opium-smoking uncle, John Jasper, whose dishonourable nature is revealed in lewd glances towards Edwin’s fiancée, the angelic Rosa Bud. After an amusingly bombastic trial, the Jury declared that Jasper should be found guilty of manslaughter, there being insufficient evidence to convict him of murder, but his character being such that to let him go free would be to risk ‘our all being murdered in our beds.’¹⁹⁰ When J. Cuming Walters, as Counsel for the Prosecution, heard the verdict, he vehemently decried the Jury’s incapacity. Judge Chesterton held everyone present (apart from himself) to be in contempt of court, and discharged all to prison without trial.

¹⁹⁰ ‘The Trial of John Jasper’ in Charles Dickens, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, and ‘The Trial of John Jasper’ introduced by Matthew Pearl (London: Vintage, 2009), p. 79.



Fig. 11. Morrison at the Trial of John Jasper, 7th January 1914, presided over by G.K. Chesterton. Morrison is at the centre of the bottom row.¹⁹¹

Although his presence at the Trial suggests his centrality to this group of prominent writers at this time, later in 1914 Morrison's name is notably absent from an important document of war propaganda. In October 1914 many of Morrison's friends and colleagues signed 'The Author's Declaration'.¹⁹² Binyon, H.G. Wells, Arthur Conan Doyle, Kipling (another of Henley's 'Young Men'), Eden Phillpotts (one of the 'New Realists') and George R. Sims, another 'Savage', were among the fifty-three signatories. The document declared that, notwithstanding the divergent views of the signatories, they all agreed 'that Great Britain could not without dishonour have refused to take part in the present war.'¹⁹³ It seems that Morrison was not recognised by the War Propaganda office as having sufficient public admiration to merit inclusion.

However, it is likely given Morrison's future involvement in the war that he would have signed, had he been asked. He was a member of the Essex Special Constabulary. As the Chief Inspector of the Waltham Abbey force, he was credited with having phoned in the first Zeppelin raid on London.¹⁹⁴ On 26th September 1914, shortly after the commencement of the

¹⁹¹ Lauren Niland, 'Solving the Mystery of Edwin Drood' in *Guardian Blog* posted Friday 6th January 2012; accessed at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/the-guardian/from-the-archive-blog/2012/jan/06/edwin-drood-dickens-mystery-solved> [Last accessed on 25th August 2015]

¹⁹² Their signatures appeared in *The New York Times*, 18th October 1914.

¹⁹³ Lyn Pykett, 'Introduction' to May Sinclair *The Creators*, (London: A&C Black, 2004), p. xix.

¹⁹⁴ Newens, *Arthur Morrison*, p. 30.

First World War, his only son Guy Morrison joined the Honourable Artillery Company as a Driver. Initially Guy served in Egypt in May 1915.¹⁹⁵ Guy then joined the Expeditionary Force and was posted to the Western Front in France in 1915, 1916, and 1917. Here he must have witnessed some of the central horrors of that war. Guy acquitted himself well and was awarded the 1914-15 Star, the Silver War badge and the British War Victory Medal.¹⁹⁶ He survived the war but died of complications from malaria which he contracted on active service, in 1921, aged twenty-eight.¹⁹⁷

VI. Modesty and secrecy in the life of a self-made man: 1924-1945

Morrison's sister Ada Jane died in 1924, aged 54. Her death is registered at West Ham, where she lived with her mother and brother.¹⁹⁸ She had, it seems, lived the kind of circumscribed life from which Morrison had so fully escaped. Morrison's mother died at Forest Gate two years after his sister, in 1926; she was 86 years old. His brother Frederick lived at the same address in Forest Gate, until his death on 18th February 1951. Morrison did not neglect Frederick in his will – he left him £1,000 on his death.¹⁹⁹

By 1930 Morrison was living in Buckinghamshire, at High Barn, Chalfont St Peters. The modest two-storey house is situated at the edge of the large village. The entire top floor was given over, during Morrison's life, to displaying artworks. Here he traded art and lived comfortably with his wife until his death in 1945. High Barn is far less grand than Arabins, the house at High Beech in Essex where the family lived in 1914, or Cavendish Square, London where they lived after the First World War, but it suits Morrison in its unpretentiousness. It was at a comfortable distance from London, and gave Morrison the proximity he always needed. As he had written in *The Bookman* in 1908, for a piece on the

¹⁹⁵ British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920 [526, 624828].

¹⁹⁶ UK, Silver War Badge Records, 1914-1920, Piece 2970, WO 239.

¹⁹⁷ British Army WWI Pension Records 1914-1920, WO 364, Piece 2592.

¹⁹⁸ England and Wales Death Index, 1916-2007, p. 131.

¹⁹⁹ England and Wales National Probate Calendar, *Index of Wills England & Wales* 1858-1966, p. 1176.

importance of the city to London Writers: ‘I prefer living out of London myself, though I do not care to stay long or far away from it.’²⁰⁰

Morrison was elected to the Royal Society of Literature in 1924. This honour was not courted by Morrison, and seems to have come as a surprise. When he was asked to participate in the Society by giving a talk on literature, he politely and modestly declined. Writing to Professor Wagstaff, then the Secretary of the Society, Morrison expressed both gratitude and diffidence, stating that:

It is many years since I produced anything, and I have never given the attention which perhaps I should have done to the matters of literary history and criticism with which such a paper as you suggest must deal.²⁰¹

Morrison’s humility here is profound. Although Wagstaff’s note in the margin of the letter suggests his willingness to hear from Morrison on the subject of art, rather than literature, which had been Morrison’s main occupation for some years, the invitation was declined.

Morrison’s anxiety was made clear when, on two further occasions, he again declined the invitation to speak before the Society. In March 1939 he wrote to Wagstaff saying:

You terrify me; and worse you compel me to two things I hate to do; first to correct your recollections – for indeed I never “read a paper” in my life, barring my morning perusal at breakfast – and second, to decline, at my age, to begin now. In very truth I can think of nothing I could say on any literary subject, that would not be a waste of the time of such a meeting as you would gather, and very possibly, an affront to its knowledge.²⁰²

Morrison described his literary knowledge as ‘wide, but very desultory.’ When the new Secretary, Miss Rudston-Brown, invited him to give a paper in December of 1939, he once again excused himself, expressing his ‘regret to have to confess my unlearned inability to instruct anybody about anything.’ He proceeded to assert that ‘I am in the Society, if for any reason at all, merely on account of volumes I have written, wholly fabulous; and this lifelong divorce from truth leaves me unprovided with either history or theory fit to place before my

²⁰⁰ Anon., ‘Authors at Work’, 86.

²⁰¹ Letter, Arthur Morrison to Professor Wagstaff, 6th Jan 1925, RSLIT Archives, University of Cambridge Library.

²⁰² Letter, Arthur Morrison to Professor Wagstaff, 3rd March 1939, RSLIT Archives.

superiors in these departments.’ This letter is extraordinary not only for its complete humility on a personal level but also for the transformation of his views by this time of the value of his work. In 1896 he had asserted fulsomely that his *Jago* was so true to life as to be unique in fiction; by 1939 he dismissed all his previous works, the greatest of which are characterised by a uniquely stark realism, as ‘fabulous.’²⁰³ The private nature of these letters suggests that Morrison’s modesty was genuine, but it could also mark an aspect of the Masonic culture of secrecy which he had espoused over years of belonging to that society.

Nearly fifty years after publishing *Jago*, his novel depicting the destruction of the city, Morrison witnessed the events that destroyed forever many of the remaining slums of the East End, as well as breaking up the miles of straight streets whose design he deplored. The street in which he had lived for much of his childhood, Grundy Street in Poplar, was almost entirely destroyed during the Second World War.²⁰⁴ Aged seventy-six at the outbreak of the war, Morrison was relatively isolated due to the absence of his chauffeur, who had joined the army, and his own ill-health. He excused himself from the meetings of the Royal Society, which continued to meet throughout the war, as he was suffering from gout. A letter from Binyon demonstrates the latter’s anxiety at the outbreak of the war, but as the reply is not preserved it is impossible to say how far Morrison shared it.²⁰⁵

Binyon died in 1943 after a very short illness: its brevity was such that Morrison heard about the death on the radio before Binyon’s widow Cicely could write to him. In a letter of March 19th, Cicely Binyon apologised to Morrison for ‘the shock of hearing of Laurence’s death on the wireless – we knew nothing of it till afterwards but I could have done nothing about it.’²⁰⁶ His friendship with Binyon had been extremely important to

²⁰³ Letter, Arthur Morrison to Miss Rudston-Brown, 30th December 1939, RSLIT Archives.

²⁰⁴ It was reconfigured and is now ‘Elizabeth Street’.

²⁰⁵ Letter, (undated), Laurence Binyon to Arthur Morrison, MSS. Lilly, Indiana.

²⁰⁶ Letter 19th March 1943 Cicely Binyon to Arthur Morrison, Binyon MSS. Lilly, Indiana.

Morrison. Binyon had recognised not only the valuable contribution Morrison was making to the study of Chinese and Japanese art but also the ‘forcible economy of [his] prose style.’²⁰⁷

Morrison did not long outlive his friend. He died from the same cause, thrombosis, on the 4th December 1945. Morrison’s obituary in *The Times* on 5th December gave very little personal information about him, and repeated the assertion made earlier by Morrison that he was born in Kent.²⁰⁸ His obituary in *The Dickensian* was, however, personal and affectionate:

Arthur Morrison, whose death at the age of 83 was recently announced, became a Vice-President of The Dickens Fellowship in its early days [...] Morrison always acknowledged his literary debt to Dickens: the books by which he established his fame, *Tales of Mean Streets* (1894), *A Child of the Jago* (1896) etc., show the same gift for graphic description and warm-hearted sympathy for the poor and unfortunate always manifested by Dickens, together with humour and a love of London life [...] Our list of Vice-Presidents is much the poorer for his passing.²⁰⁹

After her husband’s death, Adelaide wrote to Miss Rudston-Brown at the Royal Society. Adelaide observes with gratitude that ‘every letter I receive from his friends all speak of his great kindness. He was always the same.’²¹⁰ His death, Adelaide states in this letter, came after a very brief illness. His unexpected death was a shock to his wife so that, she states, there was no time for him to advise her ‘about his affairs.’ This contrasts with every account of Morrison’s death, which states that he asked Adelaide to burn all his papers. Like much of Morrison’s own writing, Adelaide’s letter is moving without being sentimental. Together with the loss of her husband, Adelaide grieved for the loss of the fine paintings in their house. First the Old Masters, then the English school, were to be sold at Sotheby’s.²¹¹ Perhaps concealing the reality of her own grief, Adelaide tells Miss Rudston-Brown ‘the empty gallery looks very forlorn – I miss them already.’

²⁰⁷ Letter (undated), Laurence Binyon to Arthur Morrison, Binyon MSS. Lilly, Indiana.

²⁰⁸ Anon., ‘Obituary: Mr A. Morrison - Author and Connoisseur’ *The Times* (London, England), Wednesday, Dec 05, 1945; 7; Issue 50317.

²⁰⁹ ‘Arthur Morrison’, *The Dickensian*, 1946, p. 113.

²¹⁰ Letter from Adelaide Morrison to Miss Rudston Brown, Feb 25th 1946. RSLIT archives.

²¹¹ On his death, Morrison’s estate was worth £45, 645 19s 8d. Adelaide would not have been left wanting, but Newens notes, ‘His will states: ‘At this time the future is uncertain, taxation is unprecedentedly high and the pillage of the widow [...] has long been erected into a principle of the state.’ (p. 13) Perhaps this is why he had the works sold at Sotheby’s. His Japanese collection was donated to the British Museum.



Fig. 12.; Fig. 13. The last known pictures of Morrison in his (?) seventies – found by his gardener’s son and given to Mr Ray Best, inhabitant of High Barn, Chalfont St Peter, since 1984.²¹²

Morrison could have been a voice of the British working class but he silenced himself. This is perhaps in part due to his artistic intention to negate the narrative voice, which could be compromised by making himself widely known in a public setting. It seems probable; however, that his secretiveness about his past was dictated primarily by what Walter Houghton calls the ‘duty’ of the respectable. Extracting himself from his past was the Victorian manifestation of discharging his social responsibility, because, although ‘formerly [duty] had simply meant the obligation to fulfil one’s calling’, in Victorian England duty meant climbing the social ladder alone, improving society by improving oneself.²¹³ His pursuit of respectability was necessarily, apart from Adelaide, one he made alone. Although his writing often acts as a corrective to the views of middle-class writers, Morrison did not intend, or see it as his duty, to use his hard-won position to elevate the East Enders among whom he had lived.

The letter he wrote to Mr Butler at Loughton in 1896 and the interviews published in American newspapers suggest that Morrison would allow things to be published in the U.S.

²¹² My thanks to Mr and Mrs Best for these photographs, and for the tour of High Barn.

²¹³ Walter E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1957), pp. 186-188.

about his life which he would not allow to be published in England. Whether the fear of the fictions about his life being uncovered drove him to keep his origins secret in England while he was happy to humour American writers with falsehoods, or whether U.S. writers latched on to the first misconceptions presented in the *New York Times* article of 1902 and proceeded by indirection to further errors, remains unclear.

Morrison's work has been broadly and lastingly disseminated. In the now gentrified part of Shoreditch where he set his most well-known novel, 'Jago' has become a sign that indicates belonging to the area by its new, middle-class inhabitants. It is used by Joe Corr e's clothes store 'A Child of the Jago' on Great Eastern Street, to sell ostentatiously shabby clothes with a luxe-tramp aesthetic. A new development of flats on Old Nichol Street was bathetically named Jago Apartments, and a new restaurant serving Jewish fusion food, 'The Jago', opened in 2014. The sign 'Jago' operates as an in-joke for those who, in the opposite movement to Morrison, come from affluent suburbs to make the East End their home. I rather think such adoption of the name Jago would have amused Morrison – but perhaps he would have cautioned those who use it that the self-satisfaction it implies can result simultaneously in being a foot higher, and having one's hat broken.

2

REWRITING THE EAST END

In the sketch 'A Street', used to introduce *Tales of Mean Streets*, Morrison employs a technique repeated throughout his fiction, echoing common misconceptions about the East End back to the middle-class reader. The East End had become so notorious, Morrison suggests, that 'there is no need to say in the East End of what.' The East End was a place much discussed but very little understood:

...who knows the East End? It is down through Cornhill and out beyond Leadenhall Street and Aldgate Pump, *one will say*: a shocking place, where he once went with a curate; an evil plexus of slums that hide human creeping things [...] where every citizen wears a black eye, and none ever combs his hair [...] The East End is a place, *says another*, which is given over to the Unemployed [...] *Still another* knows the East End only as the place whence begging letters come [...] Many and misty are the people's notions of the East End.¹

Morrison is demystifying the received view of the East End as 'shocking' and other, home to 'a race whose token is a clay pipe, and whose enemy is soap' (19). Morrison disenchants the vision of the other east, stating that 'foul slums there are in the East, of course, as there are in the West. [...] But they are not often spectacular in kind' (20). The sketch serves as a repudiation of previous understandings of the East End and undermines the security of the reader's knowledge of the place.

In the nineteenth-century superfluity of representations of the London slum, the East End had come to represent something beyond itself. In the 1880s the fictional rendering of the slum changed from depictions characterised by extreme poverty, brutality and squalor, to one of dull working-class existence. Realist portraits of the East End became, by the 1890s, the search for reality in a space of fiction and fantasy. Late-Victorian realists expected to be able to convey the ordinary experience of a shared material world. Yet when confronted with the slum space, ideas of the 'shared', 'material' and indeed 'ordinary' became troubled. Describing the East End as a place that was both more respectable and more harrowing than

¹ Morrison, 'A Street' in *Tales of Mean Streets* [1894] (Faber and Faber: London, 2008), pp. 19-28. (pp. 19-20.), emphasis added. Further references will appear in the text.

previous 'explorers' of the realm, Morrison conveyed the disquieting idea that that which is real can be more inexplicable than the realms of fantasy.

I. Writing the Victorian Slum

An abundance of slum fictions were produced throughout the nineteenth century. Those with artistic influences and aims as diverse as Henry James, Israel Zangwill, Dickens, Walter Besant, Margaret Harkness and Rudyard Kipling wrote on the phenomenon of the slum. When Robert Blatchford, editor of socialist paper *The Clarion*, and author of working-class novels *A Son of the Forge* (1894) and *Julie* (1900), reviewed *Jago*, he described his surprise that Morrison's account of the slum had been hailed as new. Listing some of the many fictions of recent decades which had featured slums, Blatchford asked:

Has Mr Morrison discovered the London slums? What about Douglas Jerrold, Charles Dickens, Henry Kingsley, Walter Besant, Rudyard Kipling, and George Gissing? Have you ever read *Oliver Twist*, *The Nether World*, *Ravenshoe*, or *The Record of Badalia Herodsfoot*?²

The anxiety of late Victorians was that slums were both repeatedly represented and ultimately un-representable: Blatchford ultimately perceived reticence in Morrison's fictional approach which evaded, Blatchford thought, telling 'the whole truth and the real truth' of the slum.³ Slum fictions were assigned the responsibility to truthfully represent the unfamiliar to their readers, a function that was both increasingly interrogated and relied upon. By the 1890s, the art of the novel and the reliability of the 'special picture' it produced were in doubt: fiction and non-fiction were so close as to cause discomfort about what was real.⁴ Morrison's fiction emerged therefore at a temporal and stylistic limit of representations of the slum.

² Robert Blatchford, *My Favourite Books* (London: Walter Scott Ltd., 1900), p. 231.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

⁴ Henry James, 'The Art of Fiction', in Moira Shapira ed. *Henry James: Selected Literary Criticism* (London: Heinemann, 1963) pp. 49-67, (p. 49; p. 63).

Early Victorian authors of ‘Social Problem’ or ‘Condition of England’ novels had, in the 1830s and 40s, described the living and working conditions of the poor in England. New industrial regions, such as Manchester, were often the focus of these works, which looked at the effects of industrialisation on the working class. These novels were later criticised for their inefficacy as ‘nothing more than a spasm of middle-class alarm, a hiccup in the general complacency of the period.’⁵ The work of Dickens, one of Morrison’s greatest influences, kept these problems in the minds of his middle-class readers throughout the 1850s.

In the mid-Victorian period, the slum in literature operated as a site of catharsis. Situated in the centres of cities, these fictional slums played on the fears of the reader of contagion and proximity to poverty. Mid-Victorian slums were represented as sick spaces, causing contagion between upper and lower class characters. This treatment of the slum was hopeful, however: sickness can be cured; the slum could be reformed. In Dickens’s *Bleak House* (1852-53), the slum Tom-all-alone’s is a place of contamination. It is the sickness lurking at the heart of London, and Dickens sends a doctor, Allan Woodcourt, to cure it. However, as Elana Gomel suggested in a recent article on *Bleak House*, this need not be negative: ‘rooted in the body, contagion promotes the social solidarity, which abstract discourse of reform cannot accomplish.’⁶ The slum demonstrates not only the problem of contagion between its unclean inhabitants and the upper classes, but the potential for upper-class characters to redeem themselves by submitting to and surviving this contagion.

Spatially, Tom-all-alone’s operates as a bridge between the reader and the city’s inhabitants. It is an unfamiliar place within the familiar centre of the city. Many late-Victorian literary slums were situated in the East End, beyond the Aldgate pump, which acts as what Burgan calls a ‘rhetorical borderland between danger and safety.’⁷ Kevin Swafford

⁵ John Sutherland, *The Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction*, (Harlow: Pearson, 2009), p. 600.

⁶ Elana Gomel, “‘Part of the Dreadful Thing’: The Urban Chronotope of Bleak House’ in *Partial Answers: Journal of Literature and the History of Ideas*, Vol.9, No. 2, June 2011, 297-309 (305.)

⁷ Burgan, ‘Mapping Contagion in Victorian London: Disease in the East End’, p. 43.

has suggested that the late-Victorian East End is imagined ‘as a place of disease and illness.’⁸ The containment of contagion within the imaginary border of ‘the East End’ emerges in the later century as an incitement to the rediscovery of the poor, and an excuse for the continued suffering that writers feign surprise at encountering there.

The predominance of Dickens in forming the imagined landscape of Victorian London was resisted. Morrison’s 1889 article, ‘Jacob’s Island’, intimates the problem that belief and disbelief in slums is effected through literary imaginings. He observes the irony whereby drawing the attention of the public to a site in need of repair often casts the place into the realm of imagination, thus destroying the possibility of reform. This article recalled the debate that had surrounded the publication of Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* (1837-39) in which critics had repudiated Dickens’s descriptions of the thieves’ den in East London. Morrison opens the article by stating that:

Jacob’s Island does not exist. When the “amazing alderman” made this statement – in the year 1850 – it was not true; but now, thirty-nine years after, the fact may be fearlessly declared. There is no island and no discoverable Jacob. And yet the place remains where it always was.⁹

The ‘amazing alderman’ Morrison refers to here is Sir Peter Laurie, once a Lord Mayor of London. After reading Dickens’s novel, Laurie rejected claims for the need to reform the area stating that Jacob’s Island ‘only existed in a work of fiction.’¹⁰ In ‘Jacob’s Island’ Morrison suggests that changes to topography and the passage of time have dissolved the knowledge of Jacob’s Island, so that ‘its name has gone floating away on the lips of the dead years’ (2). The place was once an ‘Alsatia of Alsatias’.¹¹ The place is both denied by its representation in

⁸ Swafford, *Class in Late-Victorian Britain*, p. 68.

⁹ Arthur G. Morrison, ‘Cockney Corners XIII: ‘Jacob’s Island’, in *The People: A Weekly Newspaper for All Classes*, Sunday January 20 1889, 2. Further references will appear in the text.

¹⁰ Joyce, *Capital Offenses*, p. 101.

¹¹ From the thirteenth to the seventeenth century, a slum known as ‘Alsatia’ occupied the area between Ludgate and Fleet Street. It was named for the disputed territory of Alsace-Lorraine between France and Germany. As it was outside the jurisdiction of the City of London, the site gained a reputation for criminality. See Arnold, *Underworld London*, p. 51.

fiction, and dependent on it: ‘nothing keeps its name in mind but the graphic description of the pursuit and death of Bill Sykes in *Oliver Twist*’ (2). Morrison observed the collapse of real places into fictions.

Investigations into the insalubrious corners of the city continued with a number of non-fictional and fictional slum texts produced to the horror and delight of their readers. James Greenwood followed the sensational investigative piece, ‘A Night in the Workhouse’ (1866) with a fictional work, *The True History of a Little Ragamuffin*, also in 1866. A reviewer, though complimentary towards Greenwood, observed that the market was already replete with such accounts: ‘That “one half of the world does not know how the other half lives” is a complaint that can be hardly made with any degree of justice in the present day.’ ‘Terribly in earnest’, the project of slum literature was exhaustive: ‘not a back street, not a garret, not a slum must be left unexplored.’¹²

Non-fiction approaches to the slum engaged in amusing rhetoric and stern admonitions to readers, using fictional tools and affective language. Henry Mayhew, James Greenwood, George Sims and Andrew Mearns all wrote emotive responses to their encounters with slums. The living conditions of the poor in 1880s London were revealed by the journalist Sims, the author of *Horrible London* and *How the Poor Live* (1883) and the Reverend Andrew Mearns the (disputed) author of *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* (1883). These works are profoundly rhetorical and driven by affect and didacticism, demonstrating what David Shields calls ‘the roominess of the term *nonfiction*: an entire dresser labelled non-socks.’¹³

Both Sims and Mearns reported dilapidated houses with poor sanitation, into which families crowded together with animals, vermin and sometimes the corpses of the recently departed. Mearns’s notorious *Bitter Cry* employed apocalyptic Biblical imagery. Overcome

¹² David Masson, ‘The Dark Side of Fiction’, *The Reader*, May 5th 1866, pp. 445-446 (p. 445).

¹³ David Shields, *Reality Hunger: A Manifesto* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 2010), p. 22.

by the desperation of trying to portray adequately the want and suffering he saw in the East End, he conveys his anguish using capitals, stating that ‘THIS TERRIBLE FLOOD OF SIN AND MISERY IS GAINING ON US.’¹⁴ Sims described the impoverished conditions of the slum comically. In one attic room he visited, the roof was so dilapidated that:

The water in rainy weather simply poured through the roof of this house, saturating the sleepers in their beds and washing their faces in a rough-and-ready manner, but unfortunately it didn't rain towels at the same time, so that the bath had its inconveniences.¹⁵

Mearns's plea for the apocalyptic crisis of housing and Sims's jocose announcement of the impending moral disasters the slums were creating prompted further fictional responses to the housing crisis. Morrison's view was that East London was inaccurately portrayed in such writings. He may have been right: one slum tourist went back to West London rather surprised to find that the people lived in houses.¹⁶ The Victorian East End became, as Sukhdev Sandhu says: ‘a carnival of the grotesque [...] a hive of fascination’ – a site of tourism for west Londoners who glimpsed it briefly, rather than a place of daily life.¹⁷

Slum fiction writers of the 1880s onwards have often been said to have written out of ‘admiration for Zola and reaction against Dickens.’¹⁸ Zola's ambitious cycle of twenty-three novels, *Les Rougons Macquarts*, explored the impact of heredity and environment upon a family in Second Empire France.¹⁹ The cycle was Zola's attempt to render literature with scientific causality and thus to realise the truth of the human condition. His slum novel *L'Assommoir* (1877), first published in England by Vizetelly in 1884, was, Zola claimed, ‘a

¹⁴ Andrew Mearns, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London: An Inquiry into the Condition of the Abject Poor* [1883] in Keating, *Into Unknown England* pp. 91-112. (p. 92).

¹⁵ George R. Sims, *How the Poor Live* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1883), p. 40.

¹⁶ Anthony S. Wohl, *The Eternal Slum: Housing and Social Policy in Victorian London*, (London: Transaction, 2002), p. 69.

¹⁷ Sukhdev Sandhu, *Night Haunts: A Journey through the London Night* (London and New York: Verso, 2010), p. 11.

¹⁸ Keating, *The Working Classes*, p. 137.

¹⁹ Brome asserts that ‘Arthur Morrison read *La Terre* [...] It was almost certain that he also read [...] *The Experimental Novel*.’ Brome does not give citations for these assertions: *Four Realist Novelists*, p. 14.

truthful work, the first novel about the people that does not lie.’²⁰ As a novel of urban deprivation, it caught the imagination of readers in England accustomed to the sociological explorations of Mayhew, Dickens, Sims and Mearns. Zola considered his novels as experiments in which he would set up causes – heredity, environment, historical moment – and observe the effects – alcoholism, poverty, violence. The conditions of the poor were so clearly subject to the needs of the growing city in the late-nineteenth century that the influences of determinism, heredity and the environment and how the natural condition of man could be experienced in such unnatural places were at stake in literary explorations. Naturalism seemed to offer a new way of writing the slum and the city space.

In 1882, *The Daily Telegraph* wrote of the merits of Zola’s style. The editorial suggests that there is something intrinsically urban to Zola’s naturalism, and that London requires such a writer to uncover its mysteries and to disseminate them as truths, however unpalatable:

London is in want of a writer like EMILE ZOLA, but without his unnecessary and offensive grossness – one who could paint the daily life of this Metropolis [...] with a strict regard for truth [...] the grey morning light seldom breaks across the grim chimney tops but some lost, forgotten wretch crawls into a corner to die of starvation. Hence the necessity for an English Zola, a new and more exact Dickens, a painter of the naked truth, no matter how ghastly or shocking.²¹

Morrison’s work seems to respond to the *Telegraph*’s call. Shying away from the representations of sexuality and physicality which the *Telegraph* is too prurient even to name as such, Morrison nonetheless embraced Zola’s detailed description; his focus on the environment, and the detached tone of Zola’s narrator. However, although considered by both Newens and Brome as an English Zola, Morrison does not refer directly to Zola in any of his writings.

²⁰ Zola ‘Preface’ to *L’Assommoir*, 1 January 1877, cited in *L’Assommoir*, trans. and ed. Robin Buss (London: Penguin, 2000), pp. 3-4.

²¹ Editorial, *Daily Telegraph*, 31 August 1882, cited in Anthony Cummins DPhil thesis ‘The transmission of Emile Zola in English literary culture, 1877-1895’, (Oxford University, 2007), p. 2.

French naturalism allowed more artistic freedom for English realists: it could aid them in the writing of 'life as it is.'²² Naturalism's aim at 'a complete knowledge of the truth' seemed to remove a moral necessity for self-censure by writers.²³ Irish author George Moore hoped that its 'spirit of scientific inquiry' would not be thwarted by the domineering libraries.²⁴ Late-Victorian realism was in part a resistance to the narrow precepts placed upon fiction by the operators of the circulating libraries, and by that epitome of reactionary respectability and housewifely purity, the personification of moral panic, 'Mrs Grundy'. Moore wrote *Literature at Nurse* (1885) in protest against the power of the libraries, stating that:

The literary battle of our time lies not between the romantic and realistic schools of fiction, but for freedom from the illiterate censorship of a librarian [...] that makes of the English novel a kind of advanced school-book, a sort of guide to marriage and the drawing-room.²⁵

In 1888, responding to the publication of Zola's first novel in the cycle, *The Soil*, in England, a social reform group, the National Vigilance Association, published a debate in the House of Commons led by Flintshire member Mr Smith, under the title 'Pernicious Literature'. Smith argued that literature such as Zola's inspired criminal and debased activity, particularly among young persons, arguing that:

There was nothing that so corroded the human character, or so sapped the vitality of a nation, as the spread of this noxious and licentious literature, and he believed it was at the bottom of the shocking state of the streets of London.²⁶

The idea that novels which observed squalor also propagated squalor was shared by others. Smith quoted *Society* magazine from the previous year, which stated that 'realism, according

²² Eliza Lynn Linton in 'Candour in English Fiction', (1890) excerpt in Sally Ledger with Roger Luckhurst (eds.) *The Fin de Siècle: A Reader in Cultural History c. 1880-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 113-116 (p. 113.)

²³ Emile Zola 'The Experimental Novel' [1880] in *The Nineteenth Century Novel: Critical Essays and Documents* ed. by Arnold Kettle (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd, 1972), pp. 302-329, (p. 309).

²⁴ George Moore, *Literature at Nurse, Or Circulating Morals: A Polemic on Victorian Censorship* ed. Pierre Coustillas (Hassocks: Harvester Press Limited, 1976), p. 17.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

²⁶ S. Smith, *Pernicious Literature: Debate In the House of Commons: Trial and Conviction for Sale of Zola's Novel with Opinions of the Press* (London: National Vigilance Assoc., 1889), p. 5.

to latter-day French lights, means nothing short of sheer beastliness [...] it is dirt and horror pure and simple.’²⁷ Morrison’s decision to evade ‘beastliness’, that is, to steer clear of any overt discussion of sex in his work, was a tactic to avoid censure and censorship. Making his work acceptable in the face of such campaigns was not only a commercial choice, but a way for him to complete his project – he does, centrally, believe that these accounts *do* propagate a level of moral squalor, as the following discussion will show.

Havelock Ellis and other progressive thinkers of the time appreciated Zola’s influence and hoped that it would lead towards a ‘vigour and audacity of phrase which, without Zola’s example, they would have trembled to use.’²⁸ The influence of Zola on English realism was not without some apprehension however, as is evident in criticisms of later slum novels, particularly those of Morrison.

The slum continued to be a major focus of fiction as political and philanthropic action seemed inadequate. Superficially hopeful accounts of transformation, such as Walter Besant’s, offered little in the way of social progress. Besant’s *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* (1882) re-examined the East End, finding not the sordid details of slums the narrator states a reader would expect, but a dreary wasteland of terraced houses and stultifying poverty. Karl Beckson has argued that Besant’s novel ‘helped to shape the image of the East End in the imagination of the late Victorians’.²⁹ This was likely due to its actual implications for the built environment of the East End, as it inspired (as discussed in Chapter 1) the building of the ‘People’s Palace’, but it was also due to the overwhelmingly comforting picture Besant’s novel projected.

In Besant’s novel two parvenus disguised as working-class lodgers in a Stepney Green boarding house decide to solve the twin problems of lack of entertainment and lack of dissatisfaction among their new neighbours. Defying political economy in all its

²⁷ Ibid., p. 6.

²⁸ Ellis cited in Keating, *The Working Classes*, p. 125.

²⁹ Karl Beckson, *London in the 1890s: A Cultural History* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1993), p. 308.

manifestations, they establish a 'Palace of Delight' for the working classes. At the close of the novel the hero, Harry, of 'low' birth but with a wealthy guardian, settles in the East End with his new wife Angela, heiress to a brewery and funder of the 'Palace'.³⁰ Throughout the novel it is suggested that the working classes ought to be encouraged to action by being made 'discontented'. However, Harry's final speech at the opening of the Palace defies any socialist undertones that may be deduced in Angela's repeated calls for discontentment (77; 99; 103; 115; 134). Harry states that the East Enders should certainly not attempt to reform the political system, but should focus their attention on themselves and the Palace. Harry's incitement to self-help insists that power can be seized: "the people who have all the Power there is, must find out what they want, and help themselves to it" (330). The implication of his speech is the de-politicisation of the working class, who can, he feels, no longer have anything to complain of: "'The Palace", Harry tells his audience "will be for joy and happiness, not for political wrangles"' (330). Angela and Harry's 'Palace of Delight' is a proscriptive setting for the amelioration of discontent, no matter how much they plea that they are trying to inspire just that.

The central characters, Angela and Harry, are consistently read by critics as 'upper-class changelings' motivated by philanthropy.³¹ However, they both have East End ancestry. The refrain of the novel that 'all sorts and conditions of men are alike' is disproved by their return to the East: the suggestion is that they belong to the sphere of their true inheritance, and the 'great gulf fixed' between the classes, and between East and West Enders, ought not to be traversed (330). Rather than being an exhortation to immersive philanthropy, therefore, the novel should be recognised as fundamentally conservative, stressing the continual belonging to the working classes of the newly wealthy, advising redress for the sufferings of the poor by the recently poor. Two years after the publication of this novel, the franchise was

³⁰ Walter Besant, *All Sorts and Conditions of Men: An Impossible Story*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1891) – references will appear in parentheses in the text.

³¹ Keating, *The Working Classes*, p. 27.

extended to the working class. Besant may have congratulated himself on his forward thinking with the idea of the Palace – which in any case was not a ‘new’ idea, but was inspired the previous decades’ institution building – but he actually reveals anxiety about the extension of power to the East End, which he envisions as appropriately working-class and excluded from the West.

Morrison’s fiction problematizes the relationship of institutions like the Palace to the poor. Morrison acknowledged the dullness which it seems Besant was the first to observe, but the effects of this are shown by Morrison to be far more execrable than Besant could recognize, despite his admission in the wedding scene of *All Sorts* that ‘Life is serious’ (330). Indeed ‘Besantine’ came to be used as an adjective, describing, in criticism of other novelists, wooden characters and flawed plots. As applied to Besant himself, ‘Besantine’ is forgiving of his ‘impossible or unreal stories, [which] are always refreshing after the laborious realistic or naturalistic brochure.’³²

Literary responses to the slum differed so widely that they increased concerns about the realistic representation of the city as a symbolic landscape. While Besant’s approach to the slum is romantic and conservative, the slum fictions of George Gissing, as Jameson suggests, are not only naturalistic but in fact ‘experimental [...] in a far stricter sense than those of Zola’.³³ Gissing places characters with inherited traits within challenging environments and examines the results, seeking to convey the ‘social classification of the nether world’ with accuracy.³⁴ Gissing portrays slums entirely unlike those of Dickens, whose influence on him was profound but ‘indirect.’³⁵ The influence of Gissing on Morrison was also indirect. There are no records to suggest explicitly that Morrison read Gissing, but,

³² Gloria Mundi, ‘Is National Sentiment Declining?’ *The Speaker: the liberal review* (15) (Apr 10, 1897): 401-401.; Charles Lewis Hind, (ed.). *The Academy*, 1869-1902, 0269-333X_1384 (Nov 12, 1898): 246.

‘The Ivory Gate’, *Saturday review of politics, literature, science and art* 74.1931 (Oct 29, 1892): 514.

³³ Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 184.

³⁴ George Gissing, *The Nether World* (Oxford: OWC, 2008), p. 69. Further references will appear in the text.

³⁵ Anon., ‘The Novel of Misery’, *The Quarterly Review*, 196. 392 (October 1902): 391-414. (401).

as noted in Chapter 1, it is certain that Gissing read Morrison. Their mutual acquaintance Father Jay's admiration for Gissing could well have been passed on to Morrison when he took on the project of writing about the Nichol. Nonetheless, Morrison's view of the East End was unique.

In his 1889 novel *The Nether World*, Gissing locates the slum space between Dickens's 1850s emplacement of the slum at the centre of the city and the earlier 1880s confinement of the problem to the East End. Gissing's slum is situated in Clerkenwell, an area which Morrison himself identified as one of his 'Cockney Corners' but which is not, by any usual geographical definition, the 'East End.'³⁶ While the slum in *Bleak House* acts as an osmotic sphere of contagion and circulation, for Gissing, as Henkle states, 'there is no passage from the Nether World to the spheres above it.'³⁷ In Gissing's novels no valour is to be found by confronting the problem of the slum. Rather, as Jameson notes, for Gissing 'the early Dickensian "solutions", [such as slum clearance], turn out to provide fresh problems and contradictions in their turn.'³⁸

The slum 'Shooter's Gardens' in *The Nether World* is a decaying site, home to the indigent, the indolent and the criminal. Its clearance, however, will not prevent city dwellers from living in 'the outmost limits of dread' (164). Morrison shared Gissing's view on slum clearance: it was a process whereby things could be made better without being made good. The 'intimacies of abomination' represented by the slum are not countered by intimacies of love, but by isolating distance (164). The suburban deprivation experienced by Sidney and his wife Clara is desolate. They are sequestered at the fringes of the city, exchanging overcrowding for estrangement in their decaying suburban villa. Believing that they have escaped the areas which they both had the potential to rise above, their suffering is all the

³⁶ Arthur G. Morrison, 'Cockney Corners II: A Patch of Clerkenwell' in *The People, A Weekly Magazine for All Classes*, Sunday 4 November 1888, 2.

³⁷ Henkle, 'Morrison, Gissing and the Stark Reality', 313.

³⁸ Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 173.

more poignant. The suburbs ostensibly confer respectability in the escape from the slums, but merely offer a less visible desperation. In his repudiation of the Dickensian idyll of domestic suburbia, Gissing is extremely unsettling to his readers. Morrison is also a master of disquiet, which he achieves in his location of desperation in the respectable and horror in the ordinary. Morrison records the ineffectual transformation of a slum, and identifies the even more desperate places at the edges of the city.

In 'Two Philanthropic Novelists', author Edith Sichel compared Gissing to Besant, suggesting that:

Mr Gissing's resolute wailing is surely disproportionate, and though no one could accuse Mr Besant of too much lamentation, still unfounded ecstasies are also want of symmetry, and persistent glee about non-existent joy is not sense of humour.

Sichel's conclusion that Gissing is the superior writer is couched in the vacillating phrase that Gissing 'does doubtless hold the most courageous position, for he faces, nay he over-faces truth'. Her meaning is more transparent when compared to her analysis of Besant: 'Mr Besant on the other hand, continually gallops away from truth, on a very high horse indeed, or hides it from himself in a pink silk veil.' Understanding Besant's reticence faced with the actuality of 'other people's sorrow', Sichel concludes that the ideal lies somewhere between the methods of the two. If Besant's 'buoyancy' could be married to Gissing's 'love of truth, of facing the worst without flinching and of describing what he sees', we might realise a balanced vision of the city.³⁹

Although influenced by both Dickens and Besant, Morrison's role as a slum writer of the 1890s was, as he knew, necessarily different. He needed not merely to describe the slum, but to account for the ineffectuality of previous didactic slum fictions to solve the problem of the slum. In *Tales* Morrison redefined the East End, therefore redefining the slum. In this text, and in *Jago*, Morrison demonstrated that slum fictions written by his predecessors, with

³⁹ Edith Sichel 'Two Philanthropic Novelists: Mr Walter Besant and Mr George Gissing' *Murray's Magazine* Vol. 3: 16., Apr. 1888, 506-518. (518.)

their constant and vociferous calls to arms, had perpetuated rather than alleviated the sufferings of East Enders. Frequently using the trope of introducing incorrect views about the East End held by either readers or middle-class characters within the texts, Morrison mocks those who believe that either reading about the East End or visiting it briefly can confer real knowledge about it. Saturation with information about the slums increased misapprehensions about it:

Most [philanthropists and ‘slummers’] had been convinced, by what they had been told, by what they had read in charity appeals, and perhaps by what they had seen in police-court and inquest reports, that the whole East End was a wilderness of slums: slums packed with starving human organisms without minds and without morals, preying on each other alive (*Jago*, 20).

Morrison’s contribution to the representation of the late-Victorian slum was both to over- and under- exaggerate its horrors and threats. In his sketch ‘Whitechapel’ Morrison challenges previous visions of the place and disarms the reader with his chiaroscuro effect of writing, presenting Whitechapel as both more respectable and more horrific than previous writers had discerned. In *Tales*, Morrison presents a rejoinder to the impression of the East End as wholly consisting of a slum. He demonstrates that the East End is damaging not for its antipathy to ordinary Victorian ideals – particularly respectability and marriage – but for its unequivocal embrace of these, to the detriment of the safety and happiness of its inhabitants. The fear inspired by Morrison’s fiction was not the one the public had become accustomed to, whereby ‘the deterioration of the living conditions of the poor might be producing a truly degraded race of sub-human beings [...] whose reactions might be animal, revengeful, unpredictable.’⁴⁰ Rather, it was that adherence to middle-class standards of behaviour would produce outwardly decent yet passively violent people. In *Jago* Morrison conveys the perceived solutions to the slums as the cause of misery and death in these areas. The ardent acceptance of Victorian norms and the total failure of ‘improvements’ identified in his work

⁴⁰ Enid Gauldie, *Cruel Habitations: A History of Working-Class Housing 1780-1918* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1974), p. 16.

undermined the confidence of the ‘Sentimental-Cocksure’ to tackle the greatest problems in their society (*Jago*, 76). Morrison’s slum writings remorselessly interrogate the readers’ position, and evince his insistence on the continuation of the problem of the slum beyond the page.

II. Sketches of Whitechapel, 1872-1889

Whitechapel, described by Morrison’s contemporary J.H. Mackay as ‘The East End in the East End,’ was the subject of numerous recordings both written and visual even before the murders for which it is still remembered.⁴¹ Even Morrison’s role model Guy de Maupassant wrote of Whitechapel as the site of a bizarre night-time adventure.⁴² Morrison’s sketch ‘Whitechapel’, published in *The People* in 1888 and republished in *The Palace Journal* in 1889, demonstrates the early expression of his aim in representing the East End. In it, he declared that Whitechapel had been repeatedly written about by strangers whose uninformed impressions were both entertaining and ridiculous to those who actually knew it:

A dozen graphically-written descriptions of Whitechapel, by people who have never seen the place, but have heard as much about it as most have, would probably be as amusing in the reading, to those acquainted with the district, as the most extravagant of the fables once so frequently quoted as articles of current French belief in the matter of English manners and customs ever were to the English people themselves.⁴³

In this comparison, Morrison emphasises that Whitechapel’s inhabitants are English subjects, thus destabilising the image of the East End as savage and other. This section of the chapter will examine three ‘sketches’ of Whitechapel from 1872 to 1889: ‘Whitechapel and Thereabouts’ from Blanchard Jerrold and Gustave Doré’s *London: A Pilgrimage* (1872); “‘Hookey Alf,’ of Whitechapel’ from Smith and Thomson’s *Street Life in London* (1877);

⁴¹ Mackay cited in William Fishman, *The Streets of East London*, (Nottingham: Five Leaves, 2006), p. 7.

⁴² Guy de Maupassant, ‘A Night in Whitechapel’, *Short Stories of the Tragedy and Comedy of Life* (St. Dunstan, 1903), p. 189.

⁴³ Arthur Morrison ‘Whitechapel’, *Palace Journal* 24 April 1889, 1022-1023, (1022). Further references will appear in the text.

and Morrison's 'Whitechapel' (1889). Morrison uses his sketch to repudiate the work of the 'strangers' whose representations of the place had, he felt, obscured its reality.

In *London: A Pilgrimage* (1872) Jerrold and Doré presented their visit to Whitechapel as an adventure into the unknown. The book was a lavish and expensive production in embossed leather, and was famously illustrated by Doré's chiaroscuro etchings. Jerrold and Doré struggled to control the mass of information presented by the city. They state early on that they rejected the device of using 'types' to organise their information.⁴⁴ They draw on Isaac Disraeli's notion that 'the great art, perhaps, of local description, is rather a general than a particular view; the details must be left to the imagination; it is suggestive rather than descriptive' (xxv). Their generalisation of the area as 'Whitechapel and Thereabouts', however, marks their position as outsiders to the East End: they cannot appreciate its subtle boundaries. Despite their wariness of types, ultimately they cannot resist the temptation towards a totalising vision: 'we have selected the most striking types, the most completely representative scenes' (xxx).



Fig.14. Gustave Doré: 'Over London - By Rail' 1872

Doré's images are predominantly dark. Light plays at the centre and forefront of the images. This light is often provided by an outsider, such as the lamp of the Scotland Yard

⁴⁴ Gustave Doré and Blanchard Jerrold, *London: A Pilgrimage*, (London: Anthem, 2006), p. xxviii. Further references will appear in the text.

inspector. In the corners and in the backgrounds, details are effaced, creating anticipation of horrors yet unseen. The play of light and dark is accentuated by the text, in which Whitechapel is rendered in monochrome, occasional blasts of light serving only to extend the shadows. Jerrold and Doré ‘plunge into a maze of courts and narrow streets of low houses, nearly all the doors of which are open, showing kitchen fires blazing far in the interior,’ and proceed down alleys ‘under flickering lamps jutting from the ebon walls’ (171). Whitechapel in their account contains ‘the lowest of [the] low’ (172), it is ‘savage London’ (169), ‘strange and dark’, ‘weird and horrible’ (169) in which ‘demands for gin assailed [them] on all sides’ (176).



‘... our careful guides...’
Fig. 15. Doré, ‘The Bull’s Eye’, in *London: A Pilgrimage*, 1872

Jerrold and Doré are led by their ‘careful guides’: police officers and charity workers who are accustomed to the strangeness of Whitechapel and can protect the explorers (170). The guides light the way both actually and metaphorically. Jerrold and Doré describe minutely the mode by which a middle-class gentleman visits Whitechapel. It is on no account to be done without the proper precautions:

You put yourself in communication with Scotland Yard to begin with. You adopt rough clothes. You select two or three companions who will not flinch [...] you commit yourself to the guidance of one of the intelligent and fearless heads of the detective force (166).

They establish that they are outsiders, looking in. 'Whitechapel and Thereabouts' functions as a guide to how middle-class men can travel into such dangerous areas.

Jerrold and Doré's explorations reveal the unreality of the area as they leave behind all that constitutes 'familiar London', both to themselves and to their reader, addressed directly as 'You' (166). In their sketch, actuality of impression is superseded by fictional accounts. Jerrold and Doré enter 'the room in which "Edwin Drood" opens' (173). This image, unlike the previous one in which the superintendent's lamp illuminates the etching, is lit by the flame over which opium is being prepared. Without the 'light' of the outsider, Jerrold and Doré's vision becomes unreal, an image of grotesque fictive realism.



Fig. 16, Left: 'Bluegate Fields'. Fig. 17, Right: 'Opium Smoking: the Lascar's Room in "Edwin Drood"'

Jerrold and Doré enact the role of 'careful guides' for their reader and so detach the reader to a safe distance from the text. They are unable, however, to detach themselves: Jerrold and Doré are constantly present in the text and extremely self-conscious about how they will be viewed by those they witness and record. They anticipate being looked upon 'as the Japanese looked upon the first European travellers in the streets of Jeddo [...] we were to

them as strange and amusing as Chinamen' (169; 176). Jerrold and Doré preclude any possibility of a response from the Whitechapel dwellers themselves, because they immediately subsume the experience of being looked at into their own enjoyment of this returned gaze.⁴⁵

The renowned photographer John Thomson, returning to England from a tour of China in 1872, also began his explorations of Whitechapel from the position of the stranger. He developed his great work of photojournalism *Street Life in London* (1877) in collaboration with the socialist journalist Adolphe Smith. Thomson's biographer Stephen White writes that Thomson 'explored the lives of [...] the poorest members of society, as if they were a subculture within their own society.'⁴⁶ It seems however that it is Thomson who takes the position of the stranger in the text. The figure of the stranger, as Georg Simmel famously states, combines the position of outsider and insider; he is present in a group to which he does not belong, and his strangeness to that group reveals things about them they could not have known before. The stranger is he who retains a position of strangeness within a group. Remaining at the border, the stranger is never at home but 'comes today and stays tomorrow.'⁴⁷ Smith and Thomson are unable to achieve the objective representation of the site they are attempting to describe due to this position and to their expectation that their photographs will enact an indisputably accurate picture of the city.

Smith and Thomson's explorations of the streets of London, unlike Jerrold and Doré's, deliberately sought to discover the 'types' that made up street life. They state that the 'unquestionable accuracy of this testimony will enable us to present true types [...] and shield us from the accusation of either underrating or exaggerating individual peculiarities of

⁴⁵ For another analysis of the gaze in this piece see Pollock, 'Vicarious Excitements', p. 36.

⁴⁶ Stephen White, *John Thomson: Life and Photographs*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1985) p. 31.

⁴⁷ Georg Simmel, trans. by Kurt Wolff, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, (London: Simon and Schuster, 1950), p. 402.

appearance.’⁴⁸ This categorising reflects the imperative of naturalist writers to check ‘against the facts of life an observed or documented case of typical human behaviour.’⁴⁹ The use of ‘type’ by Smith and Thomson suggests that they will produce an unbiased, scientific picture of the metropolis. As Tanya Agathocleous suggests, categorising inhabitants of increasingly complex urban landscapes as ‘types’ was a way of imaginatively controlling the ‘seemingly overwhelming proliferation’ of both people and space.⁵⁰

Smith and Thomson asserted that with the aid of ‘permanent photographs’ they would fix a moment in time and create a detached, scientific view of the street life of the metropolis. Stephen White seems to consider that this aim was achieved. He argues that there is a straightforward congruency between the photographs and the text in their work.⁵¹ Lindsay Smith supports this, stating that Thomson’s selection of the Woodburytype process contributed to the objectivity of the project.⁵² The Woodburytype process, invented in 1864, was one of the easiest and most reliable methods of reproducing images for publication. Yet it also produces a soft tone, which caused Raphael Samuel to call the images ‘sepia’ and to imbue them with the nostalgia that sepia implies.⁵³ The relationship between photography and text in *Street Life* is far more complex than either White or Smith acknowledge.

Described in the subtitle of the book as ‘permanent’, the photographs in *Street Life in London* do not simply back up the text. Rather, they disrupt the accompanying text and are in turn disrupted by it. The captions call the permanence of the images into question. The photographs are in many instances taken before the text is written, producing an

⁴⁸ John Thomson and Adolphe Smith, ‘Preface’, *Victorian London Street Life in Historic Photographs* (New York: Dover, 1994), np.

⁴⁹ Frierson, *The English Novel in Transition*, p. 16.

⁵⁰ Tanya Agathocleous, *Urban Realism and the Cosmopolitan Imagination in the Nineteenth Century: Visible City, Invisible World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 85.

⁵¹ White, *John Thomson*, p.8.

⁵² Lindsay Smith, ‘John Thomson’s London in Photographs’ in Gail Cunningham and Stephen Barber, eds., *London Eyes: Reflections in Text and Image* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007). pp. 27-46. p. 44, n 4.

⁵³ Raphael Samuel, *Theatres of Memory Vol 1: Past and Present in Popular Culture* (London and New York: Verso, 1994), p. 316.

extraordinary disparity of text and image. The subjects of the photograph are often not available for interview; they can no longer be called upon to display or caption themselves. They remind us that, as John Tagg has stated, ‘the existence of a photograph is no guarantee of a corresponding pre-photographic existence’ – a photograph only fixes a moment, it cannot fix a subject.⁵⁴ The detachment between Smith and Thomson’s subject and text creates an elision in the representation of the city. John Berger’s famous statement on photography comes to mind in examining *Street Life*: ‘all photographs are [...] an expression of absence.’⁵⁵ Smith and Thomson’s photographs reveal what is no longer there.

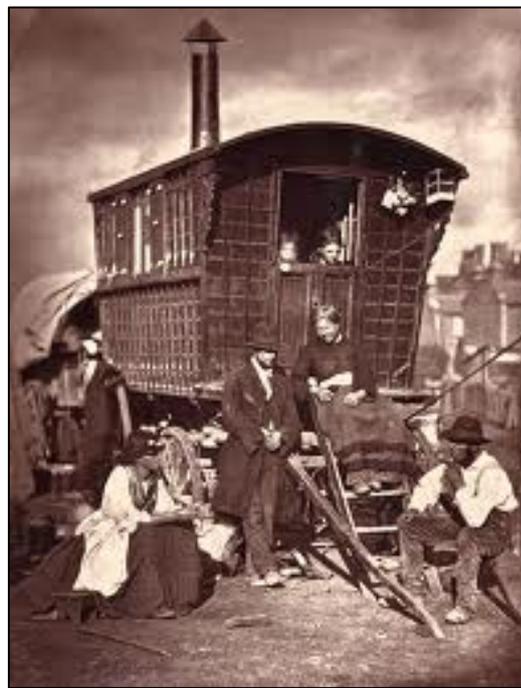


Fig. 18. ‘London Nomades’, John Thomson, 1877

It could be inferred that as a socialist, Smith intended to give the poor a voice in his captions and so did not force their testimonials to comply with their photographic representation. The outcome, whatever the intent, is that of a divorce between the pictured subjects and the caption. Those who appear geometrically central to the photograph are

⁵⁴ John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988), p. 2.

⁵⁵ Berger cited in Clive Scott, *The Spoken Image*, (London: Reaktion, 1999), p. 261.

marginalised by the text. The stories that follow the photographs are unpredictable. Nothing about the image of a group around a gypsy caravan in the image ‘London Nomades’ could prepare the reader for the caption. The image shows a group around a van incongruously situated in the city: the roofs of terraced houses are visible in the background. At the centre-right of the image a woman, Mary Pradd, is seemingly caught in mid-conversation with the man below her. Other than the child at the caravan door whose face is blurred, the figures are deliberately paused in action: the man in the foreground waits, about to smoke a cigarette. It is not an idealised image, yet the group have a unity enhanced by the triangular composition of the figures.⁵⁶ Between the time the photograph was taken and the locating of the van’s owner to provide the caption for it, Mary Pradd was murdered. Unwittingly, the photograph of ‘London Nomades’ becomes Mary Pradd’s memento mori image.⁵⁷ The reader has been assured that he can rely on the ‘permanence’ of the photographs but is denied this assurance by the text.



⁵⁶ On the importance of the triangular composition Cassell, Petter, and Galpin, eds., ‘Foregrounds’ in *The Photographic News* Vol. 10. May 11, 1866. 223-224 (223).

⁵⁷ For Barthes, the transformation of self into any photograph is a kind of death; he records the experience of being photographed – a transfiguration from object to subject – as ‘becoming a spectre.’ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000), p. 14.

Fig. 19. “‘Hookey Alf,’ of Whitechapel’, John Thomson, 1877

A viewer might assume that the intended subject of the photograph “‘Hookey Alf,’ of Whitechapel’ (above) is the small girl whose movement across the centre of the image results in the blur around her smock and hair, or the woman on the bench behind her whose forthright gaze draws the reader in to the group. Samuel sees “‘Hookey Alf,’ of Whitechapel’ as a bucolic image of a happy group in the sunshine, ‘chatting amicably.’⁵⁸ Samuel appreciated the soft-focus effects of Thomson’s Woodburytype photography as opposed to the black-and-white engravings of Doré. The content is more real yet its presentation softens the effects of this reality. This response belies the pathos of the accompanying caption which is central to our understanding of the photograph.

Smith, in writing about the photograph, chose to focus on the marginal figure to the right of the frame, “‘Hookey Alf’”. Divorcing Alf from the context of the photograph, Smith tells his story of progressive destitution for which the image does not prepare the reader. The gradations from workman and labourer to match seller that Alf undergoes as a result of injury and illness are conveyed with a respect for the dire aspect of this change from Alf’s point of view. Smith relates that:

the lowest depths of misery were reached when “‘Hookey’”, in despair, slung a little string round his neck to hold in front of him a box or tray containing vesuvians [matches], and presented himself at the entrance of a neighbouring railway station, and sought to sell a few matches.⁵⁹

The horror of reaching the ‘lowest depths of misery’ conveys the desperate impotence of the sick and injured but ‘respectable’ poor. Smith casts Alf as this character, one deserving of the audience’s sympathies as a cacophony of bad luck has brought him to semi-destitution. However, in making Alf representative not only of the ‘respectable poor’ but of Whitechapel itself, Smith requires Alf to act as a far more intrusive presence into Whitechapel than the

⁵⁸ Samuel, *Theatres of Memory*, p. 316.

⁵⁹ “‘Hookey Alf,’ of Whitechapel’ in *Street Life*, pp. 105-108. Further references will appear in the text.

marginal photograph suggests he can be. The photograph suggests that Whitechapel is governed by a chorus of voices, of which Alf is not representative but ‘the most remarkable’ (106). Unlike the girl at the centre, who is the type of ‘the little child leading home a drunken parent’, Alf is exceptional (105). Photography, which ought to have supported their unbiased findings, has revealed itself to be insufficient: it cannot secure a stable and typical representation of the city.

In Morrison’s ‘Whitechapel’ an East End writer attempts to correct the stranger’s image of the site. This sketch redresses the absences and the disjointedness of text and image in previous representations of Whitechapel. It was first published in *The People: A Weekly Newspaper for all Classes* in 1888 and reprinted in *The Palace Journal*, the newspaper of the People’s Palace institution, in 1889. Morrison reflects the concern of respectable working-class readers of the paper and journal about how East Enders had been represented by strangers. A letter from a member of the Palace published in the journal in early 1888 (prior to the Whitechapel murders later that year, which made the place infamous) plays with this cross-class looking. Entitled ‘What they think of us’, the letter ironically describes the aristocratic view of a Palace dance at which ‘there was an entire absence of rudeness and horseplay, [and] absolutely no vulgarity.’⁶⁰ *The Palace Journal* enacts a writing-back by East Enders against popular misconceptions about its typology and character. Morrison plays with this cross-class position in the sketch.

Morrison never subscribes in his writing to the concept of depicting ‘types’ of people: he observed in *Tales* that ‘an effort to typify the people of a city in one character would be foolish indeed.’⁶¹ Similarly in his ‘Whitechapel’ sketch, Arthur Morrison states that ‘generalities are rarely true, and when applied to a district of London so large as that comprised under the name of Whitechapel, never’ (1022). Morrison acknowledges two

⁶⁰ ‘What they think of us’ *Letters in The Palace Journal*, 8 Feb 1888, No. 13, 207.

⁶¹ Morrison cited in Krzak, Introduction, *Tales*, 2008, p. 13.

popular views of Whitechapel, the ‘horrible’ and the ‘pitiful’ and rejects both, providing instead the image of a place with gradations of respectability like the city itself (1022).

‘Whitechapel’ is characterised by continual contrast, but this is not simply that of light and dark as in *A Pilgrimage* or horror and pity as in *Street Life*. Rather, it contains formal contrasts of address and tone throughout. Morrison simultaneously writes for his working-class reader who knows Whitechapel well, and addresses an imaginary middle-class reader who wants Morrison to take them slumming. This dual address mocks and undermines explorations by previous writers.

The sketch uses ventriloquized language, repeating back to the reader their presuppositions about the area. Whitechapel is:

A horrible black labyrinth, *think many people*, reeking from end to end with the vilest exhalations; its streets, mere kennels of horrent putrefaction; its every wall, its every object, slimy with the indigenous ooze of the place; swarming with human vermin, whose trade is robbery, and whose recreation is murder [...] *Others imagine* Whitechapel in a pitiful aspect [...] a wilderness of crazy dens into which pallid wastrels crawl to die[...] where bony, blear-eyed wretches, with everything beautiful, brave, and worthy crushed out of them, and nothing of the glory and nobleness and jollity of this world within the range of their crippled senses, rasp away their puny lives in the sty of the sweater (1022, my emphasis).

Morrison begins a tour of the area beginning at the high street. This is the stranger’s point of entrance, as Morrison travels from the thoroughfare to the back streets, but it is also an important re-examination of ‘the distant prospect’, which, as Pollock notes, was used by Jerrold and Doré.⁶² Instead of travelling from the known West to the unfamiliar East, Morrison begins his sketch of Whitechapel in Whitechapel.

While Smith and Thomson attempted to use photography to fix an instant into a representative moment, Morrison’s present-tense account re-connects Whitechapel to its history. Morrison describes buildings and businesses whose ‘ages run into three figures’ and quotes descriptions of Whitechapel from the seventeenth-century play *Knight of the Burning*

⁶² Pollock, ‘Vicarious Excitements’, p. 28.

Pestle (1607). The allusion to ‘Beaumont and Fletcher’s self-conscious play’ is an interesting one, as Miles attests – it suggests Morrison’s increasingly nuanced understanding of fictive realism.⁶³ Morrison establishes Whitechapel as a site of history and memory, placing it beyond the individual’s capacity for recollection. Whitechapel, in Morrison’s sketch, is not a nineteenth-century phenomenon designed to encapsulate the threat of the urban poor.

Morrison also makes the place more contemporary than its representation in *A Pilgrimage* or *Street Life*. His Whitechapel is a bustling thoroughfare of modern London, not a throwback to an uncivilised nation: it has ‘four railway stations [...] the road itself forms a crowded omnibus and tramcar route’ (1022). Whitechapel’s depiction as separate from the rest of London is revealed to be false. Morrison creates Whitechapel as a synecdochal vision of the city itself, connecting it to the whole by comparing it to a more respectable area: it ‘might be Borough High Street’. He universalises it, connecting it to the world beyond London and so undoing its mythic status – ‘parts of this main road seem fragments of the High Street in some [...] market-town’ (1022). He dismisses as ‘fables’ accounts which see Whitechapel as remarkable.

Having shown the reader the honourable history of the area and its ‘commercial respectability’ Morrison leads them on to progressively less respectable parts. He mocks for the benefit of his working-class reader the slummer who follows him, who is ‘tired, perhaps, of all this respectability.’ He ironically expresses sorrow that Petticoat Lane is no longer as disreputable as it was, and reassures the slummer that: ‘one may still enjoy the consolation of having something stolen in Petticoat Lane if a visit be made on a Sunday’ (1022-23).

It is the ‘bright spots’ of the area, the philanthropic institution Toynbee Hall and its church St Jude’s, that prompt Morrison to finally allude to the Jack the Ripper murders which the piece otherwise marginalises. Like the illuminated spots in Doré’s images, Samuel

⁶³ Miles, Introduction, p. xxiii.

Barnett's church is, in Morrison's text, a point of light in a dark place. Situated at the bottom of Commercial Street near the junction with Whitechapel road, the Hall, founded in 1884 as a settlement house, ought to 'illuminate' the area with spiritual and social uplifting, but instead reveals the surrounding darkness and lurking shadows. The church, Morrison states, has a 'beautiful wall-mosaic of Time, Death, and Judgement [which] has its own significance here, in the centre of the scattered spots which are the recent sites of satanic horrors (1023).'⁶⁴ Morrison admires the endeavour represented by the mosaic, to uplift the surroundings, but regrets its lack of impact. Morrison's technique here is reminiscent of Smith and Thomson's work. In order to convey the primary reality of Whitechapel as he sees it, Morrison cannot focus upon the subject the reader expects to read about – Jack the Ripper and the murders – but instead must assign these to the margins of the piece. 'Whitechapel' disrupts the possibility of vicarious looking by assigning the murders to the edges.

The reader proceeds with Morrison towards Brick Lane. Listing the alleys that lead to this thoroughfare, Morrison asks the reader, 'through which shall we go ...?' Morrison is mocking the increasingly reluctant slummer who earlier in the piece expressed eagerness for the disrespectable and boredom at the honourable past. Morrison's language is reminiscent of Gissing's opening to *Workers in the Dawn* (1880): 'Walk with me, reader, into Whitecross Street.'⁶⁵ In that novel the reader willingly follows Gissing into a slum in which the 'deserving' poor await rescue. In Morrison's Whitechapel it is the reader who feels in need of rescue. Having been assured throughout the piece that Whitechapel is a site no more dreadful or wonderful than any other in London they are disarmed by the tributaries that lead to Brick Lane, any of which they take will contain:

⁶⁴ Lucie Matthews-Jones, 'Sanctifying the street: urban space, material religion and the G.F. Watts mosaic 'Time, Death and Judgement' in London, c.1880-1970,' *Metropolitan History*, 7 November 2012 <http://historyspot.org.uk/podcasts/metropolitan-history/sanctifying-street-urban-space-material-religion-and-gf-watts-mosaic> accessed 3 February 2015

⁶⁵ George Gissing, *Workers in the Dawn* ed. Pierre Coustillas (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1985), p. 3.

Dark, silent, uneasy shadows passing and crossing – human vermin in this reeking sink, like goblin exhalations from all that is noxious around. Women with sunken, black-rimmed eyes, whose pallid faces appear and vanish by the light of an occasional gas-lamp, and look so like ill-covered skulls that we start at their stare (1023).

The passage utilises the trope that slums contain ‘human vermin’ which had been recycled in slum literature from Dickens onwards. Describing the inhabitants as ‘goblin exhalations’ encompasses not only the fantastical images of Whitechapel which had been produced, but also the concern (again mooted since Dickens) that it was not the human vermin that made the place noxious, but the noxious place that produced these grotesque figures of deprivation. The momentary appearance of the women’s faces in the light recalls the briefly illuminated images of the place and people produced by the ‘strangers’, and anticipates, as I will later show, the shifting image of Dicky Perrott, the protagonist of *Jago*. Morrison’s subjects, however, look back: ‘we start at their stare’ (1023). These women exist beyond their momentary illumination, and they chillingly return the onlooker’s gaze. Morrison shifts from the ventriloquized voice which mocked his fictional reader’s ignorance to one of sincerity. ‘Horrible London?’, he asks of his newly-enlightened reader, and then concludes simply and with no further embellishment – ‘Yes’ (1023). In the final brusque ‘Yes’ of this passage Morrison absolutely rejects any accusations of grossness or exaggeration.

The passage draws on gothic fictions of London, recalling perhaps most closely James Thomson’s line from *City of Dreadful Night*: ‘with such a living light these dead eyes shine.’⁶⁶ It is also reminiscent of Doré’s images in the play of light and shadow. The effect of the ‘occasional gas-lamp’ plays on an assumed prior knowledge of such images. But rather than experiencing them from the safe distance created by Jerrold and Doré’s mediation, the slumming reader of ‘Whitechapel’ has been unwittingly collared, dragged into the streets

⁶⁶ James Thomson, *City of Dreadful Night* ed. by Edwin Morgan, (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1993), p. 61.

around Brick Lane and brought face-to-face with the perversity of their own desire for 'horrible London'.

The closing paragraph of the sketch represents a turn in the tone of the piece. After playing at slumming, Morrison becomes earnestly didactic at the final instant. The paragraph opens with a direct challenge to previous explorations of Whitechapel: 'Some years ago, it was fashionable to "slum" – to walk gingerly about in dirty streets, with great heroism, and go back West again, with a firm conviction that "something must be done."' Rather than an apocalyptic closing as in Doré and Jerrold's image of ruined London, Morrison ends by acceding that, yes, 'something must be done' for the children of Whitechapel, but nothing will.⁶⁷ Slum sketches ought to gather the chaos of insanitary living into a coherent shape; to provide visual evidence of that which can be changed; to order disorder. In its myriad contrasts, its darkness and light, its memory and willed forgetfulness, Morrison captures Whitechapel not as in itself momentary, caught by the flash of a camera or gas lamp, but as a site of endurance: it is as such that Morrison ultimately condemns it.

Introducing Morrison's *The Hole in the Wall* (1902), Pritchett wrote that:

To the stranger the East End is a foreign city which will seem meaner or more exotic than it really is; and when he turns to literature for guidance he will find that until very recently the literature of the East End has been written by strangers.⁶⁸

In writing 'Whitechapel' Morrison both engaged with and destabilised the photojournalistic and pictorial recordings of that locality which had been made by 'explorers' to that region. In examining the area as simultaneously looked at and looking, Morrison adopted his own generic practice, writing against representations of the city which he believed perpetuated myths and did not access the real.

⁶⁷ This vague but persistent call, 'something must be done', was repeated by journalists discussing the housing problem – for example, J W. Horsley wrote on 'The Housing Question' in *The Economic review*, that the Local Boards should 'do something' 1891-19143.1 (Jan 1893): 50-63.

⁶⁸ Pritchett, Introduction, p. vi.

From 1891, Morrison began to write fictional as well as non-fiction sketches of the East End. Keating notes this shift but cannot explain it, merely stating that Morrison ‘came to feel that what he had to say could be better expressed in fiction than in newspaper articles.’⁶⁹ It seems that fiction was seen as having greater power to shock an audience who had become inured to the newspaper reports of ‘another murder in Mile End’.⁷⁰ Yet the pattern Morrison established in ‘Whitechapel’ was retained: he shocked readers with the commonplace misery lurking in the backstreets.

III. *Tales of Mean Streets* (1894) and the reappraisal of the Slum

In *Tales*, Morrison positions himself as uniquely knowledgeable about a place considered unknowable. *Tales* was developed from a series of sketches Morrison produced for *The National Observer* between 1892 and 1894, under the editorship of W.E. Henley. At Henley’s suggestion, Morrison collected the sketches, as well as two sketches published in the *Pall Mall Budget*, and the sketch ‘A Street’, which was published in *Macmillan’s* in October 1891, into one volume. Jocelyn Bell has remarked that Henley’s editing of this collection was so fastidious that Morrison never again achieved the strength of *Tales*.⁷¹ *Tales* identifies the true source of the abject and sinister nature of the East End as the desperate maintenance of respectability in the interminable streets. Morrison reveals respectability itself to be, not a synonym for morality, but as historian Peter Bailey has described, ‘a highly specific value system of considerable normative power.’⁷² A commonly-held idea stated that East Enders often chose ‘a short [criminal] life but a merry one’ over ‘dull respectability’.⁷³ In *Tales* Morrison demonstrated that dull respectability had a very sharp edge.

⁶⁹ Keating, ‘Who Knows Arthur Morrison?’ p. 43.

⁷⁰ Amy Levy, ‘Ballade of a Special Edition’, *A London Plane Tree and other verse* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1889), p. 9.

⁷¹ Bell, ‘A Study of Arthur Morrison’ p. 79.

⁷² Peter Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City*, (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), p. 30.

⁷³ Arnold, *Underworld London*, p. 150.

The collection was received variously, with great attention being paid to the domestic violence in the story 'Lizerunt'. The perceived licentiousness in the story caused Clerkenwell Public Library and W.H. Smith and Sons, among others, to ban the book.⁷⁴ A critic in *The Spectator* revealed the perceived links between misery and morality when it said:

If the squalor, the drunkenness, the deadly and grinding monotony [...] were really typical of the poorer streets of London, we should have to admit we are face to face with a moral situation as awful and as terrifying as any that the world has ever encountered.⁷⁵

However, some reviewers were extremely impressed: the critic in *The Bookman*, for example, stated that *Tales* was 'unmistakably strong' and 'scrupulously truthful.'⁷⁶ The strength of the collection and its reception as 'truthful' stems from the multiplicity of views and tones it conveys. The East End is, in this collection, a site of humour as well as violence, where hard work and pathos are counterpoised with indolence and vice.

In two important ways Morrison's *Tales* challenged the view of the slum established by earlier writers by attempting to 'demythologise darkest London.'⁷⁷ Firstly, the combination of the short story and sketch forms create a tone that was less didactic and more immediate than either the romanticised fictions or the instructive booklets of social explorers. The form allowed Morrison to portray heterogeneity, not of the place of the East End, but of the characters and lives lived there. Secondly, he explicitly states in the opening sketch 'A Street', in which he uses the motif of a single street stretching for hundreds of miles to represent the East End as a whole, that the East End is not a slum. To view it as such is to view 'the distorted shadow of a minor feature' (20). The typical East End street is 'rigidly respectable', situated at 'many grades of decency' distant from 'the nearest slum' (20). The distinction of the 'mean streets' from the slum, is, importantly, a division scrupulously maintained by the 'rigidly respectable' East End inhabitants (20).

⁷⁴ Krzak, 'Preface', *Tales*, p. 13.

⁷⁵ Anon., Review: 'Tales of Mean Streets', *Spectator*, 74, 9 March 1895 cited in Miles p. 218.

⁷⁶ 'Novel Notes: *Tales of Mean Streets*' in *The Bookman*, Jan 1895, Vol. 7; Issue 40; 120-121.

⁷⁷ Alan Robinson, *Imagining London, 1770-1900* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 58.

Respectability was the maintenance of a good reputation in the eyes of the community, evidenced by financial steadiness, domestic propriety including the proper recognition of the boundaries between public and private, conformity to bourgeois norms and essentially being ‘decent, self-sufficient members of the community.’⁷⁸ Morrison shows the grave consequences that arise from affixing enormous importance to ideals of Victorian respectability. The slum is crucial to the maintenance of respectability as its presence reminds the inhabitants of what they must struggle against. Yet this desired segregation keeps the respectable East Enders trapped between the slum and the world of culture and pleasure, in a relentless ordinariness. In this sense Morrison seems to agree with the conservative attitude that novels about slums perpetuate immorality, but he perceives this somewhat unusually: in order to protect themselves from the nearby slums, inhabitants exact punishing codes of respectability, to the detriment of kindness and sympathy.

This East End is a site of ‘sordid uniformity’ and ‘utter remoteness from delight’ (28). The choice of the adjective ‘delight’ here recalls Besant’s ‘Palace of Delight’. However, by stating both the street’s insurmountable distance from delight, and the ineffectuality of places such as the Palace which have no impact on the ‘fathomless ignorance’ of the inhabitants, Morrison repudiates the success of Besant’s project (28). As Keating notes, Morrison insists on the centrality of ‘monotony, respectability and violence’ to East End life.⁷⁹ The play of these three together challenges Besant’s ‘persistent glee about non-existent joy.’⁸⁰ *Tales* operates as a critique of the texts which attempted to show the damage done to the poor throughout the nineteenth century, but which themselves contributed to a view of the slum as a hazard to be avoided even at the cost of morality.

In *Tales*, Morrison takes the authorial objectivity of late-Victorian realists to its limit. The pieces in the text vary between journalistic sketches and fictions which employ free

⁷⁸ Fox, *Class Fictions*, p. 98.

⁷⁹ Keating, *The Working Classes*, p. 173.

⁸⁰ Sichel, ‘Two Philanthropic Novelists,’ p. 518.

indirect speech. The effect of these stylistic choices is the destabilisation of the conceit of earlier slum literatures, that the author acts a guide to the East End. 'A Street' is, as Hunter has observed, a 'rhetorically complex' piece. It opens with the deceptively simple statement: 'This street is in the East End.' Indeed the language throughout is deceptively simple, so much so that his technique in this piece has been misinterpreted by critics. Matthew K. McKean and William C. Frierson (as I have noted in the Introduction) both mistakenly insist that *Tales* portrays the East End as 'an evil plexus of slums.'⁸¹ Like 'Whitechapel', it is deliberately disconcerting to the reader, setting up the text that follows as likely to confound their expectations. The sketch states that the infamy of the East End has not provided accurate accounts – rather it has been repeatedly, incorrectly represented. Thus far, *Tales* builds on Besant's claim in *All Sorts*, disputing the idea that 'they are all paupers [in the East End]' (18). However, the picture Morrison presents is far more desperate than Besant's.

Morrison focuses on the unit of a single street to represent synecdochally the 'vast city' of East London (19). The effect of the sketch is to convey the overpowering organisation of the space. It has been designed to exclude detail and difference, so that the entire East End appears as 'a single street' (28). The result is 'not pretty to look at.' It is a row of 'two or three score' of 'dingy little brick house[s]' (20). This is a place of bleak repetition, where 'one monotony is broken with another' (23-24). It is a quiet street, though not altogether a silent one. Time is observed by the fading voice of the night-watchman, 'whose cry of "Past nine o'clock," as he collects orders in the evening, is now seldom heard' (22). This quietness repudiates the image of the East End as a site of uncontrollable rowdiness or picaresque noisiness.⁸² Isolation is the norm of daily life here, as men and children depart each morning, shutting doors behind them so that the women are mostly hidden from view.

⁸¹ Above, pp. 17-18.

⁸² O'Neill, *My East End*, p. 10. On the charming noisiness of the East End, see for example Dudley Heath, 'In Coster-Land', *The English illustrated magazine* 125 (Feb 1894): 517-521.

The sketch is told in the present tense and focuses not on any event or incident taking place here but the diurnal pattern of life, in which ‘every day is hopelessly the same’ (23). The East End exists in an endless present, without culture or history. Each child enters the street at the same time to walk to school: ‘door-shutting is heard, and then the trotting of sorrow-laden feet along the grim street to the grim Board School three grim streets off’ (22). The repetition of ‘grim’ attests to the monotony the narrator has already discovered. The unusual tone of ‘A Street’ comes from the dichotomy of the narrator’s obvious intimate knowledge of the area and the refusal to represent any truths about the place other than its present reality.

Negative repetitions throughout the sketch reinforce the representation of the street as a cultural vacuum: ‘There are no dances, no tennis, no water-parties, no picnics.’ For young people in love there is ‘no exchange of promises, no troth-plight, no engagement, no love-talk.’ It is a closed space with its own ‘indigenous’ customs (27). ‘Nothing disturbs’ the street and ‘no event in the outside world makes any impression.’ The street is a microcosm: ‘Nations may rise, or may totter in ruin; but here the colourless day will work through its twenty-four hours just as it did yesterday, and just as it will to-morrow’(24). Through repeated negation Morrison creates a place characterised by absence – of outsiders, of culture and of pleasure.

Tales was originally to be called ‘Lizerunt, and other East End Idylls’.⁸³ In 1893 Morrison published a sketch, the first of three parts, entitled ‘An East End Idyll.’⁸⁴ The three sketches together became the story of ‘Lizerunt’. The irony of the early title is swiftly discovered by the reader, for whom any Besantine notion of a calm, green East End is destroyed by the desperate violence and bleak outlook for the ‘heroine.’

⁸³ Anon., ‘Literary Gossip’, *The Athenaeum* 3493 (Oct 6, 1894): 458-459. (459).

⁸⁴ As Keating notes, Arthur St John Adcock attempted to imitate Morrison’s style in *East End Idylls* (1897) – ‘Fact and Fiction’, p. 599.

In 'Lizerunt' the voice of the narrator is so far removed from its subjects that it seems to be nowhere. The author is removed and the inhabitants of the East End must speak for themselves. However, there is, in the story, a single slip. Limehouse girl Eliza Hunt, whose name is corrupted by local pronunciation into 'Lizerunt', is enraptured by Billy Chope's aggressive seduction. The narrator suddenly appears to say 'everything, I say, went well and well enough until Billy bought a ladies' tormentor and began to squirt it at Lizerunt.'⁸⁵ This slip reveals that the absent narrative style which characterises most of the collection is a deliberate choice. At this point in the text Morrison succumbs to the temptation to make an appearance. Yet the almost casual and sudden interruption of the narrator is a pose in itself. The colloquial term 'well and well enough' had been noted and condemned in 1848 by Robert Chambers, who deplored its usage as it implied satisfaction with insufficiency.⁸⁶ The narrative intervention to employ this term is both at a level with its subjects in its use of the colloquialism, and pejorative of Lizer for not recognising that 'well enough' is not 'well.' The narrative voice, therefore, when it does appear, is not that of a traditional omniscient narrator, but nor is it Morrison's voice.

In his depiction of Lizer, Morrison employs the mock heroic later used by Richard Whiteing to describe his slum heroine Hilda as 'an Antiope of the slum' in *No. 5 John Street* (1899).⁸⁷ Admired by two men, Lizer feels glory when they fight for her: 'for almost five minutes she was Helen of Troy' (32). Whiteing's brawling Hilda is strong and virtuous: the comparison to Antiope illustrates Sir Charles's desire to be Hilda's equal. The comparison of Lizer to Helen of Troy is less favourable to her. It places her in a hopeless situation: between two men, she mistakes popularity for agency. The mock-heroic however also emphasises the

⁸⁵ Morrison, 'Lizerunt', *Tales*, pp. 29-47 (p. 32.) Further references will appear in the text.

⁸⁶ Robert Chambers, ed., 'Well Enough', *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal*, Feb. 1832- Dec. 1853 232 (Jun 10, 1848): 378-379. (378).

⁸⁷ Whiteing, *No. 5 John Street*, p. 31.

great problem of the slums Morrison observes in *Tales*: the degeneration of masculine ideals.

Lizer cannot be a heroine because the men around her are far from heroes.

The representation of Lizer is a departure from the attraction the slum woman represented in previous fictions. In Nevinson's *Neighbours of Ours* (1895), the gaze at the body of the slum woman by the middle-class author is detached by the use of dialect and the adoption of the first-person narrative. The central thread throughout is the unrequited love of the slum-dwelling narrator for Lina, a Hoxton slum girl who dances, as the narrator describes it, 'like the actin' o' makin' love and gettin' love made to you, only for its not bein' much like the love-makin' yer mostly sees in cimeterry gardens and such.'⁸⁸ The appeal of the slum woman is almost mystical. Later writers such as William Pett Ridge, author of *Mord Em'ly* (1901) expressed the appeal of the slum by demonstrating the vivacity, courage and attractiveness of his central female figure. For Lizer, such qualities are impossible to attain.

Lizer marries Billy Choape, a violent parasite who lives off Lizer's pickle factory earnings and the earnings of his mother, a washerwoman. He attends demonstrations of the Unemployed in order to eke shillings out of sympathetic bystanders. The cycle of irresponsible men is reinforced by the simple statement that, at Lizer and Billy's wedding, 'Lizerunt's father was not' (35). The simplicity of this statement is shrewd. The speed with which Lizer's father is mentioned and then the subject dismissed is suggestive of his absence being noted but unremarked by the respectable guests at the wedding: whether Lizer's father is dead or simply absent is never established. This vagueness conveys an endemic complacency about neglect or death, but it also establishes male fecklessness as a primary problem of the East End. As Henkle has observed:

[T]he slums and the world of the underclasses had entered the world of the Victorian discourse as a sphere for the registering of male energies and fantasies. And it is clear from a reading of Morrison's work that it is male experience that has gone awry.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Henry Woodd Nevinson, *Neighbours of Ours* (Bristol: Arrowsmith, 1895), pp. 12-13.

⁸⁹ Henkle, 'Morrison, Gissing, and the Stark Reality', 319.

G.K. Chesterton's notebooks include a draft review of *Tales* written in purple wax crayon. Chesterton's usual acerbic humour is evident in this review, which compared Morrison's work negatively with Rudyard Kipling's story, 'The Record of Badalia Herodsfoot', published in 1890:

Tales of Mean Streets is a collection of sketches, laid on with a broad brush, some technical skill, and a cheap and lavish supply of lamp-black. The mean Streets are inhabited by a set of rather mean people; an arcadia of gaudy bonnets, muddy boots, and flaring gas lamps. We fear the book will be called "powerful" and we shall be forced to dislike it: it goes in largely for a tenor of gross horror, but we miss in it the manlier feelings, the almost primeval humanity of Mr Kipling's 'Record of Badalia Herodsfoot', where the self-sacrifice stands as real and rugged as the selfishness. The best thing in the book is the title of one of the stories, 'Lizerunt'.⁹⁰

In Kipling's short story, Badalia gains the respect of the priest Reverend Eustace Hanna by teaching him the ineffectuality of indiscriminate alms giving. *The Bookman* also noted the 'primeval' in Kipling's text, stating that its characters are 'in the savage state, aboriginal or relapsed' – all save Badalia who they greatly admired as a 'grand creation'.⁹¹ The story is atypical in Kipling's oeuvre (or, as his friend C.F. Monkhouse described it 'a little out of his line') as an investigation of the slums of England, but it has been held in esteem by his critics as a significant development in his treatment of women.⁹²

Badalia is the 'arrogant, fluffy-fringed' heroine of Gunnison Street, which is located in the unspecified East End.⁹³ She is the virtuous wife of a violent husband who has left her for another woman, and the mother of a dead child, but she has charm and vitality which allow her to remain independent and useful to her community. There is gentle mocking in Badalia's coarsely drawn dialect: "You give Lascar Lou custids [...] give 'er pork-wine [...] Give 'er blankits! Garn 'ome. 'Er mother, she eats 'em all, and drinks the blankits" (328).

⁹⁰ G.K. Chesterton, Review (unpublished) (fragment) of *Tales of Mean Streets*; Chesterton Archive 73330C.891, British Library.

⁹¹ Y.Y., 'Many Inventions', *The Bookman*, 4,22 (Jul 1893): 113-114. (114)

⁹² C.F. Monkhouse cited in 'The London of Rudyard Kipling', Arthur Bartlett Maurice, *The Bookman* 59.352 (Jan 1921): 151-155. (153).

⁹³ Rudyard Kipling, 'The Record of Badalia Herodsfoot' [1891] in *Many Inventions*, (New York: Doubleday, 1912), pp. 326-360., p.329. Further references will appear in the text.

Kipling does not laugh at Badalia: although ‘perfectly unlicensed in speech’, she is entirely comprehensible (329). Kipling saves his mockery to point out the useless infighting of the numerous charitable movements including the Order of Little Ease; the Tea Cup Board, and the Little Sisters of the Red Diamond. Badalia is the means of uniting these disparate agencies and increasing their efficacy (329).

The presence of these middle-class philanthropists intercedes between the residents of Gunnison Street and the reader: Sister Eva and Reverend Eustace ‘have seen pain – pain that no word or deed of theirs can alleviate – life born unto Death, and Death crowded down by unhappy life’ (336). The implication is that pain is felt more by the middle-class witnesses than the sufferers themselves. In ‘Lizerunt’, there is no attempt by the narrator to reflect upon how painful the sight of pain is for observers. When the doctors’ assistant tries to stop Billy beating Lizer after the birth of her child, Lizer and her mother-in-law both round on the assistant and he departs precipitously, ‘leaving the coast clear for Billy’ (40). His voice is heard but his feelings are not recorded. The text is, in this way, as Hunter has stated, ‘affectless’ – it does not mediate between Lizer and the reader by offering a middle-class emotive response.⁹⁴

Badalia’s innate sense and sensibility contrast to the pining love of the Reverend for Sister Eva, and to the ineptitude of philanthropic movements in the area. By her management of the charitable funds, Badalia becomes herself ‘an institution’ (356). Her reported new wealth is heard of by her bigamous husband Tom, who returns to Badalia to claim the money as his right, and beats her. Dying from her injuries, Badalia passes the care of the street and of the Reverend Hanna on to Sister Eva, noting that “I’ve wished otherways often, but of course it was not for the likes o’ me” (360). Sister Eva and Reverend Hanna are both improved by their exposure to Badalia’s raw goodness in ways that the assistant at Lizer’s

⁹⁴ Hunter, ‘Arthur Morrison and the Tyranny of Sentimental Charity’, 301.

birth never can be. Badalia states that her endurance to this date is due to her husband having left her – if he had stayed, and lived off her, she would have “been like the rest”, relying on the charities for food for babies and money for their funerals (360).

The crisis of masculinity at issue in ‘The Record of Badalia Herodsfoot’ seems to have been an influence on Morrison’s story. Lizer has far less agency than Badalia, however, and is entirely at Billy’s mercy throughout. No longer considered employable by the factory after her marriage, Lizer is sent out to get money for Billy by prostitution. Domesticity has proven to have no comfort and no security. The horror of the story lies in the fact that Lizer is as unsafe inside her home as outside it. Defeated by seeking the ideal of respectability through early marriage, Lizerunt begins the tale with aggrandised street courtship and ends as ‘Lizer Chope [...] in the windy street’ (47). The dialogue used by Morrison is very similar to Kipling’s (“Garn,” said Lizerunt’, (30)), but the arc of the story creates a contrast. Lizer’s courtship is merely another bleak chapter rather than Badalia’s ‘days of fatness’ (326). Morrison conveys that in the mean streets, things do not go from bad to worse but begin badly and inevitably continue so. Lizer’s subjection to Billy’s violence continues at the close of the story; she retains her position as a married woman at the expense of everything else. Badalia’s is a martyr’s death which allows her to escape the violence of her husband and confirms that she is a heroine. Lizer is not: it is her tragedy that, ‘for almost five minutes’, she thought she was.

‘Lizerunt’ was influential on later writers of slum fiction. Though not set in the East End, W. Somerset Maugham’s *Liza of Lambeth* (1897) takes place in a similarly mean street, where a similarly named heroine suffers from the brutality of respectability.⁹⁵ Liza Kemp has an affair with a married man, is beaten by his wife, and dies of the resulting miscarriage. The

⁹⁵ W. Somerset Maugham, *Liza of Lambeth* (London: Vintage, 2000).

effects on Liza and Lizer of living in such places are similar – for both, domesticity and respectability are enforced with violence.

Criticisms of *Tales* centred on ‘Lizerunt’, arguing that Morrison depicted the entire East End as ‘a race of yahoos’.⁹⁶ However, the story is atypical of the collection in its unremitting violence. Morrison retorted to the criticisms saying: ‘I do not present Billy Chope as a type of all the dwellers in the East End [...] Chope is a blackguard in a book of all sorts.’⁹⁷ As Joyce has suggested, ‘Morrison’s point is not Besant’s that such scenes should not be reported and may not actually occur. Rather, it is that they are not representative’.⁹⁸ Indeed Billy’s violence is not typical: *Tales* focuses more frequently on acts of passive aggression and brutal neglect.

Morrison’s troubling treatment of domestic space is also pivotal in ‘On the Stairs’, which further reveals the dangerous preoccupation with respectability. This story takes place entirely on the stairway of a block which had been:

“genteel”. When trade was prospering in the East End, and the ship-fitter or block-maker thought it no shame to live in the parish where his workshop lay, such a master had lived there. Now it was [...] [an] ugly house [...] cracked and patched in the windows: where the front door stood open all day long, and the womankind sat on the steps, talking of sickness and death and the cost of things.⁹⁹

The house is the type historian Donald Olsen has called ‘cast-off’.¹⁰⁰ Rather than portraying the East End as a sight of sensational poverty, Morrison demonstrates the effects of economic deprivation in a measured voice. The East End has not always been a ruin; it is a site that has declined gradually from gentility to poverty, from decent housing to ‘grimy’ overcrowded houses where women spill onto the staircases. For all the dirt and decrepitude, however, Morrison insists that ‘it was not a slum’ (119).

⁹⁶ Anon., ‘Tales of Mean Streets’, *Spectator*, 74, 9 March 1895, 329.

⁹⁷ Morrison, Letter ‘To the Editor of the *Spectator*’, *Spectator* 74, 16 March 1895, 360.

⁹⁸ Joyce, *Capital Offenses*, p. 218.

⁹⁹ Morrison, ‘On the Stairs’ in *Tales*, pp. 119-123. (p. 119). Further references will appear in the text.

¹⁰⁰ Donald Olsen, ‘Victorian London: Specialization, Segregation, and Privacy’, *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 3 (Mar., 1974), 265-278., (269).

The man at the centre of the story, Mrs Curtis's son, lies dying behind a shut door, beyond which the reader never sees. Gossiping on the stairs, Mrs Manders and Mrs Curtis discuss the importance of having a respectable funeral for loved ones.¹⁰¹ Mrs Curtis wants 'mutes' for her son's funeral, but doubts whether she can afford them: "It's a expense" (109). Morrison switches to an ethnographic register to tell the reader that 'In the East End, when a woman has not enough to buy a thing much desired, she does not say so in plain words; she says the thing is an "expense" [...] It means the same thing but it sounds better' (121). Morrison thus employs a register similar to social explorers. Whilst his tone is sardonic, he takes these ethnographic patterns seriously, revealing the ruthless respectability of life at the slum borders.

The silence of the son and his invisibility to the reader suggests something sinister in this pursuit of respectability. The doctor's assistant gives Mrs Curtis money for port-wine as a stimulant for her son, but as the assistant departs, there is heard from the stairs 'a clink as of money falling into a teapot' (122). The door to Mrs Curtis's room is impenetrable. It is a still point in the perpetual movement of a multiple occupancy house. The stillness emphasises Mrs Curtis's lack of action on her son's behalf:

The door was shut, and the stair a pit of blackness. Twice a lodger passed down, and up and down, and still it did not open. Men and women walked on the lower flights, and out at the door, and in again [...] but nothing left that room all night. Nothing that opened the door... (111).

Mrs Curtis's son dies behind the door, but Mrs Curtis is proud that he is "a lovely corpse" (123). Her respectability prevails, and though Mrs Manders could have heard the clink of the money in the teapot, she 'went about her [own] business', expressing by inaction her respect for Mrs Curtis's choice (122). Death is inevitable, but survival is only possible through

¹⁰¹ See Ellen Ross, "'Not the Sort that Would Sit on the Doorstep'" – Respectability in Pre-World-War-I London Neighbourhoods', *International Labour and Working-Class History*, 27 (1985), 39-59. (43).

respectability.¹⁰² Hunter argues that due to the action taking place behind the closed door this story is ‘rich in ambiguity’.¹⁰³ However, the choice Mrs Curtis makes and Mrs Manders’s passive support of it clearly represent their silent consensus on the importance of respectability: Mrs Curtis cannot use ‘plain words’ to explain her decision, but Mrs Manders understands it nonetheless. Julie-Marie Strange suggests that this tale caricatures the women, perpetuating a stereotype about the poor at the turn of the century prioritising ‘death over life.’¹⁰⁴ While it is clear that the story does not challenge that stereotype, it identifies disturbingly the desperation with which Mrs Curtis acts, evidencing the relief she feels that she can now afford for her son’s funeral to be “respectable, thank Gawd!” (123). Morrison’s challenge to masculine agency in this story lends it a unique perspective. Men in the mean streets are at the mercy of women’s pursuit of respectability.

In ‘In Business’, Cubitt Town resident Ted Munsey, ‘commonly alluded to as Mrs Munsey’s husband’ inherits £100 on the death of his uncle.¹⁰⁵ The family, under Mrs Munsey’s direction, use the money to open a drapery shop, drapery being ‘genteel’ – ‘chandlery, sweetstuff, oil and firewood – all these were low, comparatively’ (96). Ted, renamed ‘Hedward’ in accordance with their new position, is instructed to act as ‘shop-walker’ but fulfils this function maladroitly, to his wife’s chagrin (97). Yet Mrs Munsey’s ambitions continue: she forbids her daughter Emma to continue meeting Jack Page, a plumber, who would have been an appropriate potential husband ‘for a moulder’s daughter, but impossible, of course, for the daughter of people in business’ (99).

¹⁰² Maud Pember Reeves in *Round About a Pound a Week* (London: Persephone, 2008) tries to be supportive of the budgeting decisions of Lambeth women, but criticises their contributions to funeral clubs, pointing out that the money could have been used for food and heat which could have prevented illness. p. xii.

¹⁰³ Adrian Hunter, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Short Story in English* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 40.

¹⁰⁴ Julie-Marie Strange, *Death, Grief and Poverty in Great Britain, 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 37.

¹⁰⁵ Morrison, ‘In Business’ in *Tales*, pp. 95-103. (p. 95). Further references will appear in the text.

The shop fails after Mrs Munsey makes some unwise speculative purchases. The ironic narrator observes that ‘the weak spot in the plan was the absence of any binding arrangement with the general public’ (100). Their debts increase, and Mrs Munsey becomes ‘desperate’ and blames ‘Hedward’ (101; 102). Ted, harangued and emasculated, leaves his family. Mrs Munsey wakes to see two letters on the table. The first is an IOU signed ‘Ed. Munsey’, asserting his responsibility, not his wife’s, for their debts. The second is a note to her:

my dear wife I have done this legle dockermert after thinking it out [...] if you do not see me again will you pay the detts when [the business] is pull round as we have allways been honnest and straight i should wish for Emma to keep co with Jhon Page [...] you will soon all be rich swells i know [...] this one must be burnt keep the other (103).

The note draws on the motif of the ‘unspellable’ language used in slums, but Morrison takes this problem seriously.¹⁰⁶ Ted leaves behind all his valuables, so that the note announcing his absconding is suggestive of suicidal intent. As for Lizer and Liza, Mrs Munsey’s pursuit of respectability is extremely damaging: it results in a loss almost like death.

Morrison’s East End is full of understated horrors. Respectability is both destructive and confining: Keating’s contention that respectability in Morrison’s work is ‘the only viable means of escape’ is contradicted.¹⁰⁷ In the desperate rigidity of the ordinary working-class streets, the maintenance of difference from slum spaces results in passively violent acts. Unlike Besant, Morrison shows the effects of the consistent deprivation from culture and the struggle to remain distinct from the slum in the brutal adherence to respectability.

The generic shifts throughout *Tales* make it challenging to read as a coherent piece. The journalistic sketch ‘To Bow Bridge’ is very different from the stories discussed above. The similarity lies in its observation of the nuances of respectability and the challenge it

¹⁰⁶ Gissing wrote that ‘the vituperative vernacular of the nether world has never yet been exhibited by typography, and probably never will be.’ Cited by Pierre Coustillas, *George Gissing: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 2013), p. 367. See also Maugham, *Liza of Lambeth*, p. 11.

¹⁰⁷ Keating, *The Working Classes*, p. 176.

presents to the common portrayal of East Enders. 'To Bow Bridge' examines East End inhabitants as inhabitants of the city as a whole. On a Saturday night, East End drinkers begin a weekly journey from Stratford to Bow in order to take advantage of the later closing times there. The sketch describes a tram journey from the moment the narrator steps on board, hoping to evade the revellers, to the departure of most of the passengers before the tram travels on into the West End. The tram is populated by respectable people: an engineer, a maid, and a 'decent' woman with children, as well as drunks and a prostitute. As such it is a microcosm of the East End, or 'a street on the move', as Krzak has identified.¹⁰⁸ The first-person narrator takes up his position inside the tramcar, 'I boarded it [...] taking care to sit in the extreme fore-end inside.'¹⁰⁹ From this position he is both separated from and connected to the community enforced by sharing the space with the other passengers. The narrator is both insider and witness.

The duration of the sketch is brief, reflecting the speed of the journey, the weekly 'great rush westward, a vast migration over the Lea' (59). The speed of the journey fragments the crowd into a confusion of parts: 'knees' 'toes' and 'bonnets'. However, the narrator resolves each of these fragmentations into individuals. Parts such as 'clogs' and 'blowses' reassemble as 'a little maid', 'an enormous female' or 'a decent woman' (60-61). In the fragmented representation of bodies, which then resolve into people, Morrison conveys the halting and restarting of the tram, as well as suggesting that the inhabitants of streets, fixed in place as they are throughout *Tales*, will resume their occupation of space despite being on the move.

'To Bow Bridge' challenges the typical late nineteenth century point of view from which to observe the working class. In an 1895 issue of the *Humanitarian*, French novelist Alphonse Daudet described the division of rich and poor in London and Paris as the division

¹⁰⁸ Krzak, Introduction, *Tales*, p.17.

¹⁰⁹ Morrison, 'To Bow Bridge', *Tales*, pp. 59-64. (pp. 59-60). Further references will appear in the text.

of those who go on foot, and those who travel by carriage. Morrison's narrative position is never that of the flâneur: that is, a walking observer with sufficient money and leisure to choose to witness the city on foot. Such a deliberate descent from carriage to pavement is necessarily a form of slumming. 'To Bow Bridge' reimagines the relationship between author and subject, and creates a new form of realism which does not look down from above, nor indeed up from below. Daudet declared that 'carriage folk [...] lead a life between heaven and earth, and know nothing of what goes on on earth.'¹¹⁰ Morrison's class position inhibits him from viewing the modern city either from above or as a flâneur. Observing the city from the same level as his subjects enables him to represent pathos without sentimentality when he conveys the aspirations of a 'street-walker' for the normality of motherhood. In *The Nether World*, Gissing's portrayal of the East End is limited to glimpses from above seen on a train ride to Essex which takes the protagonists over East London, 'a city of the damned' (164). Gissing's narrator is positioned literally above his characters. Morrison's sketch redresses such superiority.

The animation of the sketch bears witness to a mobile and lively East End existence. This bustling tram journey is, as Morrison's inclusion of it in *Tales* suggests, as much a feature of London life as the stillness of the East End streets. In 'To Bow Bridge', time is under the traveller's command. The East End revellers race against closing time in order to reach the Bombay Grab in Mile End Road, safely in the bounds of the city of London where time works differently, and 'the law gives them another hour' at the pub (59). The time frame in 'To Bow Bridge' is characterised by repetition, as it is in 'A Street' – the passage occurs every Saturday night – but there is in this sketch the sense of a reclamation of time by the passengers on the tram. Access to modernity in the use of the tram allows a resistance to monotony by the passengers and reflects a positive feature of repetition: the on-going. 'To

¹¹⁰ Robert R. Sherard, 'Alphonse Daudet on Social Problems: A Recent Conversation', *Humanitarian*, July 1895 Vol VII No. 1, 1-6 (2).

Bow Bridge' is a subtle sketch which implies that the East End is not a container for the idea of poverty; it will overflow any such attempts to contain it, but such movement need not be threatening. The piece challenges earlier works such as *Bleak House*, as crossing the boundary from East to West does not result in effluvia pouring in to the West End.

At the close of the piece, the tram does not stop, but continues moving west. The sketch illustrates the impossibility of creating a fixed image of the city. Morrison reveals that the city can be glimpsed momentarily by the repetitions of its inhabitants' movement in their weekly passage from East to West; but beyond the frame, the movement continues. The challenge of *Tales* for its contemporary reader ultimately comes from the point of view Morrison adopts. Unlike so many urban writers of his time, Morrison depicts the city as he stands east, looking west. Morrison recorded moments but did not arrest time: he suggested the perpetual movement of the city without removing the faithfulness with which he recorded these moments as they passed. Morrison's London entails an ongoing gaze at the city as it moves.

The discursive register of *Tales*, as Raymond Williams has stated, achieved 'a new sound of the city.'¹¹¹ It redrew the East End as a place of stillness and conformity interspersed with fleeting moments of vitality. After *Tales*, Morrison's fiction shifted its focus from the suffering, respectable woman and the emasculated man. The protagonists are boys and young men who exhibit qualities of responsibility, diligence and insight. Yet in *Jago*, exploring a site Morrison saw as separate but connected to the mean streets, he demonstrated the power of the place over the innate goodness of the central character. Structures of respectability persist in the deprived areas of the East End, but Morrison shows that their observation is critical and damaging. It is the mirror-like qualities of the Jago, its

¹¹¹ Williams, *The Country and the City*, p. 225.

operation within, not beyond, the accepted terms and norms of wider capitalist society that made it so disturbing to contemporary readers.

IV. *A Child of the Jago* (1896) and the Nichol Slum in Fiction

In *A Child of the Jago* Dicky Perrott, neglected by his thief father and indolent mother, struggles to survive in a slum so notorious that its inhabitants are widely known by the metonymy of 'Jagos.' His greatest hope for escape is to become a member of the 'Igh Mob, the local gangsters, and he makes a promising beginning by stealing a watch from a bishop at a charity event. Dicky's home at the centre of the slum, Jago Court, and later the entire community are destroyed by slum clearance.¹¹² The local priest Father Sturt, based on Osborne Jay, observes a good work ethic in Dicky and gets him a job as a shop-boy, but the fence Weech, who had counted on Dicky's stealing for him, gets him sacked. In retribution Dicky's father Josh kills Weech and is caught and hanged. Dicky's previously respectable mother submits to the standards of dirt, drinking and neglect prescribed by the place, and Dicky is stabbed in a faction fight while defending the destroyed slum from a neighbouring gang. The only ways out of the slum for the Jagos, even after its destruction, are jail, the 'Igh Mob or death.

In 1910, popular novelist T. Hall Caine contributed to a biography of the Bishop of Lahore and his son, Reverend Arthur Osborne Jay entitled 'Father and Son: A Study in Heredity.' Describing Jay's life and work in the Nichol, Hall Caine claimed that Jay's parish had been 'the very worst in London, which means, I fear, the very worst in the world.'¹¹³ The slum clearance had been completed in 1900, but Caine claimed to have visited when the slum was still 'a densely populated rookery, realising at all points the picture given in Mr

¹¹² Arthur Morrison, *A Child of the Jago* ed. by Peter Miles (Oxford: Oxford Worlds Classics, 2012), p. 11. All further references will appear in the text.

¹¹³ 'The Son: Arthur Osborne Montgomery Jay Vicar of Holy Trinity, Shoreditch' [1910] in *Father and Son: A Study in Heredity* compiled by D.N.I. (1914), p. 10.

Morrison's *Child of the Jago* (8-9). Caine's deferral to the historical realism – indeed, his precipitation of the consensus of the basis in reality of Morrison's writing – seems unusual when one considers that Caine used the Nichol, and specifically Jay's church/gym building, in his 1897 novel *The Christian*.

Between 1895 and 1897, three novels were published representing the Nichol. In L.T. Meade's *A Princess of the Gutter* (1895) and in Caine's *The Christian* this slum operates as a quest object. Through these palimpsestic iterations the Nichol slum and Jay, who appears as the local priest in each of the novels, both became what Koven has described as a 'spectacular reality', so that the real was hard to discern beneath layered fictions.¹¹⁴ *Jago* achieves an anchoring of the idea of the slum even amidst these romantic and utopian portraits of the same place. The greater realism of Morrison's account is due not only to the topographic exactitude of the place he describes in the text but the time at which he captured it. In *Jago* the destruction of the notorious slum is the central event in an otherwise sedately plotted novel. Written on the cusp of the site's transformation, the novel fixed the Nichol at the point of its destruction. In its creative reconstruction within the text, Morrison inspired a belief in the persistence of the slum.

These generically diverse novels concerned with a single historical place question the idea, suggested by Barthes, that realist art contains 'truth somehow rawer and more indisputable than that of the other so-called interpretative arts.'¹¹⁵ The depiction of the hellish place that was the Nichol becomes unreal in the melodramatic romance of Caine and the boundless optimism of Meade, but these accounts record the place with some topographical accuracy, raising the question of why Morrison's depiction of an abject hell should be perceived as more realistic. Meade and Caine were the more popular authors but *Jago* possesses a historical stability which the other novels lack, one which persists in the cultural

¹¹⁴ Koven, *Slumming*, p. 65.

¹¹⁵ Barthes, *Critical Essays*, (Northwestern University Press, 1972), p. 159.

imagination. The representation of this particular slum by three such different novelists for three such different narrative purposes reflects the cultural usage of the slum as a site attributed the qualities of both fact and fantasy.

A comparison of *The Christian*, *A Princess*, and *Jago* destabilises the notion that historical verisimilitude of place must confer realism. Josephine McDonagh has suggested that in nineteenth-century realism, place became ‘a key constituent of realist narrative’, and that ‘literary texts that conform to readers’ realist expectations begin to exude what is often referred to as a “sense of place”.’¹¹⁶ In the case of the Nichol, however, ‘readers’ realist expectations’ could not be coherent due to its repeated representation. Further, the Nichol complicates J. Hillis Miller’s question, ‘what is at stake in the assumption that a novel arises from the landscape in which the action takes place? The attachment of “realism” in the novel to referential assumptions is reinforced by this grounding.’¹¹⁷ Meade and Hall Caine’s accounts are no less historically grounded, or ‘real’ as such, than Morrison’s depiction of an abject hell. For Meade and Caine the slum is the antithesis of societal norms, but this reversal has potentially positive implications. The protagonists of these novels, unlike the protagonist of Morrison’s, are able to exert control over the slum environment. The intersections of these three fictional Nichols will show that, as Swafford has stated, ‘the battle over the “reality” of Morrison’s narrative was really a coded struggle over the meaning of the slums.’¹¹⁸

Elizabeth Thomasina Meade was a prolific writer, producing over 250 novels in her lifetime.¹¹⁹ She wrote didactic stories for young people and was a pioneer of the girls’ boarding school story. *The Speaker* described her as ‘a writer of charming little tales for

¹¹⁶ Josephine McDonagh, ‘Space, Mobility and the Novel: “The spirit of place is a great reality”’ in Matthew Beaumont (ed.) *Adventures in Realism*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 50-67. (p. 50).

¹¹⁷ J. Hillis Miller, *Topographies*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 19.

¹¹⁸ Swafford, *Class in Late-Victorian Britain*, p. 91.

¹¹⁹ Mitchell, *The New Girl*, p. 13.

girls.’¹²⁰ These stylistic preferences characterise *A Princess*, in which midnight feasts and mutual hair-braiding are favoured activities. Meade disparaged social realism as a form and declared that it allowed for the circulation of filth; “microbes thrown off from disease.”¹²¹ This use of contemporary discourse of disease and infection suggests Meade’s belief that realism was not a cure for social ills – like the National Vigilance Association, she saw a potential in realism for spreading ‘dirt’.¹²² However, she believed that her own novels were capable of ‘purifying’ effects.¹²³ Her shift to slum fiction can best be explained by the commercial popularity of slum works: as Janis Dawson has noted, Meade ‘wrote to order’.¹²⁴ Meade herself stated that she approached writing as a task rather than waiting for inspiration: ‘I might never write at all if I did.’¹²⁵ In spite of her personal hesitancy, the novel is an interesting – and in parts innovative – contribution to slum narratives.

A Princess bears similarities to Besant’s *All Sorts*, as the protagonist, Joan, is a Cambridge-educated heiress, who moves to the East End as a practical philanthropist. Cleanliness is the primary concern of this novel. Meade aestheticizes the slum not by gratuitously demonstrating its filth but by revelling in its capacity to be clean. The heiress Joan’s actions solve the problem of the slum in the city, because, as anthropologist Mary Douglas suggests; ‘dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is [...] a positive effort to organise the environment.’¹²⁶ Joan rescues the environment by her exertion of control over its dirt. The slum prevents Joan, who is described as masculine, from being an odd woman in West London.¹²⁷ Joan fills the slum with women, resists her own attraction to the foreboding

¹²⁰ Anon., ‘Fiction’, *The Speaker*, 9 (May 19, 1894): 563-564. (563).

¹²¹ Koven, *Slumming*, p. 216.

¹²² Koven, *Slumming*, p. 216.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

¹²⁴ Janis Dawson, “‘Write a little bit every day’: L.T. Meade, Self-Representation and the Working Woman Writer”, *Victorian Review*, Vol. 35. No. 1. Spring 2009 132-152 (144).

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 144.

¹²⁶ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An analysis of concept of pollution and taboo* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 2.

¹²⁷ Gissing’s *The Odd Women* (1893) observed that as more women than men were born in England, not all could be married and some were therefore ‘odd’ or superfluous.

Father Moore, based on Osborne Jay, and creates an Eastern idyll, with the help of paint and practical flooring. If realism itself was ‘dirt and horror pure and simple’, Meade’s romance of blue wallpaper envisions the slum as a place of dirt and horror eradicated by the pure and the simple.¹²⁸

Joan’s attention is soon diverted by the ‘buxom’ Martha, who at the beginning of the novel occupies a ground floor apartment of the Shoreditch house to which Joan moves.¹²⁹ During the course of Joan’s intervention in Martha’s life, however, the situation of this apartment changes, unremarked, from the ground floor in Chapter XI, to the basement by Chapter XVI, which is described as a ‘cellar’ in Chapter XIX. The cellar was recognised the place of last resort in nineteenth-century slum novels – indeed, an 1883 article suggests that ‘cellar’ was a frequently-used synonym for ‘slum’.¹³⁰ Place in this novel serves as a romantic catalyst and the author thinks nothing of moving characters’ homes in order to serve the romance of the plot. Martha’s basement dwelling makes her in need of rescue: Meade alters the slum space within the course of the novel to heighten the dramatic tension and the need for intervention.

The closing of the novel sees the slum cleansed by Joan, who lives happily in the model dwellings she has built, ‘Joan Mansions’, with her cousin Anne, her ‘mate’ Martha, her servant Honey and the child of the murderess Lucy, a girl Joan has named Peace whom they raise collectively. Koven regards this feminist ending as ‘deceptively radical’.¹³¹ It is radical in that it implies a final cleansing of the slum, with the elimination of the heterosexual relationships which muddied relations between female ‘mates’ (127). This novel makes of the slum a curious mix of a girls’ boarding school – ‘Joan Mansions’ is a quasi-public space with

¹²⁸ Society magazine 21st April 1887 cited in National Vigilance Association

¹²⁹ L.T. Meade, *A Princess of the Gutter*, (London: Wells Gardner Darton & Co., 1895), p. 121. Further references will appear in the text.

¹³⁰ Anon., ‘The Slum and the Cellar’, *Saturday review of politics, literature, science and art*; Oct 27, 1883; 56, 1461; 521. In *The Nether World*, the Hewett’s cellar is worse than the actual slum, Shooter’s Gardens (188).

¹³¹ Koven, *Slumming*, p. 219.

frequent visits between girls on different floors – and a New Woman Utopian fantasy such as Elizabeth Corbett's *New Amazonia* (1889). Joan creates a *New Amazonia* characterised by the Peace she brings into the world when she names Lucy's daughter. While Kimberley Reynolds has argued that in Meade's novels, 'the rebellious heroines of the titles are inevitably tamed as their stories unfold', this is neither possible nor necessary for Joan. In the slum, she is able to be herself: to, as she puts it, 'see life without any sham' and represent herself accordingly.¹³²

It therefore seems unfair to scorn the book. Wise is dismissive of the novel, viewing it as 'an armchair tour of the slum'.¹³³ However, *A Princess* reimagines the possibilities of the slum. It is the only place where Joan and Anne can be independent, despite their wealth. Through rational dress, cleanliness and female homosociality, the novel suggests that the worst problems in society can be solved. The use of the slum by upper-class women in this novel to achieve independence suggests the lack of opportunities for them elsewhere: their willingness to cast themselves into the most shocking realms of the city reveals the abominable state of female dependence in mainstream society.

Yet the novel would be more aptly described as a New Girl novel, as Sally Mitchell would have it, rather than one of New Women. Joan describes her friends at Girton as 'girls of nineteen and twenty' (15). Joan's seemingly revolutionary approach to slum life in fact mirrors the temporary dwelling of the Oxford boys in the settlement houses of the East End. But for Joan and Anne, the solution is a permanent one. Unsuitable for the West End in their lack of desire for marriage to a wealthy man, they are 'odd women', or odd girls. If girls were defined as 'those who have left the schoolroom but not yet entered society', Joan's seemingly radical interventions in fact confine herself, Anne, and her all-female community to the limits

¹³² Kimberley Reynolds, *Girls Only? Gender and Popular Children's Fiction in Britain, 1880-1910* (New York: Harvester, 1990), plate 16 caption (centrefold).

¹³³ Wise, *Blackest Streets*, p. 225.

of the slum, therefore limiting their impact on the wider social world of London.¹³⁴ Joan and her manliness are safely bound by the slum. Joan demonstrates the qualities of a heroine of a utopian fantasy, appearing as the ‘fantastic obverse of – rather than a social alternative to – the [...] inactive intellectual’ circumscribed by her class allegiances.¹³⁵ The opening up of the slum space which Morrison describes does not occur in Meade’s *Nichol*: the place retains its boundaries and borders.

The power of the city over its inhabitants is also pivotal in Caine’s *The Christian*. In this romance the slum is the site of spiritual purity in the debased, degenerate city.¹³⁶ The slum becomes the quest object in a romantic crusade across London, acting as ‘a backdrop for personal adventure and self-creation.’¹³⁷ Central to this romance is the conflicted relationship between Glory Quayle and John Storm. They leave their native Isle of Man together to pursue separate ambitions in London. John will take up a living as a priest whilst Glory will study nursing. From the opening, their mutual attraction hinders their respective ambitions. Every movement they take in the city is dictated and thwarted by the lust that makes Glory quail and John storm. Glory says that:

When I think of it [John’s conversion to the monkhood] in the streets, I have to run to keep myself from doing something silly, and then people think I’m chasing an omnibus, when I’m really only chasing my tears (155).

Movement through the city space in *The Christian* is primarily that of chasing. The characters face the dilemma of whether to follow God, ambition or one another. After one of their passionate yet restrained meetings, Storm ‘returned to the park and tried to step over the very places [Glory’s] feet had trod’ (223). Their eventual destination is the slum but they can only reach it, and the moral redemption which working there offers, after tracing routes of

¹³⁴ Mitchell, *The New Girl*, p. 1.

¹³⁵ Matthew Beaumont, *Utopia Ltd.: Ideologies of Social Dreaming in England 1870-1900* (Chicago: Haymarket, 2009), p. 88.

¹³⁶ T. Hall Caine, *The Christian*, (London: Heinemann, 1897). References will appear in the text.

¹³⁷ Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, p. 11.

miserable coincidental mutual stalking across the city (391). The slum serves the central romance rather than occupying the centre of the novel.

The Christian received similar criticism to that directed at Morrison's *Jago*. Like many critics of Morrison, a critic of the novel in *The Biblical World* identified real-life doubles compared to which the representation is a failure. This was directed at the character of John Storm himself, who, like Morrison's Father Sturt, was based on Jay. Recognising the type but not its execution, the reviewer states that 'the men who are really doing what the hero of this novel is represented as doing are as much better acquainted with the gospels as they are better balanced.'¹³⁸ Father Storm is an ascetic priest who inadvertently inspires a religious mania, in which he is believed to be the Messianic figure of Apocalypticism. This novel is a romance not only in its use of hyperbolic language but in form, relying as MacWilliams notes, 'heavily, on absurd coincidence' such as Glory's sighting of the errant Brother Andrew in the dark streets.¹³⁹

Caine relocates the Old Nichol slum to Westminster. The slum is no longer beyond the pale, but in the midst of the West End which so captivates Glory. Its emplacement in the West creates the romantic tension and central conflict of the novel, as Glory cannot forget her theatrical and societal ambitions. Places that occupy the same space, rather than places divided by Aldgate Pump, reveal to Glory her inner dichotomy:

It seemed to Glory that two women sprang into life in her – one who loved John Storm and wished to live and work beside him, the other who loved the world and felt that she could never give it up (318).

John Storm's church is designed round the novel's themes of sexuality and surveillance. The slum building which John Storm wishes to transform into a church and shelter seems much like many descriptions of the real slum place, Orange Court:

¹³⁸ Anon., 'Literary Notes', *The Biblical World*, Vol. 10, No. 4, (Oct. 1897) 315-317.

¹³⁹ David C. MacWilliams, 'The Novelistic Melodramas of Hall Caine: Seventy Years On' *English Literature in Transition 1880-1920*, 45.4. 2002, 426-439. (427).

Behind my church, in a dark, unwholesome alley called Crook Lane, we have a clergy house, at present let out in tenements, the cellar being occupied as a gin shop. As soon as these premises can be cleared of their encumbrances I shall turn them into a club for working men (323).

Caine uses the extraordinary space as an architectural manifestation of muscular Christianity, giving it a central role in the play of romance in the slum space. This intervention is prompted primarily by Storm's displaced desire for Glory rather than by what the inhabitants of the place want. The children make up a song about Storm: 'Father Storm is a werry good man / he does you all the harm he can' (361). Storm's ideals are shown to be deluded: they perpetuate, rather than relieve, the suffering of the poor.

The peculiar interior of the shelter is not revealed until later in the novel. Caine represents the unique form of Reverend Jay's church, with the church on the first floor. Storm and Glory plan to marry, and 'to live under the church itself' (395). The ground floor shelter is described thus: 'In addition to the main apartment there was a little room with a glass front which hung like a cage near to the ceiling at one end and was entered by a circular iron stair. This was the keeper's own sleeping place' (520). The glass room seems like an additional detail presented by Caine as a representation of surveillance, self-exposure and visibility. Caine's mawkish characters frequently examine themselves and each other through eye-glasses and in mirrors (58; 63; 180). These mirrors all serve the romantic plot and romantic notions of selfhood. Unlike the Veneering's mirror in *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-65), which Hillis Miller discusses as having 'a solid reality within the novel', mirrors in *The Christian* are not representative of the liminal position of the narrator between 'imagination and reality'.¹⁴⁰ It is Glory's lips, and not the pier glass, that quiver when she looks in it as she leaves the nurses' home (122).

¹⁴⁰ J Hillis Miller, *The Form of Victorian Fiction: Thackeray, Dickens, Trollope, George Eliot, Meredith, and Hardy* (Ohio: Arete Press, 1979), p. 35; p. 39.

The glass box in Storm's church gymnasium, then, seems as unreal as each of these symbolic glasses exploring pride and vanity; the power and imposition of the gaze; self-consciousness and self-awareness. However, Osborne Jay's church/boxing club did contain the glass box as described by Caine. In *The Christian*, therefore, the reality of the historical slum is concealed by the romance of its representation. This congruity of representation where there ought to be incongruity makes the slum itself a site of contention between romance and reality. Like Glory's lips, the place itself seems to quiver.

In the Christian paper *Good Words*, Rosa Waugh (later Waugh Hobhouse) introduced an article describing the 'practically unanimous disappointment' inspired by *The Christian*. Caine had, Waugh stated, 'alienated' many of his devotees. Members of 'the reading public' were invited to share their disillusionment, with cash rewards offered for the best (most vitriolic) letters. First-prize winner Thomas Jessop lamented the end of Caine's idealism, mooted in 'The New Watchwords of Fiction' (1890) saying 'we [the readers] look for better things than malodorous scenes in London slums [...] Is not this, alas! painting life as it is?'¹⁴¹ Jessop's criticism inheres in the contention that stories about slums are innately realist. The introduction of the slum into the literature of his favoured Idealist writer has, Jessop states, given a concomitantly realist and artificial effect:

[The] result [is] that the masses of fact, artificially acquired, have given to your work a realistic tendency and effect. On me at least, rising from the perusal of "The Christian" [...] the depression caused by contact with world-evil, is deepened; faith is blotted out, hope cancelled, effort paralysed.¹⁴²

Literature should, Jessop wrote mournfully act as a 'counteraction to the benumbing influence' of life. In siting his romance at a slum, Caine disappointed his readers with what they saw as 'the sordid real.'¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Rosa Waugh, 'Letters to Living Authors-I: Mr. Hall Caine', *Good Words*, Vol. 43. Dec. 1902, 217-233. (218).

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 219.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 219.

Conversely, the criticism of Caine by Anglican cleric Dean Farrar suggested that the ultimate value of the novel lay in its correspondence to reality. He praised its topographical accuracy, but when the novel deviates from his direct experience, particularly in the representation of Canon Wealthy, Farrar declares 'I am quite sure the author had no such intention.' Further, Farrar suggests not only that some gross exaggerations made by the novel are accurate, but that 'even worse than [Caine] describes' exist too.¹⁴⁴ Like Morrison, Caine was criticised for being both too real and not real enough.

Meade and Caine both present the Jay figure as a middle-class guide into the slums. Storm and Moore are both introduced outside the slum, Storm travelling to London from the Isle of Man with Glory, and coming gradually, in a pursuit made more indirect by the determining romance of the plot, to reject the West End living and make his way to the slum. Meade's Ranald Moore is also introduced to the reader in the known site of West London, in a letter to the slummer protagonist Joan which makes her 'cheeks flush' and her 'heart beat' (81). This representation and the depiction of Jay as John Storm, a lustful young priest in search of self, may have been unsettling to readers who had appreciated Jay's depiction in non-fiction such as Frederick Greenwood's, which represented Jay as a man who could solve the problem of the slum; 'a priest who offered some answer to readers' fears.'¹⁴⁵

In *Jago*, however, the appearance of Jay, as Father Sturt, does not solve the problem of the slum. He is described in similar terms to Moore and Storm; he has an overpowering presence, a 'certain square muscularity of face', and an 'invisible discipline' (42; 76). Hapgood observes that 'the narrative's statement of [Jay's] power and the characters' apparent recognition of it to some extent sets up false expectations for the reader.'¹⁴⁶ Sturt ought to be able to achieve the transcendence of Dicky from Jago Whelp to 'R. Perrott', Grocer (95). He inspires, but does not realize, Dicky's dream of the everyday – that is, an

¹⁴⁴ F.W. Farrar, 'Review: *The Christian*' in *The Contemporary Review* Vol 72 October 1897, 482-489. (485).

¹⁴⁵ Hapgood, 'Urban utopias', p. 192.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 196.

ordinary life beyond the Jago's bounds. Sturt fails, because as Keating has said, 'the power of the slum is greater than the power of the priest.'¹⁴⁷ Unlike Moore, whose advice to Joan is the catalyst for her move to the East, and Storm, whose personality and struggles, together with Glory's, dictate the plot, Sturt's role in the plot is one of belatedness. He not only appears belatedly into the text, when Dicky Perrott's ingratiation into the lore of the Jago is already complete, but he is used to demonstrate the tardiness and inefficacy of interventions.

In the Jago, the church Sturt builds is described using the language of contagion. It is a physical manifestation of Father Sturt's superiority to the Jagos: 'large and healthy amid the dens' around it (141). However, Morrison, in spite of his praise for the Reverend Jay's work, reveals that the church's health has not cured the place of the Jago. Instead, Jagos dispossessed by its building and the further building projects of the 'creeping' County Council 'had gone to infect the neighbourhoods across the border' (141). Sturt's intervention comes too late to save the Jago. For Morrison the slum is 'not merely a sickness to be cured' by, as Meade suggests, cleanliness amid the dirt.¹⁴⁸ Morrison therefore challenges the typical slum narrative from Dickens to Meade. In Morrison's Jago, contamination occurs *after* the slum clearance, as the poor spread out in a ring around the yellow houses, as if embodying a putrescent boil of disease (141). At Canonbury, the 'gross, pimply' gangsters of the 'Igh Mob have spread into the middle class zones of London (115). Although they physically embody impurity, they are disguised by their apparent 'respectability' (117).

In each of these Nichol novels, central courts are portrayed as the worst sites in the slums. In *Jago*, Jago Court is 'the blackest hole in all that pit' (11). In *A Princess* the blackest pit is represented by 'Jacob's Court'. Father Moore warns Joan more than once that she "ought never to come to this court alone" (141). In *The Christian*, Jay's double is warned away from the worst site of the slum, Brown's Square. Inadvertently inspiring a religious

¹⁴⁷ Keating, *The Working Classes*, p. 181.

¹⁴⁸ Ramasastry, 'Alternative Construction', p. 2.

mania, he is directed towards safety out of the shelter by his servant: ““Turn to the left when ye get ter the bottom, Father – mind ye turn ter the left”” (521). His heart, which has been continually boiling and sinking throughout the novel, unsurprisingly fails him, and, ‘seeing a brightly lighted street running off to his right, he swung round to it and walked boldly along [...] he had come to [...] Brown’s Square’ (521). In Brown’s Square, the misguided Storm meets his death. In the equivalent place in *A Princess*, Joan is kidnapped and Martha wrongly identified as the murderer of Lucy’s husband. These places operate as sites of heightened drama and turning points: they are places of extreme violence which assist the plot. It is only in *Jago* that one of these doubles of Orange Court is represented as a home – albeit an unhomely one.

Dicky experiences Jago Court as a place of relative comfort and safety. He shares the space with the donkey Canary, who stands:

...forgotten and unfed, in Jerry Gullen’s back yard: gnawing desperately at fences, and harrowing the neighbourhood with his bray [...] gnawing, gnawing, with a sound as of a crooked centre-bit. [...] as the donkey turned his heavy head, a drip of blood from his gums made a disc on the stones (26).

Dicky’s place is marked by harrowing sounds and sights. The effects of deprivation are marked in the ‘Canary’, whose name stresses the pit-like nature of the place. His suffering should, but fails to, alert the Jagos to their imminent danger. The repetition of Canary’s behaviour is disturbing. His ‘gnawing [...] gnawing gnawing’ at the posts in the yard reflects the human failures to counter the problem of the slum. In order to solve the problem of housing, they gnaw away at the slum, until its inhabitants, like Canary, drip blood on the stones.

The slum space is treated by Meade with the solutions of the previous thirty years – individual philanthropy and ‘model’ lodging houses managed by paternalistic middle-class figures, but it also looks towards a future in its utopian vision: at the close of the story, Joan declares that it is the ‘beginning’ (306). Caine’s novel suggests that the slum holds the

promise of revelation, but is ultimately disappointing as a site of social purification.

Morrison's 'Jago' looks both back and forward, conveying the slum as the site of the apocalyptic everyday.

V. The Apocalyptic Everyday in *A Child of the Jago*.

Jago is generally categorised as a realist novel: it has become, as Miles notes, 'a synonym for realism.'¹⁴⁹ Yet its generic alignment is as complex as the term 'realism' itself. Morrison based the novel on purportedly factual accounts by Jay. He embellished these with his own naturalistic mode of research, spending eighteen months recording the lives, activities, and speech of inhabitants of the real slum.¹⁵⁰ With heavy irony and bleak humour, Morrison created a place in which the extraordinary is experienced as ordinary. His approach has often been elided with naturalism, but whilst his method of research involved in-depth studies of speech and behaviour and a personal knowledge of the place, Morrison does not imitate Zola's experimental form. Naturalism examines characters whose inherited disorders and weaknesses are then put to trial by their surroundings. In *Jago*, the slum environment utterly proscribes any attempts to reach beyond it. The novel recounts the approach of modernity in the form of urban regeneration, as the secluded slum is opened up to the city by the clearance scheme. This transformation causes shocks to the inhabitants which are recorded in the same unvarnished prose in which the grotesque reality of slum life is conveyed throughout. The ruined site is only made more ruined by the advances of modernity. Morrison examines the 'unreality of the slum clearance scheme' as experienced by the slum's inhabitants.¹⁵¹

The Jago is represented as the manifest memory of infamous historical slums. In this appraisal, Morrison seems to agree with reformers, journalists and the LCC who saw the

¹⁴⁹ Miles, Introduction, xxi.

¹⁵⁰ Keating, 'Biographical Study', p. 25.

¹⁵¹ Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, p. 221n

Nichol as the epitome of a slum. The Jago is the quintessence of three notorious slums, destroyed in earlier clearance plans: 'What was too vile for Kate Street, Seven Dials, and Ratcliff Highway in its worst day, what was too useless, incapable and corrupt, all that teemed in the Jago' (11). These places were not only part of history but also part of literary history, having been described in works by Dickens and De Quincey among others. Morrison invokes the fictional past, demonstrating how slums survive in the imagination, beyond their actual destruction.

The slum is pseudonymously named. Theories as to the origin of 'Jago' centre on the importance of Jay to the piece – it's 'where Jay goes.'¹⁵² In a letter to the Reverend W. Priest Morrison stated that 'Jago' was a Cornish surname, but does not explicate the reasons for its selection.¹⁵³ He locates his pseudonymously named slum very specifically at the site of the Nichol, so that the fictional place proceeds from the real: 'From where, off Shoreditch High Street, a narrow passage, set across with posts, gave menacing entrance on one end of Old Jago Street' (11).

From the opening, *Jago* is characterised by a mix of melodramatic imagery and the everyday, which together impart a hellish vision to the reader:

It was past the mid of a summer night in the Old Jago. The narrow street was all the blacker for the lurid sky; for there was a fire in a farther part of Shoreditch, and the welkin was an infernal coppery glare (11).

Unlike the sky in *Bleak House* (1852-53) which is a conduit for contagion, 'fetching and carrying fever', the Jago sky is described as 'quivering', as if fearful of the slum beneath it.¹⁵⁴ The Jago is the aberration and not the world surrounding it. Morrison casts the reader directly into this place of fiery light and black holes, a place unremittingly ugly, but melodramatically

¹⁵² Sarah Wise attributes this explanation to David Rich: Wise, 'Arthur Morrison: A Child of the Jago, *London Fictions* [2010] <http://www.londonfictions.com/arthur-morrison-a-child-of-the-jago.html> [Last accessed 1 February 2012]

¹⁵³ Letter, Arthur Morrison to Revd. Priest, 30th September 1899, in Miles, p. 168.

¹⁵⁴ Dickens, *Bleak House*, [1852-53] (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 1999), pp. 235-236.

and powerfully lit. Lit by fire, not electric or gas light which was common elsewhere in London, the Jago is an ancient place, pre-modern and barely visible. This is emphasised by the choice of the archaic 'welkin'. The language here draws on sixteenth and seventeenth century images of hell, bearing particular similarities to passages from Milton's *Paradise Lost*.¹⁵⁵ The situation of the place beneath the 'welkin' suggesting heaven, aligned with the contrary adjective 'infernal' suggesting hell, makes the place a limbo: on the borders of hell.

On being told to "Go t' 'ell!", Jago resident Mr Beveridge makes the sardonic reply, "Hell? And how far's that? You're in it!"(12). As Miles suggests, this is not only reminiscent of Christopher Marlowe's *Faustus* but also of Osborne Jay.¹⁵⁶ Similar language is also used in Gissing's *The Nether World* where Mad Jack says of the slum 'Shooter's Gardens' – "This is hell – hell – hell!" (345). Putting these words into the mouth of the sane Beveridge changes their import, exaggerating the horror through understatement. Morrison's Jago is both reminiscent of and an exaggerated revision of earlier representations of the slum.

Morrison's use of melodrama in the novel may be expected to create an incredible picture. However, it is worth considering Chesterton's views on the uses of melodrama for writing slum fiction:

If we wish to lay a firm basis for any efforts to help the poor, we must not become realistic and see them from the outside. We must become melodramatic, and see them from the inside. The novelist must not take out his notebook and say, "I am an expert." [...] He must slap himself on the chest and say, "I am a man."¹⁵⁷

The situation of the Nichol was sufficiently dire to warrant melodrama. Morrison combines melodramatic imagery with ethnographic language of social explorers and realist attention to detail to rewrite the East End from the inside, creating an apocalyptic vision which shows the East End as the end of the world.

¹⁵⁵ 'From either end of heaven the welkin burns', John Milton, *Paradise Lost* Book II, line 538, (London: Penguin, 1996) p. 45.

¹⁵⁶ Miles p. 193 n. 12.

¹⁵⁷ G.K. Chesterton, *Heretics*, (London and New York: John Lane and the Bodley Head, 1905), p. 284.

The heat and light of the opening are immediately destabilising. As William Sharpe suggests in his investigation of Morrison's contemporaries in New York, 'night scenes ask us to reconsider noonday certainties from the murkier ground of midnight.'¹⁵⁸ Beginning the novel at night, Morrison therefore insists upon the reconsideration of the familiar slum space. Knowing that he is writing for a readership accustomed to tropes of poverty and suffering, he shows the extremity of the Jago as unique. Unlike in New York, extreme heat in London even during the height of summer is unusual, so that Morrison is conveying the catastrophic level of overcrowding which must occur before it is necessary or desirable to sleep outside.

The uncanny light within the darkness should be understood in relation to other depictions of night in relation to poverty. As Sharpe argues, 'night told the truth about poverty; to explore the dark slums conferred a black-and-white badge of authenticity on the author.'¹⁵⁹ Sharpe's study of the nascent artificial lighting of city streets is suggestive of the transformation of consciousness at this time. The fire with which *Jago* opens is both a signifier of disaster and a reminder of an ancient time – it suggests genetic throwbacks lurking within the 'managed darkness' of the modern night city.¹⁶⁰ Morrison conjures a place which confronts the reader instantly with textures of heat, odour and that melodramatic motif, the 'pure and polar concepts of darkness and light.'¹⁶¹ The reader is plunged into the slum before plot or characters appear to assist them into it.

Jago falsifies Jean-Paul Hulin's statement that Victorian depictions of the city always express a dualism whereby 'somehow, the Heaven of the ideal city lurks behind the hell of the real city.'¹⁶² There is no heavenly city to be unearthed in the Jago, as there is in Meade's

¹⁵⁸ William Sharpe, *New York Nocturne: The City After Dark in Literature, Painting and Photography, 1850-1950* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2008) pp. 19-20.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹⁶⁰ Burke cited in *Ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁶¹ Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1976), p. ix.

¹⁶² Jean-Paul Hulin *Victorian Writers and the City Centres D'Etudes Victoriennes*, Université de Lille, eds. Jean-Paul Hulin and Pierre Coustillas. (Septentrion, Presses University, 1979) p. 9.

A Princess, where the dirty need only be cleaned to become good. Lurking behind the hell with which the novel opens there is only the possibility of the everyday, as expressed in Kiddo Cook's "I wish I was dead, and kep' a cawfy shop"(12). In this passage, Morrison combines two idioms of the Nichol described by Osborne Jay in *In Darkest London* (1891). Morrison uses this customary expression to conflate the melodrama of this dark yet fiery place with the everydayness of Kiddo's aspiration, thus achieving the rendering of hellishness as everyday.

Contrary to Henkle's assertion that Morrison 'rejects the sentimental and the melodramatic for a laconic, unmodulated prose' the opening of the novel is powerful due to the conflation of the melodrama of the opening with the everydayness of Kiddo's aspiration; the rendering of hellishness as everyday.¹⁶³ Kiddo's words disturb the melodrama of the opening passage and his amiability defies the 'overt villainy' that Brooks identifies as a marker of the melodramatic.¹⁶⁴ These contrasts are necessary – opening with these contrasts, Morrison states, 'reader, this is a fiction' then disturbs them with the commonplace expression.

Social explorer texts and slum fictions of the previous decades had warned that ignoring the plight of the poor in the metropolis meant that 'the day of reckoning will assuredly come.'¹⁶⁵ Both the opening and the close of *Jago* suggested that it already had. While *Tales* is concerned above all with the relentlessness of the diurnal, *Jago* is poised between the perpetuity implied by the everyday and the finality implied by the apocalyptic language. This 'apocalyptic everyday' is one of the reasons for the persistent belief in the place of the Jago. Like the streets in *Tales*, which are characterised by an endless sameness, the slum of the Nichol persists in a similar perpetuity, continually caught at the moment of its

¹⁶³ Henkle, 'Morrison, Gissing, and the Stark Reality', 302.

¹⁶⁴ Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, p. 11.

¹⁶⁵ Howard Goldschmid, *Dottings of a Dosser*, (London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1886). p. 48.

destruction. *Jago* thus conveys a continual ending; the place is diurnally poised at the end of the world, appearing to observers – that is, readers – to be frozen at the point of destruction.

VI. The ‘Strangely Familiar’ Slum.

The Jago is presented as a place both starkly different and disquietingly like the city beyond. The Jago perverts external economic realities: Dicky feels gratified and reassured after his first encounter with the fence Weech to note that ‘he owed money like a man’ (40). Henkle argues that Morrison troubled the middle-class reader: his picture of the Jago is ‘so alien, so intractable [...] to middle class representation and hegemonising.’¹⁶⁶ However, Morrison uses the familiar patterns of marriage, work, and childhood and inverts not the norms but the values with which they are structured and managed.¹⁶⁷ It is this distortion of the everyday with markers of ethnographic precision that caused the Jago to be unpalatable to the late-Victorian middle-class reader. Morrison represents the inverted practices of work, marriage, and family in order to create the Jago as a site of ‘ordinary lives in disorder’.¹⁶⁸ In this way the novel adheres to the realist idea of the novel acting as a mirror, reflecting the social world. However, this mirror reveals so much that is disconcerting that it is more like Alice’s looking glass, into which the reader falls. The Jago is a fictional world which unnervingly reflects the potential for disorder within the real.

Throughout the first chapter, Morrison establishes the inversion of norms in the Jago. It is light at night, its economy is ‘cosh-carrying’ – that is, violent mugging – and men who do not beat their wives and children are ‘mighty pertickler’ (17). The chapter closes by naturalising the effects of the violent attack on an outsider. As dawn breaks, and the Jagos, in a further inversion of normality, begin to sleep, the only respectable character to have

¹⁶⁶ Henkle, ‘Morrison, Gissing and the Stark Reality’, 309.

¹⁶⁷ Tim Youngs, *Beastly Journeys: Travel and Transformation at the fin de siècle* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), p. 49.

¹⁶⁸ Richard Sennett, ‘Ordinary Lives in disorder’ *Unruly Cities? Order/Disorder* ed. Steve Pile, Christopher Brook and Gerry Mooney, (London, Routledge, 1999) pp. 364-366.

appeared, a 'decent working man' who has been 'coshed' – lured into the backstreet by a woman, and beaten with a wooden stick by her partner – awakens on the pavement. The reader is unwittingly soothed by the normalcy of this action, as the victim wakes as if from sleep: 'with the blood dry on his face, [he] felt the colder air, and moved a leg' (18). It is immediately clear that the respectable reader has no representatives in the Jago.

Living in the Jago is a decline from respectability for Dicky's mother Hannah Perrott, who 'was alwis kep' respectable an' straight' (15). As Keating observes, the Perrotts can be read as inhabitants of the Mean Streets who have 'allowed their respectability to slip from them.'¹⁶⁹ Kijinski counters this, stating that:

Morrison's poor are not simply normal people fallen on hard times. Instead, the very cultural structures by which they experience their lives put them outside the purview of all "advanced" norms of contemporary Christian culture.¹⁷⁰

It is important, however, to recognise that Hannah sees herself in this way: as a respectable person enduring hard times. She tells Dicky not to associate with the Rann and Leary families who dominate the Jago because "we ain't that sort o' people" (15). Hannah makes the mistake that her respectability is judged by herself: it is always judged by one's community, even when that community is not perceived as respectable by society at large. Hannah's duty as a woman who understands respectability is to better herself, and, if she cannot, not to show up her neighbours.¹⁷¹ Examining the representations of masculinity in Morrison's work, Bivona and Henkle have asserted that male efforts to higher status in the Jago involve 'a route through a parodic Jago-vision of the "better world" of money and power.' However, this 'mimicry only confirms the inaccessibility of upper class life'.¹⁷² Similarly for Hannah the observation of norms of the respectable class to which she once belonged only confirm the irrevocability of her fall.

¹⁶⁹ P.J. Keating, ed., Arthur Morrison, *A Child of the Jago* (London: Panther, 1971), p. 30.

¹⁷⁰ Kijinski, 'Ethnography in the East End', 494.

¹⁷¹ Fox, *Class Fictions*, p. 99.

¹⁷² Bivona and Henkle, *The Imagination of Class* pp. 112-113.

Although the use of dialect, particularly the h-dropping and dropping of closing consonants suggests that she is a native East Ender, Hannah is not native to the slum, and has ‘been used to different things, once’ (15). The trope of slum fiction that it is impossible to convey the sounds made by slum inhabitants is shown in the novel when ‘less spellable sounds’ are made during a fight, but in general Morrison does not make such evasions (59).¹⁷³ Meade’s contention that the ‘language of East London cannot [...] be altogether reproduced’ is a trope Morrison avoids (v). Indeed his dialect is far more phonetic and therefore accessible to a reader than, for example, Nevinson’s in *Neighbours of Ours*. Morrison’s use of a glossary as an appendix to *Jago* suggests, without pleas to their faculties of terror, that the reader needs him as a guide, to interpret the other east for them.

Hannah Perrott avoids gossip, violence and alcohol, and was married in a church. Dicky is neither an orphan nor the product of illegitimacy. He lives in a nuclear family unit; father goes to ‘work’, mother ‘looks after’ house and children. They do everything ‘correctly’. Dicky, however, by the opening of the novel is already thoroughly immersed in the life of the street. From his first appearance in the novel, returning home after midnight, his knowledge of Jago customs is displayed proudly. On encountering the two thieves who plundered the unconscious coshed victim, he declares; “Done ‘im for ’is boots”(14). The reader never finds out where he has been, and neither does his mother. Hannah’s attempts to prevent Dicky from being ‘wicked and low’ and to encourage her husband to ‘git a reg’lar job’ are futile. Hannah’s repetition of the word ‘low’ emphasises her fear of a decline that has already happened. While she insists that Dicky will ‘git on’ if he is ‘alwis respectable an’ straight’, the coshing of the respectable man at the opening of the novel has already falsified her claims (16).

¹⁷³ See note 114, above.

Hannah's church marriage and her strict observation of the norm of living within the family unit demonstrate the insufficiency of societal norms to guarantee moral or experiential value. Swafford equivocates over whether 'the absolute difference' of the Jago can be seen as 'perhaps not a total difference in the end'. He clings onto the idea that 'the Jago alone produces itself', hesitating before suggesting that 'the core of the dominant ideology of the inhabitants of the Jago and the materialist ideology of the larger society are essentially the same'.¹⁷⁴ It seems clear, however, that the latter part of his analysis is the correct one. Despite its lack of the material trappings of the bourgeois domestic scene, the interior of the Perrott's room is founded on its obeisance to middle-class norms and is therefore not an alien, 'other' space but one that is 'strangely familiar'.¹⁷⁵ Hannah's observation of correct behaviour has conferred no security. These norms are insufficient in and of themselves, thereby exposing the myth of domesticity as such.

Morrison contrasts the Jago immediately with the satirically named 'East End Elevation Mission and Pansophical Institute'. Morrison gives an ironic appraisal of the philanthropic young men, 'Missionaries' who spend two weeks in the East End: 'they came away with a certain relief, and with some misgiving as to what impression they had made, and what they had done to make it' (20). Morrison's caustic critique relies on his usual obliqueness of language when describing ineffectual social actions. The reader's representatives in the novel are the supporters of the 'East End Pansophical Institute and Elevation Mission' – a place in the midst of Bethnal Green which has no knowledge of the Jago hidden behind Bethnal Green Road. The representation of this place as ineffectual is a challenge to Besant's project as well as to the middle-class reader. Morrison assumes the language of the philanthropic slummers, those who:

¹⁷⁴ Swafford, 'Translating the Slums', 51; 58.

¹⁷⁵ Emily Cuming, 'Home is home be it never so homely': Reading Mid-Victorian Slum Interiors', *Journal of Victorian Culture*, 2013, Vol. 18, No. 3, 368–386. 374

...plunged into the perilous deeps of the East End, to struggle – for a fortnight – with its suffering and its brutishness [...] they came away with a certain relief, and with some misgiving as to what impression they had made, and what they had done to make it. But it was with knowledge and authority that they went back among those who had doubted their personal safety in the dark region (20).

Morrison mocks the foolish young philanthropists who claim to understand the East End and its position in the city. Leaving the East ‘with some relief’, they tell their friends that the East End ‘was nothing like what it was said to be. You could see much worse places up West’ (20). The philanthropists use middle-class slang to describe the East Enders as ‘quite a decent sort, in their way – shocking Bounders of course’ (20). His ironic tone here shows that he is mocking the voice of the reader. The reader’s place in a slum text is usually achieved through possibilities for redemption of the slum. By introducing the slum before the synecdochal place by which most of his readers would know the slum – that is, the philanthropic institution – Morrison forces the reader to re-encounter the Jago as a real site which philanthropic projects mask. Kiddo Cook’s response on being cursed at by a ‘toff’ in the crowd is to mock the use of slang: “wot ’orrid langwidge!” (12). Morrison undermines the superiority of middle-class use of language and illuminates the Jagos’ awareness of the paternalistic forces that wish to moderate their language and behaviour.

Where James Greenwood and later Jack London and George Orwell investigated the slums by disguising themselves as working-class, Morrison achieved the disguise of the middle-class interloper, but he did so to interrogate and mock the middle-class voice. His process in researching the novel involved working alongside, but making no pretence of being one of, the inhabitants of the slum.¹⁷⁶ Journalist Elizabeth Banks, who disguised herself as a working-class woman and wrote about her experiences, recalls the experience of mimicry as copying with a difference: ‘that day I felt like a flower-girl – not, certainly, like

¹⁷⁶ C.R. ‘The Methods of Mr Morrison’, *The Academy*, December 12th 1896, 531 (531).

my coarse-voiced associates...'¹⁷⁷ Morrison reverses the pattern of mimicry of the poor as the dominant mode of social criticism.

Morrison makes no concessions to philanthropic endeavours and offers no comfort to those who undertake such projects – they do not reach Dicky, the child who needs them. The reader, like the mugged man, awakens to themselves in the Jago. The 'extraordinary unreality' which Traill observed in the text comes not from the picture itself, though as suggested above, it has melodramatic elements, but from the lack of a familiar place for the reader to be in the text.¹⁷⁸ Morrison's is a brutal but effective narrative method whereby, without the uses of sentimentality, he forces the reader to reconsider the slum and its continuance despite such interventions.

Morrison further suggests the uselessness of institutional help in his depiction of Dicky's school. A Ragged School had been established in Old Nichol Street in 1836.¹⁷⁹ This school was visited by journalists from *The Schoolmaster* magazine in 1884. It was said to be 'carried on under most difficult conditions', and to demonstrate 'the social degradation, which has only to be seen to be appreciated at its full and deplorable measure.'¹⁸⁰ In the novel, Morrison relocates the school to the border of the slum, so making the site of education a site of territorial dispute for Dicky. The shifting of the actual place is reminiscent of Caine's moving the slum to Westminster and Meade moving Martha to the basement. As Morrison, however, shifts a school rather than the slum, he enforces the idea that interventions – in the form of education in this instance – have failed.

The initial appearance of the ragged, perilously-housed Dicky is a challenge to the reader to discover the effects of the environment on his physicality. Dicky's appearance is

¹⁷⁷ Elizabeth L. Banks, *Journalistic Adventures of an American Girl in London* (NY: Tennyson Neely, 1894), p. 146.

¹⁷⁸ H.D. Traill 'The New Realism', *Fortnightly Review*, 67, NS 61, (1897), 63-73, cited in Miles ed., *CJ*, pp. 175-176. (p. 175.)

¹⁷⁹ 'Sunday in East London: Shoreditch and Bethnal Green West', in *The Sunday at home: a family magazine for Sabbath reading* Jan 1st 1895, 243-248 (246-247)

¹⁸⁰ *The Schoolmaster*, Vol 26, No 663, 13 Sep 1884 (363). Thanks to Chris Bischof, Rutgers, for this source.

sudden: he falls – or is pushed – into the novel. Two thieves run into Jago Row with a pair of stolen boots, and:

A small boy, whom they met full tilt at the corner, staggered out to the gutter and flung a veteran curse after them. He was a slight child, by whose size you might have judged his age at five. But his face was of serious and troubled age. One who knew the children of the Jago and could tell, might have held him eight, or from that to nine (13-14).

Dicky's appearance is so conflicted as to suggest the impossibility of representation. He uses the language of a 'veteran'. His face looks older and his body younger than his age. His age can only be deduced from the clues in his contradictory appearance by 'one who knew the children of the Jago and could tell.' Even then, there is no certainty, since it relies on a subjective reading, of what one knowing witness could consider eight, the other, nine.

Morrison's aim here is not simply to assert that Dicky has grown old unnaturally fast. There is a child beyond this conflicted physicality. The reader, unfamiliar with the Jago, must inevitably fail to imagine Dicky's physical actuality – they are left with a picture that cannot be reflected in reality. Dicky's face is obscure. The reader can only anchor meaning to material clues such as Dicky's 'ragged jacket [...] coarsely made from one much larger' (14). His rags relate him to other images of street children, but give him no notable features. The image of Dicky is inconstant. Morrison divorces Dicky from a bodily existence.

Morrison withholds information about a 'type' much investigated in literary, photographic and journalistic portraits of the day. The figure of the ragged boy was available for public consumption, both in material forms such as Thomas Barnardo's photographs of children saved by his homes, and in literature and social investigation. Barnardo's photographic efforts ensured, as Koven has argued, that the children Barnardo rescued from the streets were 'forced to exhibit themselves to anyone willing to pay Barnardo's price.'¹⁸¹ Against this, Morrison's imagining of Dicky as a shifting image refuses to proffer

¹⁸¹ Koven, *Slumming*, p. 108.

the reader the solution to the problem of the homeless boy child. In disallowing the reader a direct view of Dicky, Morrison suggests that the reader cannot solve the problem of the perilously homed child by witnessing or possessing his appearance.

Of indiscriminate age, and rendered universal through dirt which obscured his appearance, the image of the ragged boy was repeated from Oscar Gustave Rejlander's 'Homeless' in 1860 via John Thomson's 'Little Mic Mac Gosling' (1877), to Jacob Riis's 'Street Arabs' in New York (1893). These iterated images of the ragged boy reduce the subject to an archetype to which no individuality is afforded. Morrison plays on this cultural obsession, conveying Dicky as a type who has gone through so many imaginings that his physicality is impossible for an elite spectator to witness. However, his interiority is impossible to ignore, as it emerges in anguished statements such as that 'it would be a comfortable thing for himself if he could die quietly' (163). With his interior monologue, Dicky is able to achieve something like autonomy. Morrison's portrayal of Dicky reveals that in reading physical descriptions as types, a reader could risk overlooking the interiority of individuals.

Morrison ascribes Dicky a moving self-consciousness in which his isolation and distress are exposed. Like Jo in Dickens's *Bleak House* (1853), Dicky and his father Josh struggle to articulate themselves. However Morrison, unlike Dickens, allows us to see the inner turmoil of slum dwellers. Dicky contemplates suicide on being sacked from his first non-Jago job:

The whole world was against him [...] plainly he must have some incomprehensible defect of nature, since he offended, do as he might, and could neither understand nor redeem his fault. He wondered if it had been so with little Neddy Wright, who had found the world too ruthless for him at ten; and had tied a brick to his neck, as he had seen done with needless dogs, and let himself timidly down into the canal at Haggerstone Bridge (102).

In *Bleak House*, Jo contemplates suicide, but the expression of Jo's feelings is muddled by the fog of language in which he operates. Jo's almost comic inability to convey meaning is

revealed, his sincerity concealed, when he says: “I don’t know why I don’t go and make a hole in the water, I’m sure I don’t”.¹⁸² By contrast the introduction of the suicide of ‘little Neddy Wright’ is brief and startling. The detail with which this is described is particularly shocking because the timidity with which Neddy is noted to have acted suggests an onlooker to the deed. Either Dicky himself or another Jago must have witnessed this tragedy. This sudden reference to an incomprehensible horror entirely rejects the Dickensian form of representation of suicidal children as tragicomic.

The plaintiveness of this insight into Dicky’s thoughts is powerful due to its immediacy. The impression created by the use of reported indirect speech such as in the phrase ‘the whole world was against him [...] he must have some incomprehensible defect of nature’ are represented as Dicky’s unmediated thoughts. In Henry James’s 1886 novel *The Princess Casamassima*, the slum is the negative space around which characters from disparate backgrounds congregate: it is invisible until its revelation provides the dramatic coda to the novel. Morrison’s form of realism, however, rhetorically reproduces the slum as a known entity which veils the internal reality of its inhabitants. These efforts of Dicky to understand his own despair, and to challenge his overwhelming grief, demonstrate that he is human, with human feelings. Any errant behaviour must be understood as a response to the alienation expressed here. Through gradual revelations of selfhood and consciousness of the characters, Morrison confronts the reader with their willingness to allow the place of the Jago to define the ‘Jagos’. In its sudden introduction, Morrison forces the consciousness of the slum dweller into the mind of the reader. Morrison achieves his aim of the ‘immediate presence’ of these characters.¹⁸³

¹⁸² Dickens, *Bleak House*, p. 660.

¹⁸³ Morrison, ‘What is a Realist?’ p. 4.

In the 'Preface' to *The Princess Casamassima*, James described such characters as being unlikely to have any interiority.¹⁸⁴ James could never have written a Dicky or Josh Perrott. For Morrison the crisis of the late-Victorian slum is not that it is unknowable, but that the late-Victorian slum has been repeatedly looked at without being seen. In *Jago*, the reader is challenged with having allowed such a child to be invisible. They are left with the unsettling idea that such a child may have existed, without their recognising him. Morrison reveals the person behind the ideologies that surround discourses about the poor. He shows the individual consciousness which had been occluded by the enormity of the slum in the cultural imaginary.

Morrison suggests his subjects' sensitivity to their own alienation through this representation of Dicky's dissociation.¹⁸⁵ He never puts resistance to change in the mouths of the Jagos, but records their silent, interior reactions to the shock of the new.¹⁸⁶ While in 'Jacob's Island' he speaks of the tragedy of voicelessness, in *Jago*, both Josh and Dicky are voiced through their inner narrative. Morrison therefore both gives and withholds the voice of the voiceless. Morrison's representation of Dicky's interiority suggests he has succeeded in his mentor Besant's aims as stated in the 'Art of Fiction' (1884): in Dicky, 'we are enabled to discern the real indestructible man beneath the rags and filth of a common castaway.'¹⁸⁷

Introducing Dicky's troubled interiority pushes against classical realism. As Terry Eagleton has observed, 'despondency, so the Victorians believed, is potentially subversive, and it is part of the function of classical realism to keep it at bay.'¹⁸⁸ Dicky's interior voice also allows Morrison to avoid the potential controversy of having the criminal Jagos narrate their own story.

¹⁸⁴ James, 'Preface', *The Princess Casamassima*, [1886] ed. David Brewer (London: Penguin, 1987), p. 40.

¹⁸⁵ Koven, *Slumming*, p. 283.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 283.

¹⁸⁷ Besant, 'The Art of Fiction', in Walter Besant and Henry James *The Art of Fiction* (Boston, Cupples and Hurd, 1884), pp. 3-50. (p. 14).

¹⁸⁸ Terry Eagleton, 'Small Hearts', Review of *The Green Road* by Anne Enright in *London Review of Books* Vol. 37. No. 11., 4 June 2015., 3-4. (p. 3.)

David MacWilliams suggests that critics were chiefly challenged by the parts of *The Christian* written in the voice of the music hall singer Glory: contemporary critics ‘felt Caine had demonstrated poor taste in allowing an immoral female to plead her own case.’¹⁸⁹ It is the slum dwellers, not the middle-class representatives, to whom the reader is given purportedly unmediated access – we never see Sturt’s interiority. In *A Princess*, similarly to Besant’s *All Sorts*, Meade records the apparent voices of the poor saying “we don’t want no fuss made, and no parlymentary interfering” (224). By giving Dicky, not Sturt, an interior voice, Sturt is accorded an ambiguous position. Morrison does not require the Jagos to be mouthpieces for their own debasement, as Meade does. He represents the inability of the Jagos to use their voices, and despite his personal admiration for Jay, shows that Sturt’s intervention drowns these voices out.

Critics such as Keating, Brome and Bell have all suggested that the slum itself is the central character in the novel.¹⁹⁰ The predominance of the place was the cause of much contemporary criticism of the novel. H.G. Wells criticised *Jago* for its local focus, stating that Morrison ‘had determined to write of the Jago and nothing but the Jago.’¹⁹¹ This aspect of the novel should be understood in its intent to provoke the reader. Another contemporary critic wrote that ‘the novel, as a story of the career of a child of the slums, does not give enough space to the principal character’ but failed to see the deliberateness with which this effect is created.¹⁹² The lack of space for Dicky is precisely the point. It caused readers to look so closely at the space of the Jago itself that Dicky’s childishness and his childhood pass by at speed. Three years go by in a sentence: ‘Dicky was fourteen, fifteen, sixteen’ (135). The child living in the vanishing place is vanishing in front of the reader. In representing the characters of Dicky and Josh in *Jago* Morrison redresses ethnographic and naturalist depictions of

¹⁸⁹ MacWilliams, *Novelistic Melodramas*, 429.

¹⁹⁰ Keating, *The Working Classes*, p. 179.; Brome, *Four Realist Novelists*, p. 10. Bell, ‘A Study of Arthur Morrison’, p. 78.

¹⁹¹ H.G. Wells ‘A Slum Novel,’ *Saturday Review* 82 (28. Nov. 1896) 573 cited in Miles *CJ* pp. 168-170, (p. 169).

¹⁹² ‘The Novel of Misery’, p. 408.

members of the working class as ‘types’. His project of rectifying such accounts with his usual method of echoing the incorrect suppositions of the middle-classes can be seen in his article ‘A Workman’s Budget’ (1901):

His habits are so-and-so, says one; on the contrary they are invariably such-and-such, says another. The truth is that the workman is merely a human being.¹⁹³

Like *Tales*, Morrison’s *Jago* relies on its reader’s prior knowledge of slum writing.

The reader is expected to recognise the signifier of ‘Shoreditch’ and the nature of East End streets from non-fiction writing of the slums. Morrison exploits this shared knowledge. His description of Dicky’s sister Little Em, who ‘unwashed, tangled and weeping, could well take care of herself and the room, being more than two years old’ is reminiscent of George Sims’ ‘poor little baby-sentinel’, a four-year old child left to watch her younger sibling in a squalid attic. (122).¹⁹⁴ Sims’ baby sentinel is unnamed and becomes evidence of Walkowitz’s assertion that for Sims, ‘the particularity of slum life had disappeared’ due to saturation with impressions of the slums.¹⁹⁵ By making Em younger than Sims’s ‘baby sentinel’, Morrison exaggerates the situation, but by naming Em he also redresses the over-saturation of accounts of anonymous slum dwellers. The depiction of Em is troubling because of its reminiscence to a picture a reader had been taught to accept as real.

Morrison also uses ethnographic techniques to great effect when describing the faction fight: the screaming of a victim of Sal Green is conveyed with dispassionate language as if analysing the nature of the sound:

The sufferer’s screams were audible afar, and beyond their invariable eccentricity of quality – a quality vaguely suggestive of dire surprise – they had mechanical persistence, a pump-like regularity that distinguished them, in the accustomed ear, from other screams (28).

¹⁹³ Morrison, ‘Family Budgets: A Workman’s Budget’, *Cornhill* April 1901, held at the Charity Organisation Society Library, Denison House, Vauxhall Bridge Road., p. 446.

¹⁹⁴ Sims, ‘How the Poor Live’, in Keating ed. *Into Unknown England: Selections from the Social Explorers* pp. 65-90. (p. 72.)

¹⁹⁵ Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, p. 27.

In Sal Green Morrison undoes both the Amazonian appeal of slum women fighting such as the presentation of the half-naked 'Antiope of the slums', Tilda in *No. 5 John Street* (1899), the laundry room fight between Gervaise and Virginie in Zola's *L'Assommoir* (1877), and the mock heroic with which Morrison treats 'Lizerunt'. Swafford argues that Sal Green has 'a crude sexuality,' depicted as she is at one point in the faction fight as 'stripped to the waist, dancing, hoarse and triumphant'¹⁹⁶ However, as in this passage she is described as holding 'a long bunch of clotted hair [...] a trophy rent from the scalp of Norah Walsh', it seems bizarre to read this as sexually appealing (30). Indeed, a contemporary reviewer commended this description of Sal as evidence of Morrison's lack of 'immorality'; here he 'deals frankly with dirt brutality and crime.'¹⁹⁷

Wells also admired Morrison's use of violence, comparing it favourably to Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893).¹⁹⁸ The power of the scene lies in the sparse manner with which Morrison depicts the fight between Josh and Leary – he uses chiefly single-syllable words to portray pace and precision. This has a staccato effect: 'the men took and gave knock for knock'. Consonance in the passage allows Morrison to portray the rhythm of the fighting: 'Leary lay like a man fallen from a house-top' (70-71). The most significant aspect of this fight is not its violence but its role in assimilating the Perrott family further into the Jago. Dicky's toes scraping against the wall as he eagerly tries to grip the windowsill to watch the fight, and Hannah's escalating pride in Josh's prowess, are as important as the fight itself (68; 72). As Keating has stated, the violence 'is never used for sensational reasons, but is always part of a well-defined total pattern.'¹⁹⁹ With his depictions of violence, Morrison achieves the ingratiation of the reader into the codes and norms of the Jago. The reviewer in

¹⁹⁶ Swafford, 'Translating the Slums', 57.

¹⁹⁷ Anon, 'A Child of the Jago', *Athenaeum*, 3607 (12 Dec. 1896) 832-3 in Miles ed., *CJ*, p. 170.

¹⁹⁸ H.G.Wells 'Another View of "Maggie"', *Saturday Review*, 82, (19. Dec. 1896), p. 655. in Miles, pp 170-171. (p.171).

¹⁹⁹ Keating, *The Working Classes*, p. 172.

The National Observer stated that by the time of Weech's murder towards the close of the novel:

We are so far filled with the spirit of the Jago that the murder almost fails to shock us. [...] our main regret is that Mr Perrott must hang for it.²⁰⁰

Kiddo Cook's perverse sense of humour embellishes the violence with farce. During a fight, Kiddo:

...ran hilariously through the streets, brandishing a long roll of twisted paper, wherewith he smacked the heads of Leary's all and sundry, who realised too late that the paper was twisted round a lodging-house poker (31).

This humour is derived from music hall slapstick. Morrison thus depicts a comic moment which a late-Victorian East Ender would find funny. Julian Franklyn has argued that Morrison missed much of the East End humour.²⁰¹ However, Morrison's comedy is what Keating describes as 'the true humour of a realist – it conveys a joke which is funny to the characters rather than to the reader.'²⁰²

The only women who do not fight are Hannah Perrott and Pigeony Poll. In his depiction of the redemptive potential of the unmarried 'harlot' Poll, Morrison further challenges expected characterisations of slum inhabitants (31). The prostitute is usually a paradoxical figure, both 'repudiated and desired, degraded and threatening,' but Poll is steady, sentimental and kind.²⁰³ The use of the archaic 'harlot' softens the presentation of her profession. Poll exhibits the most un-Jago qualities in her gentleness – the injuries to others during the faction fight make her weep – and her desire for domesticity and sanctified marriage (31). She is 'outcast' not because she is a prostitute but because 'she neither fought nor kept a cosh-carrier [pimp]' (31). Although she is a 'streetwalker', she is very rarely seen on the street and is usually depicted indoors, helping Dicky and his siblings as far as her

²⁰⁰ Anon, 'How the Poor Live', *The National Observer*, 17; 420, (5 December 1896): 73-4 (p. 73).

²⁰¹ Franklyn, *The Cockney*, p. 39.

²⁰² Keating, *The Working Classes*, p. 191.

²⁰³ Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*, p. 21.

means allow. In Poll, Morrison demystifies the late-Victorian streetwalker, making her a danger neither to domesticity nor to others.

Arguments over the naturalism or otherwise of the place Morrison depicts, most famously Wells's criticisms, relied upon the fact that Kiddo Cook, Poll and Hannah Perrott survive.²⁰⁴ Wells stated that Morrison unwittingly disproves theories of heredity and environment prescribing the individual, because Morrison 'shows, firstly, in Mrs Perrott that to come into the Jago is to assimilate oneself to the Jago; and secondly, in Kiddo Cook, that a vigorous, useful citizen may come out of it.'²⁰⁵ Kiddo, who feeds the Perrotts when they are starving, and Poll, who weeps over the death of Looey, must be saved. Hannah's survival however demonstrates, as Wells suggested, the power of the slum to assimilate her. Her survival shows not social-Darwinian strength, but the inevitable submission of humanity to the city.

Like the mean streets, the Jago is devoid of culture. The only cultural incursion comes from the music box that Dicky steals to compensate for his theft from Bobby Roper (55). The music box plays 'Gently Does the Trick', a music hall song that includes the lines:

Some people go to church, and say they go to pray,
And others go to see what they can take away;
And some hand round the plate, and some are most devout,
And some put three pennies in, and others take them out.²⁰⁶

Morrison does not employ the late-Victorian realist technique of layering his depiction with artistic representations in order to plea for the reality of his representation. Alison Byerly suggests the importance of layering realist fiction with artworks:

By framing a person or a scene as an artwork, the author separates it from the world of the novel [...] by labelling this other world "art," the novelist makes the world left behind seem more real.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁴ Wells, 'A Slum Novel,' pp. 168-170.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., pp. 169- 170.

²⁰⁶ 'Gently does the Trick.' [Song] written and composed by P. Browne. Punchinello Browne (London : Francis Bros. & Day, 1888)

Morrison warps this technique with the introduction of the music box, which is only conveying another image of the slum's problems of vice and misdirected charity. Morrison suggests that there is no other sign system possible for the Jago. The hole created is a Carrollian rabbit hole: the reader enters into the hole of the music box which belongs outside the Jago, and through it appears again at the place where they already were. Morrison uniquely uses cultural artifacts to convey the unreality of the reality of the Jago. The music box in *Jago* is a window onto a real but impossibly harsh world, one in which childhood is longed for, but cannot exist. Morrison's realism is purely self-referential: as a mirror image of reality it is disturbing in its insistence on its own presence.

On the publication of the novel, Morrison asserted not only the reality of the text but the continuation of the problems it discussed. The father of naturalism, Zola, was criticised for having base material artistic desires, for having 'tried to build bricks and mortar inside the covers of a book.'²⁰⁷ Morrison alleged that the bricks and mortar he created were there before and *after*, within and *beyond*, the pages of the book. In the essay 'What is a Realist?', published in response to the mixed criticism of *Jago* in the English press, Morrison claimed that not only had he entirely stuck to facts when representing the slum, but that it was

... a foolish fancy [of many, to believe] that because the houses of the Old Jago have been pulled down, the Jago difficulty has been cleared out of the way. That is far from being the case. The Jago, as mere bricks and mortar, is gone. But the Jago in flesh and blood still lives, and is crowding into neighbourhoods already densely over-populated.

It is at this point that 'Jago' became cast in to language, as Morrison embellished his slum novel with a meta-text that suggests the continuation of a problem and not a solution. The Jagos, he stated, had escaped the confines of the slum, of the new building and of the novel itself: the Jago had been transubstantiated from bricks and mortar into flesh and blood.

²⁰⁷ Alison Byerly, *Realism, Representation and The Arts in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 4.

²⁰⁸ Keating, *The Haunted Study*, p. 117.

Morrison's novel operates as a reversal of the process identified by archivist Claire Lyons, whereby 'in the absence of written accounts, antiquarians looked to the material traces of the past for tangible evidence of human history.'²⁰⁹ In the absence of the material traces of the real slum, the presence of Morrison's novel has been looked to as containing traces of the actual past. Neither *The Christian* nor *A Princess of the Gutter* can command such deference, because neither forces an encounter with the deconstruction of the actual. In this way in spite of his refusal to be pigeonholed as a realist, Morrison ascribes reality and authenticity to his work. Writing *Jago* on the cusp of the slum's destruction, Morrison causes realism to transgress a boundary into reality. The historical place of the Nichol is supplanted, not only by its real replacement, the Boundary Street estate, but by its creative reconstruction and destruction in the material text.

Swafford has suggested that in *Jago*:

We as readers are encouraged to see the writing as offering a clear window into reality. Such narrative technique creates the impression that the East End, as a real and symbolic site, is epistemologically secure.²¹⁰

Morrison exploits previous modes of representation in order to conjure a place that troubles boundaries between reality and realism, naturalism and ethnography. The slum he portrays becomes more real than both its non-fictional and other fictional representations, but the way in which the reader views it cannot be through a 'clear window': rather, the *Jago* is a distorted mirror reflecting to the city the inevitable and psychical effects of urban destitution. Morrison disrupts previous extrapolations of the slum but does not demystify it. By placing realist characters within places where the hellish is experienced as ordinary, Morrison exposes the everyday horror of the late-Victorian slum as a problem both perpetual and perpetuated.

²⁰⁹ Claire Lyons, Michael Roth and Charles Merewether, *Irresistible Decay: Ruins Reclaimed* (Los Angeles, The Getty Research Institute, 1997), p. 80.

²¹⁰ Swafford, *Class in Late-Victorian Britain*, p. 108.

3

MAPPING THE LATE-VICTORIAN SLUM

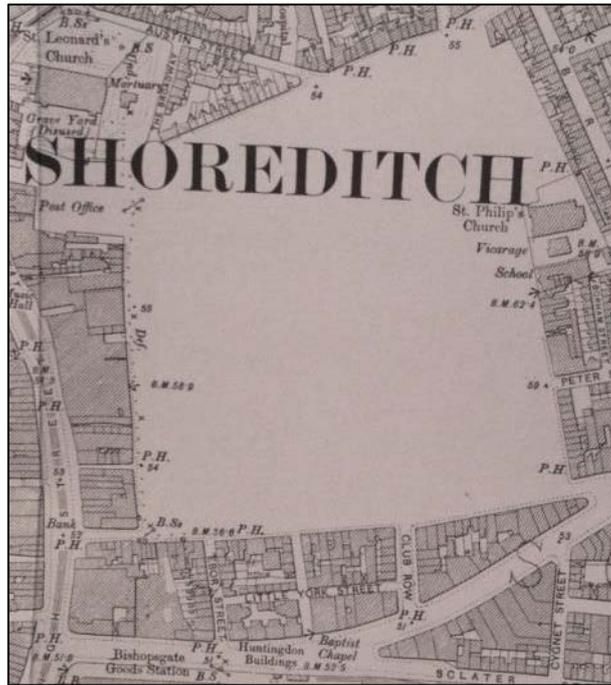


Fig. 20. above: Section from Ordnance Survey Map of Shoreditch, 1893.¹
The Nichol/Jago is the white space under the word 'Shoreditch'.

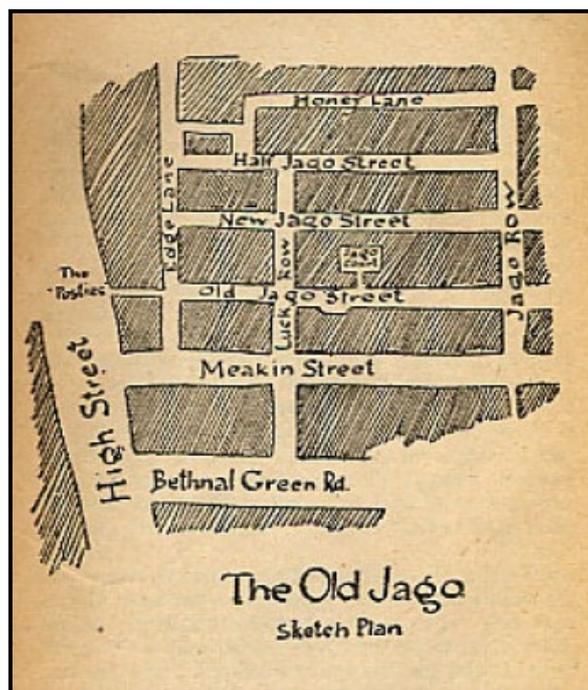


Fig. 21. 'Sketch Plan' of the Old Jago, 1896²

The conventional status of maps is one of indisputable authority. Maps ought to 'orient us in the practical world', to portray the known as the knowable.³ Maps are perceived as offering

¹ Old Ordnance Survey Maps, Shoreditch 1893 (Consett: Alan Godfrey Maps, 2010).

² Frontispiece, *A Child of the Jago*, 1896.

‘the transparency of total knowledge.’⁴ In the incomprehensible sprawl of Victorian cities, maps worked to visually explain the city, to record its frequent changes, and by the ‘attainment of a steady view from above’, offered a ‘vantage point from which to gain an initial sense of unity and order.’⁵ Yet implicit within this statement is the subjectivity of a map: they always operate from *a vantage point*. As Edward Casey states, ‘every map presents a view that is particular and not general: a view *from somewhere*.’⁶

Maps accord with the nineteenth-century narrative aim for omniscience. In Victorian novels of the city, as Keating has argued, ‘the point of view – the necessary way of comprehending the scale of the modern city – is from above.’⁷ A geographer may assert that ‘the map is to geography what verisimilitude is to the history of the novel: the visual dominance of the one, and the omnipotent realism of the other, are powerful tools for representing a city like nineteenth-century London.’⁸ This analysis, however, is greatly complicated by the use of maps within realist texts, whereby the realist text is accorded reality by its correspondence to mapped space.

In 1893 the Ordnance Survey mapped Shoreditch. The slum was marked for destruction in 1889 and by 1893 the process of transforming the place into one of the first and most ornately designed London County Council housing estates meant that it was recorded as empty. This map portrays the Nichol, the notorious slum on which Morrison’s ‘Jago’ was so closely based, as a blank white space. The slum is conveyed as the absent centre of the East End; a negative space at the commercial heart of London. The Ordnance Survey presented the slum as an unknowable place. In drawing the map in this way, the Ordnance Survey

³ Edward Casey, *Representing Place: Landscape Painting and Maps* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), p. xiv.

⁴ Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose, eds, *Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies* (New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1994), p. 6.

⁵ Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities*, (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 58.

⁶ Casey, *Representing Place*, p. 173.

⁷ Peter Keating, ‘The Metropolis in Literature’ in Anthony Sutcliffe, editor, *Metropolis 1890-1940* (London: Mansell, 1984), pp. 129-146. (p. 131).

⁸ Brian Robinson, ‘Charles Dickens and London: The visible and the opaque’, *GeoJournal*, Vol. 38, No. 1, Geography and Literature (January 1996), 59-74. (59).

denied the reality, and effaced the history, of the slum. The map placed the Nichol at the limits of veracity, believability and legibility.

In *Jago*, the omniscient narrator achieves further authority by the inclusion in the text of a map. The sketch plan of the Jago mediates between what is and what can be known about the slum. The map is persuasive evidence of the persistence of fictional place over the transparency of real space. Simultaneously it consolidates the place of the slum as separate from the world, and preserves place. Maps demonstrate the authorial intent to stabilise and fix place in space. The mapping of these places causes them to exert a ‘fatal structure’ on the characters but also has an enduring effect on the real places mirrored in the realist texts.⁹ *Jago* thus defies the idea that as an ‘aerial observer seated in the gods [...] “man” can map the geography of poverty and turn the crowded streets into perfectly legible space’.¹⁰ The use of a map in *Jago* pushes against the official geography of the known city. In this way, it challenges the Victorian ideal of the map whereby ‘when confusion threatens, the map comes to your aid.’¹¹

Maps in novels usually guide the reader to unreal places – perhaps most famously Hardy’s Wessex, Tolkien’s Middle Earth, and Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County. The role of the Jago sketch map is different. Fitting precisely to the absence at the centre of the Ordnance Survey map, it asserts itself as more real than reality while cohering to the fictional mode of representing the fantastic. The Jago map is what Doreen Massey calls an attempt to ‘institute horizons, to establish boundaries, to secure the identity of places’¹² It insists that the Jago, and its real-world double, the Nichol, existed – that there is a *there* there. The Jago map mocks the Ordnance Survey map: it suggests that the Nichol has not been destroyed by its

⁹ Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1999), p. 80.

¹⁰ Ruth Livesey, ‘Women Rent Collectors and the Rewriting of Space, Class and Gender in East London, 1870-1900’ in Elizabeth Darling and Lesley Whitworth, eds, *Women and the Making of Built Space in England, 1870-1950* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 87-105. (p. 88).

¹¹ Auguste Spectorosky cited in Vale and Snaith, eds., *Bygone Bethnal Green*, p. 57.

¹² Doreen Massey, *Space, Place and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 5.

physical obliteration. In mapping the Jago onto the negative space at the centre of the 1893 Shoreditch map, Morrison refuses to annihilate the Nichol slum and causes it to remain as an imagined place. This layering of the map onto the real space is what Homi Bhabha would call ‘the unknown territory mapped neatly onto the familiar.’¹³ The map causes the conflation of the real, destroyed slum with the fictional one: Andrew Whitehead argues in the recent book *Maps*, that the map is the reason why the sign “Jago” is now better known than the Nichol.’¹⁴ The map of the Jago asserts the presence of the realist place in the real city.

The use of mapping to understand real slums in nineteenth-century cities will be discussed in the first section of this chapter. Readers of Morrison have often positioned him as analogous to the sociological writers of the period who produced maps of slum spaces. Morrison’s similarities to these writers are not due to his intent in *Jago* to produce a sociological account of the slum, but due to the narratives produced by all maps, which can be disharmonious to the purportedly objective writing they embellish. The second part of the chapter will examine the sketch map of the Jago, with which the novel is prefaced, alongside ‘real’ maps of the Nichol, in order to uncover the tension at the boundary of realism that Morrison creates by mapping this place. Finally the map of the Jago will be examined in relation to the textual mapping which demonstrates the effects of urbicide on the characters. Reading attempts at resistance to the map and plan by characters will show the determined fixity with which fictional slum places operate.

I. ‘Real’ Maps

Maps of city space were not, of course, a Victorian invention. No decade has passed without the use of the map to record the changing city. The earliest known maps of London date from the thirteenth century. The bias of the map, however, always changes. Earlier views

¹³ Homi Bhabha cited in Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift, eds., *Mapping the Subject: Geographies of Cultural Transformation* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 47.

¹⁴ Andrew Whitehead ‘Beyond Boundary Passage’ in *Maps* ed. by Ross Bradshaw, (Five Leaves Publications: Nottingham, 2011), pp. 135-138.

were more concerned with content than spatial precision. Buildings were rendered three-dimensional and scaled according to importance rather than size, as Matthew Paris's map (Fig. 22.) shows.¹⁵ The urge to see the city in its totality, from above, is also reflected in the popularity of panorama views in the seventeenth and throughout the eighteenth century, when many used preliminary sketches taken on balloon flights. A notable example of the nineteenth-century city seen from above comes from Joseph Gandy, who was commissioned in 1830 by the architect John Soane to paint Soane's plans for the refurbishment of the Bank of England as it would appear centuries hence: that is, in ruins. This painting showed how an aerial view of the city could be used to record not only its present, but also its past and its possible futures (Fig. 23).



Fig. 22. Thirteenth century map of London showing Roman roads, (detail) by Matthew Paris c. 1252¹⁶

¹⁵ Philippa Glanville, *London in Maps* (London: The Connoisseur, 1972), p. 17.

¹⁶ Reproduced from the *Chronica Majora* in *Ibid.*, p. 73.



Fig. 23. Joseph Gandy, aerial view of the Bank of England, 1830.

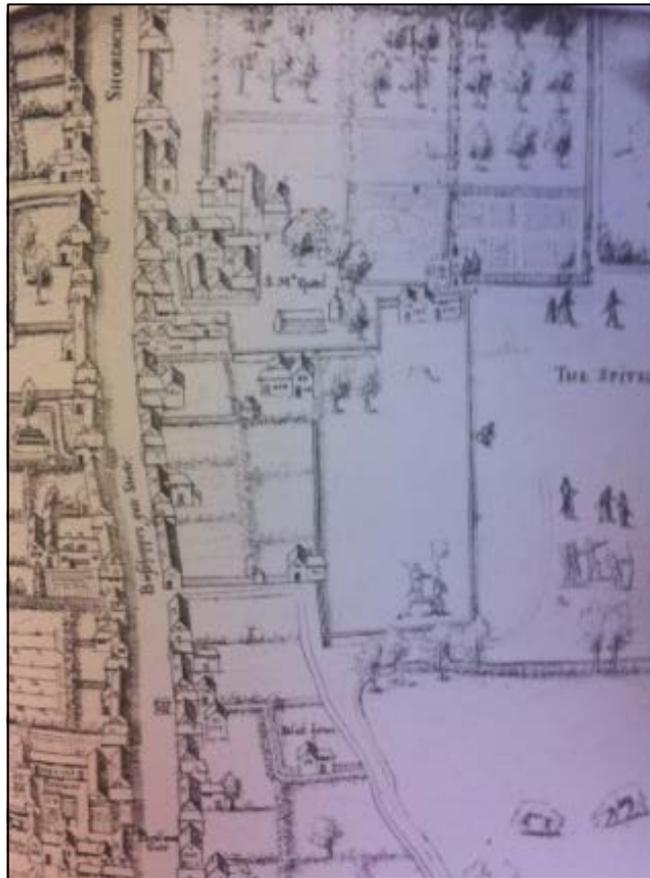


Fig. 24. Tudor map of London showing Shoreditch, (detail) c. 1553-1559.¹⁷

In the early Victorian period, George Bradshaw's railway maps and Karl Baedeker's travel guides, translated into English in the mid-century, became indispensable in mapping the newly figured and connected country. Angus B. Reach wrote satirically of the ubiquity of

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.

the Bradshaw among railway travellers: 'Every one of them is sitting/With a Bradshaw in his hand.'¹⁸ The Victorians were self-consciously map-literate. However, the later Victorian period saw the production of maps of the city which purported to not just record but to produce information. These maps showed not only where things were but illustrated the likely experiences of those in the mapped places. Maps were being used to describe not only geography but society, and particularly flaws within society. Recording the constantly changing city began to be impossible at precisely the time when it was more possible than ever to accurately record its contours. Maps became both more trusted and more misleading. The map retained its knowledge capital whilst acting with ideological prowess. Reading the maps used by social explorers and proto-sociologists in this period shows their totalising imperative and ideological intentions beneath the abstracted spatial geometries of the map.

The limitations and errors of reading Morrison's fiction as sociology have already been mentioned. However, his map does purloin its authority status from these pioneering social studies.¹⁹ Like them, it indicates both a problem and the impossibility of its resolution. Drawing on prior decades' use of maps to show poverty, the sketch map of the Jago shows the persistence of the problem beyond the text, reflecting the reality of poverty in the world.

Henry Mayhew's ground-breaking project *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851-2) began as a series of sketches published in the *Morning Chronicle* from 1849 recording the experiences, customs and dwellings of workers in the capital. It is noted by historians for its use of the first-person in chronicling the experience of life in the city. The amount of faith levelled at Mayhew's system is quite remarkable. As Anne Humpherys has noted, although 'Mayhew's accuracy of information will never be completely demonstrable,

¹⁸ Angus B. Reach, 'A Review of Bradshaw's Railway Guide', *Sharpe's London Magazine* (Jul 1853): 238-243. (238)

¹⁹ Krzak, 'Arthur Morrison's East End of London', p. 171.

nearly all readers from 1849 to the present have trusted him'.²⁰ Mayhew's use of maps, however, has been little discussed, indeed many editions of *London Labour* exclude the maps altogether, although these would be an explanation of the faith in his records.

Mayhew's maps of the United Kingdom abstract the incidences of crime and deviance into monochrome. They appear in Volume IV of *London Labour*, which is the section primarily concerned with criminality. The map below shows arrests for brothel keeping in the United Kingdom in c. 1862. Like all the maps in Volume IV, the map uses black to denote over-average incidences of criminality and white for under-average. In this, London is clearly the site of the highest number of arrests. The map works to both alarm and to reassure: it shows both vice and its cure in the application of the law. It operates therefore as a totalising narrative, illustrating concomitantly the problem and its solution, and offering itself as resolution: disorder is ordered by the lines of the map.

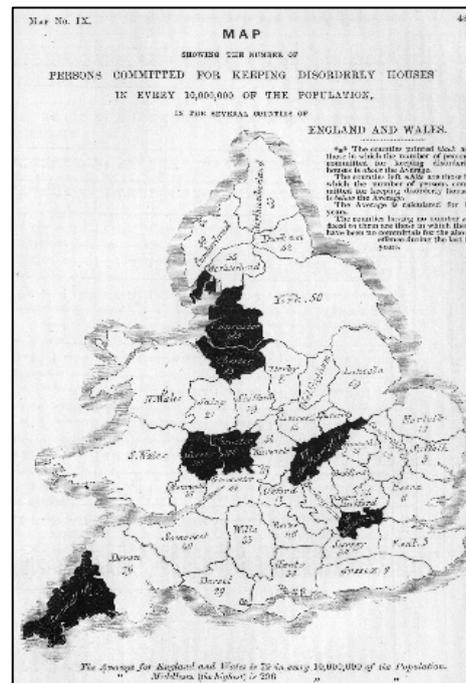


Fig. 25. Mayhew's Map showing incidences of 'Disorderly Houses' – brothels – in the UK, c. 1862²¹

²⁰ Anne Humpherys cited in Andy Croll, 'Who's Afraid of the Victorian Underworld?', p. 32., see also Theo Kindynis, 'Ripping up the Map: Criminology and Cartography Reconsidered', *The British Journal of Criminology*, Vol. 54, No. 2 (March 2014), 222-243.

²¹ Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, Vol IV., introduced by John D. Rosenberg Map No. IX., (New York: Dover, 1968), p. 485.

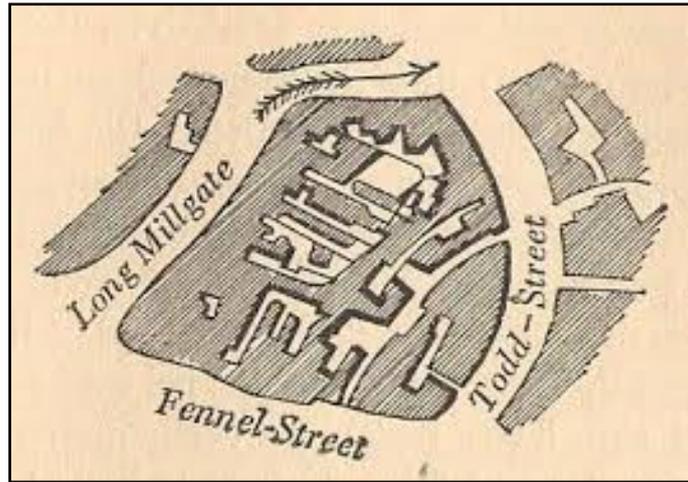


Fig. 26. Map of the Irk area of Manchester drawn by Friedrich Engels, in *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845)²²

An earlier non-fiction text, Friedrich Engels's *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845), serves to amplify my claim that non-fiction writers recognised and utilised the ideological power of maps. Engels demonstrated the emotive power of maps when he drew the Irk area of a Manchester slum. However, he was concerned that it was impossible to convey the 'the cramming together', the 'tangle' of these buildings. The map therefore was affective for what it omitted as much as what it included: Engels described the area he had drawn as 'not the worst spot and not one tenth of the Old Town', implying greater horrors unseen: unmapped and unmappable. This map, however, is itself suggestive of unseen horrors. The closely cross-hatched spaces indicate the chaotic, overbuilt housing. The areas in white represent the streets and courts around which the (many unplanned) buildings are arranged. The white, secreted spaces cannot be reached by any of the named streets – they can only be accessed through the dark places of the map. In this way Engels's sketch map responds to, and creates, rhetoric about slums. The map collaborates with the text to convey the intense overcrowding, disorder and dirt, which are so prevalent in the place that: 'he who turns in thither gets into a filth and disgusting grime' (61).

²² Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2009), p.61. Further references in parentheses.

Like the Nichol, the area Engels described was already disappearing, it had been ‘partially torn away and rebuilt’ (62). Like Morrison though, Engels is circumspect about viewing this destruction as improvement. The map fixes the area in the reader’s mind. Engels emphasises this fixity with the description of the stagnant water of the river Irk. The reversal of nature in this place has been so severe that even when ‘improved’, the water which should clean is a grotesque puddle of bubbling, rotten slime; the river which should flow ‘stagnates’ (62). Engels’s map endeavours to reveal the back streets; the places usually concealed by more respectable thoroughfares. The map conspires with the narrative to create the persistence of the slum in the mind of the reader. This is how maps produce narratives about slums.

When Sir Richard Cross propounded the need for slum clearance in what would become known as the ‘Cross Act’ of 1875, he described the problem that ‘these plague spots where all these evils flourish and whence they spread are mapped out [...] as clearly as the mountains of the moon are, by the aid of scientific discovery.’²³ The Mountains of the Moon were a mountain range in Africa described by explorers from Ancient Greece; but for centuries, no one was certain of their existence. The use of the lower case by Cross suggests that he means the mountains of the moon itself, but the allusion is clear and interesting. Inconsistent reports by subsequent explorers allowed the question of the mountains’ existence to continue: they remained in the realm of the possible. It was not until the English explorer Henry Morton Stanley discovered a possible candidate in a range of Blue Mountains in 1889 that the reality of the range was confirmed.²⁴ Imploring such a legend of unfixed space to describe the problem in cities in 1875, then, Cross invokes the frustrated imperial project to map even the realms within England’s domestic borders, thus using the fear of the unmappable and mythological to insist on the critical state of housing.

²³ Richard Assheton Cross, ‘Homes of the Poor in London’, *The Nineteenth century: a monthly review*, Mar. 1877-Dec. 1900.12.66 (Aug 1882): 231-241. (231)

²⁴ Henry Morton Stanley, *Autobiography*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909), p. 371.

The need to map ‘darkest England’ was raised by the founder of the Salvation Army, William Booth, who adapted the title of Stanley’s exploration text *In Darkest Africa* (1890) to write of *In Darkest England* (1890). In this project, Booth’s manipulation of the trope of the East End as the deepest recesses of the empire was consolidated by his use of a map showing his idea of a ‘farm colony’ coming to rescue humanity from the mire of the ‘city colony.’

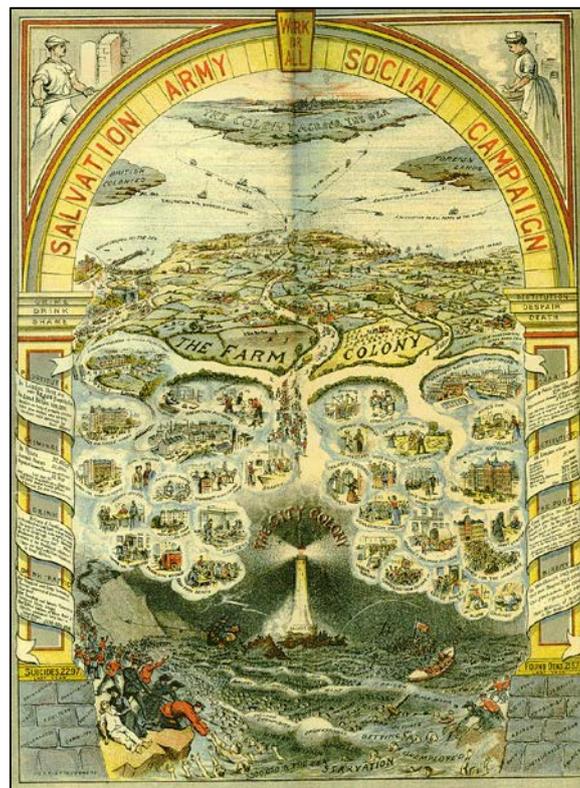


Fig. 27. City Colony/Farm Colony: from William Booth *In Darkest England* (1890).

This map, as Tanya Agathocleous has noted, is aware of its sociological power, as it is ‘covered with facts and figures’ but it also draws heavily on allegory.²⁵

In 1886 Charles Booth began his pioneering project, *Inquiry into the Life and Labour of the People in London*, to record the experience and figures involved in poverty in London. The aspect of the project for which he is now most well-remembered is the colour coded maps he devised, showing the eight degrees of poverty experienced across the capital.

²⁵ Tanya Agathocleous, *Urban Realism and the Cosmopolitan Imagination in the Nineteenth Century: Visible City, Invisible World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 167.

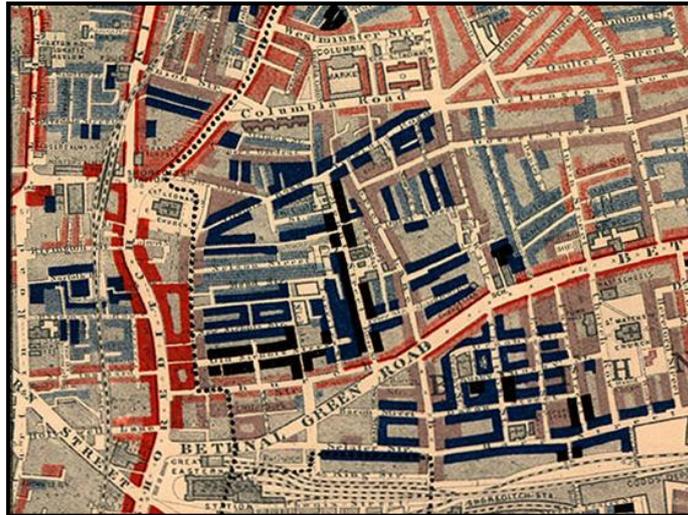


Fig. 28. Charles Booth's Map of the Nichol area, 1889.²⁶

The philanthropist and Fabian Socialist Beatrice Webb called Booth's method of mapping 'social topography.'²⁷ The maps were seen as a manifestation of Booth's terse scientific analysis of poverty. As such, they 'drew admiring comments mainly as a visible demonstration of the order and method of the survey.'²⁸ This view persists in recent criticism: Laura Vaughan states that Booth's maps revealed the 'true nature and extent of poverty in London.'²⁹ Yet Booth's selection of colours – black for the poorest, gold for the wealthy – makes these maps metaphorical. His claims of sociological objectivity are defeated by his uses of these colours, and by the categories they represent. Booth defines the poorest classes, coloured in black, as 'vicious, semi-criminal', implying that crime is never committed by the wealthy in the golden squares. Booth's maps are didactic, containing a moral judgement of place. Booth in fact reveals the failure of maps to objectively represent reality. It is necessary to interrogate the perceived stability of his maps because, as Pamela Gilbert states:

²⁶ Charles Booth, *Descriptive Map of London Poverty 1889* introduction by David A. Reeder (London: London Topographical Society, 1984), np.

²⁷ Webb cited in 1984 edition of Booth's *Descriptive Map of London Poverty 1889* (London: London Topographical Society, 1984), np. *Also in My Apprenticeship*, p. 236. (Camb. 1979 edn).

²⁸ *Ibid*, np.

²⁹ Laura Vaughan, 'Mapping the East End Labyrinth' in *Jack the Ripper and the East End* (London: Chatton and Windus, 2008), pp. 219-238 (p.221) Emphasis mine.

All maps are rhetorical. That is, all maps organise information according to systems of priority and thus, in effect, operate as arguments, presenting only partial views which construct, rather than simply describe, a system of knowledge.³⁰

Sociological methods such as Booth's were looked upon as possessing cures to the social dis-ease of the city.³¹ Yet Booth's maps instead represented the sickness of the city; they revealed the extent of the disease. Mary Burgan notes that the colours of Booth's maps are like the circulatory system.³² Gilbert's argument goes further, stating that Booth's maps work as images of disease in the body of London.³³ In this context we can see the Jago as an 'incurable' space. It has been argued by Ledger and Luckhurst that in Booth's 'remorseless statistical regulation of the city, [...] which replaces the anecdotalism of Henry Mayhew or Dickens, [we can see] London's East End moving from a mythical 'Darkest England' to an object of positive knowledge.'³⁴ Miles has suggested that Morrison's mapping makes him analogous to cartographers or urban planners of the area. Reading Morrison's map alongside actual maps of the Nichol, however, suggests that, contrary to Miles's assertion, Morrison was drawing the Jago against what cartographers and planners were permitting or acknowledging to exist in that space. The mapping of the area of the Nichol shows that maps can be particularly confounding to 'positive knowledge'.

The 1893 Ordnance Survey map presents itself as a cure, not only for 'what Booth typically regarded as the social disease of poverty' but of what Burgan called, 'the disease geography'.³⁵ The white space suggests that the dark spots of the Nichol can be wiped out: the disease of poverty and the disease of geography can both be cured. But the fiction of this cure is revealed by Morrison's map. As Manguel and Guadalupi discuss in *The Dictionary of Imaginary Places*, 'the world we call real has deadlocked boundaries in which the long-

³⁰ Pamela K. Gilbert, ed., *Imagined Londons* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), p. 12.

³¹ Rose, *The Relief of Poverty 1834-1914*, pp. 33-34.

³² Burgan, 'Mapping Contagion,' p. 52.

³³ Gilbert, *Imagined Londons*, p. 28.

³⁴ Ledger and Roger Luckhurst (eds.) *The Fin de Siècle*, p. xv.

³⁵ Reeder in Booth, *Descriptive Map*, np.; Burgan, 'Mapping Contagion', p. 51.

established principle that two bodies cannot occupy the same place at the same time is rigorously observed.’³⁶ The unwillingness to recognise the persistent problem of the slum is represented by the white space at the centre of the Ordnance Survey map, but representing the space as blank unwittingly makes room for Morrison’s Jago, contributing to the sense of the Jago’s persistent reality.

II. Unstable Toponymies: Mapping the Unmappable Nichol

An alarmed reviewer of *Jago* wrote in 1896 of their staunch belief that it was unlikely that any place could be as bad as Morrison described. Citing a source who knew the slums well, the writer claimed that it ought to give readers solace that the place was improbable, or at least atypical. It is with some uneasiness, therefore, that they note: ‘Mr Morrison, however, gives us a map of the district in which that region of utter lawlessness, intestine warfare, crime, and savagery is to be found.’³⁷ The map destabilises their hopeful disbelief in Morrison’s vision of the Jago: it suggests its persistent reality beyond the text.

In Booth’s *Life and Labour of the London Poor* (1902), as Wise has noted, streets were renamed in order to preserve the pride of the occupants.³⁸ Morrison too renames the streets of the slum, but retains the real names at the border – the High Street and Bethnal Green Road ‘starred as themselves.’³⁹ Morrison explained his pseudonymous naming thus:

If you substitute the word ‘Nichol’ for ‘Jago’ wherever you see it in the plan, you will have the true names of the streets, except in the case of Jago Court, which was Orange Court, Luck Row is Chance Street, and Edge Lane is Boundary Lane.⁴⁰

³⁶ Alberto Manguel and Gianni Guadalupi, *The Dictionary of Imaginary Places*, Maps and Charts by James Cook (Canada: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), pp. xiii-xiv.

³⁷ Mrs Oliphant, ‘A Raid Among Books’, *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine*, 160 (974), 822-846. (842).

³⁸ Wise, *The Blackest Streets*, p. 170.

³⁹ Sarah Wise, ‘A Child of the Jago’ on *London Fictions*, <http://www.londonfictions.com/arthur-morrison-a-child-of-the-jago.html> accessed 30 April 2012.

⁴⁰ Arthur Morrison, letter to Reverend W. Priest, September 30th 1899, in Miles edn. of *A Child of the Jago*, p. 168.

This pseudonymous naming, and the framing of realist place within real boundaries, emphasises Morrison's disruption of the boundaries between real and realist place. This is similar to Thomas Hardy's practice when mapping his 'Wessex' tales. Hardy notes in the 1912 Preface that he used the real names of places in his otherwise pseudonymous maps to 'mark the outline' of the area. Briefly describing his scheme, Hardy acknowledges that 'the scheme was not greatly elaborated, but, whatever its value, the names remain still.'⁴¹ This suggests the tension between the persistence of the real signs and the likely longevity of the pseudonymous ones. Hardy's statement is suggestive of the greater probability of the survival of the real names – they 'remain still' and so aid his tales to persist. However, it also suggests that his Wessex is mutable within the 'real' boundaries he assigns. The use of the real sign, Bethnal Green Road, at exactly the boundary between the real road and the destroyed slum places the Jago at a boundary of knowledge and imagination.

In *East London* (1901), Walter Besant describes the life of a typical factory girl growing up in Ratcliffe. Of her home, he states: 'This is London Street, Ratcliffe. It is a real street, with a real name, and it is in a way typical of East London of the lower kind.'⁴² Besant uses the real signs of 'London Street' and 'Ratcliffe' to sketch the typical. In combining fictional names with the use of the 'anchoring signifiers' of the real street names, Morrison conveys the atypical nature of this place.⁴³ The real streets contain and exclude the Jago from the outside world but simultaneously guide the reader in. Peter Brooks has suggested that:

Representation in the realist mode seemed to depend on a faulty understanding of the linguistic sign [...] Linguistic signs are used to compensate for the absence of the things they designate – use of a word stands in for the absent referent of the word.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Thomas Hardy, General Preface to the Wessex Edition of 1912, in *The Hand of Ethelberta* introduced by Robert Gittings, (Basingstoke: Macmillan 1986) pp. 335-338. (p. 337.)

⁴² Besant, *East London*, p. 119.

⁴³ Maltz, 'Arthur Morrison, Criminality and late-Victorian Maritime Subculture', 20.

⁴⁴ Brooks, *Realist Vision*, pp. 6-7.

The correspondence of the real streets to the absence at the centre of the OS map causes the real-world referents to be as unreal as the representation. Morrison's pseudonymous signs become more legible than those of the 'official' mapped city, which records a city of gaps and deliberate omissions. The sign 'Jago' therefore gains as much authority as the annihilated 'Nichol.'

This re-naming of streets is a departure from slum texts like Besant's *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* (1882), in which each street is named with the real-world sign: '[Harry] looked about him, standing at the north entrance of Stepney Green – on the left hand, the Whitechapel Road [...] on the right, the Mile End Road' (29). Besant's novel is an incitement to upper class involvement in the daily life of the East End, and his readers can use it as a textbook, retracing the steps of the protagonists.⁴⁵ For Morrison, though, such philanthropic efforts as Besant describes have already failed, and the latest slum clearance will only accentuate the problem.

In surrounding his fictional doubled streets with the frame of the real streets, Morrison connects fragment with whole: he replaces the margin at the centre. Max Nordau, author of *Degeneration* (1892), argued that:

[The realist's] so called picture is [...] no more than an expressionless fragment of the world, in which the artist's personality is only represented by the frame which encloses it, not because the eye of nature really terminates at that point but because the eye of the painter only embraces that portion and no more.⁴⁶

However, Morrison's use of pseudonymous streets contained within the real street boundaries suggests not the limitations of his picture but the treatment by society of the site as marginal. If the real streets are the frame of actuality, Morrison's realist picture begins at the boundary where the slum was thought to end. As Gilda O'Neill elucidates, the eastern boundary of the

⁴⁵ Besant describes the use of this novel as a textbook in the building of the 'People's Palace', as I note in Chapter 1, above: *Autobiography*, p. 244.

⁴⁶ Max Nordau, *Degeneration*, trans. and introduced by George L. Mosse (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1993), pp. 477-478.

East End – as Morrison describes in *To London Town* (1899) in which London is shown to be advancing towards Epping Forest – always changes, but the western one never does.⁴⁷ In this way his map of the Jago makes it a microcosm of the East End itself, with its fixed western, but shifting eastern boundaries.

Mike Parker's work reveals the possible imperative behind the absence in the OS map. He notes that turn-of-the-century Ordnance Survey maps depended upon 'Victorian imperial attitudes of geographic and cultural rank.' The following instructions were given in the 1905 OS *Field Guide*:

For names generally the following are the best individual authorities, and should be taken in the order given: Owners of property; estate agents; clergymen; postmasters and schoolmasters, if they have been some time in the district; rate collectors; road surveyors; borough and county surveyors; gentlemen residing in the district [...] Respectable inhabitants of some position should be consulted. Small farmers or cottagers are not to be depended on, even for the names of the places they occupy, but a well-educated and intelligent occupier is, of course, a good authority.'⁴⁸

Booth's project used a similar hierarchy of information to this one. His team of researchers included many school board inspectors, who spoke to priests and other persons in authority to gain local information.⁴⁹ Booth's research was praised for the 'judicious nature of the inquiry.'⁵⁰ Yet only the 'respectable' and the powerful were consulted in the coding of his maps.⁵¹ Insisting on working-class impuissance in the naming of their own streets was used as a way to control them in relation to their own geography; to attenuate the increasing power which suffrage allowed them.

The Nichol slum was not thought to contain any people with sufficient authority to name their own streets. Social explorers of the 1860s and 1870s had repeatedly claimed that the Nichol was unregulated and unmanageable. The slum therefore yields before the agency

⁴⁷ O'Neill, *My East End*, p. xviii.

⁴⁸ Mike Parker, *Map Addict: A Tale of Obsession, Fudge and the Ordnance Survey* (London: Collins, 2009), p. 91.

⁴⁹ Wise, *The Blackest Streets*, p. 174.

⁵⁰ Reeder, *Descriptive Map of London Poverty*, np.

⁵¹ Wise, *The Blackest Streets*, p. 174.

of the Ordnance Survey. Destined for destruction, it is no longer authorised to exist. Maps of the area reflect a lack of consensus about how the space was actually laid out; a peculiar recalcitrance to cartography. J. Hillis Miller has observed the inevitability of the shortcomings of cartography thus: ‘sooner or later, the effort of mapping is interrupted by an encounter with the unmappable. The topography and the toponymy hide an unplaceable place.’⁵²

Two later maps of Shoreditch, ‘Reynold’s Shilling Map’ of 1895 and ‘Stanford’s Map of Central London’ of 1897, reveal the unreality of the Ordnance Survey’s vision of an empty place. In these maps, the Nichol appears fully formed with a grid street plan. However, the cartographers disagree on the names of some streets – Fournier Street and Vincent Street in Reynold’s map appear as Nelson Street and Mead Street in Stanford’s. The unstable toponymy troubles the reliability of these maps and further reveals the difficulty of mapping this particular place.

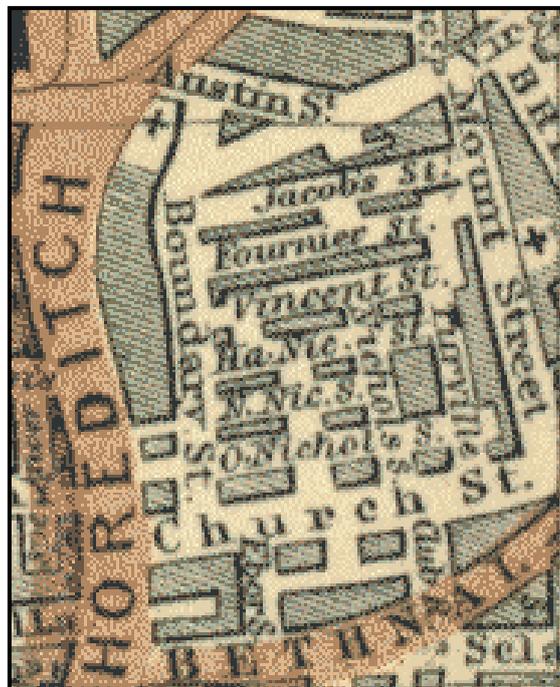


Fig. 29. Section from Reynold’s Shilling Map of London, 1895

⁵² J. Hillis Miller, *Topographies*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 7.

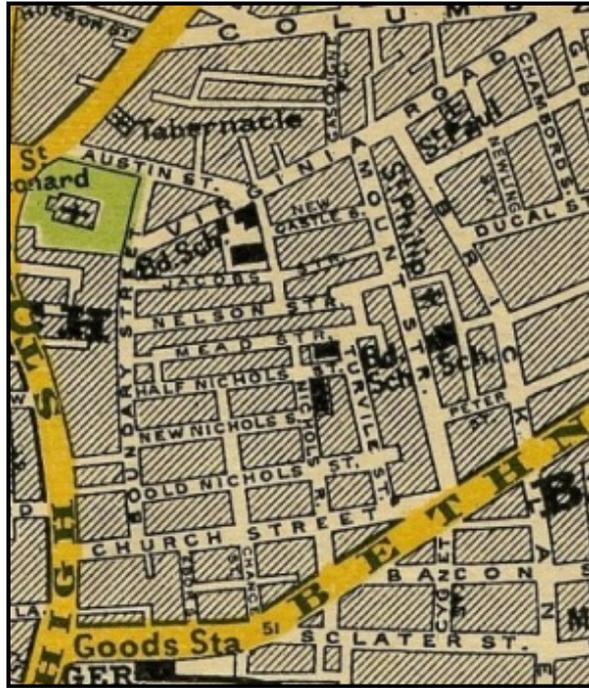


Fig. 30: Section from Stanford's Map of Central London, 1897

The Ordnance Survey map reveals that whilst physically occupying a central area within the city of London, the Nichol slum is in fact a liminal space beyond the boundaries of the main thoroughfares. Its effacement of the Nichol is an attempt to retrieve control of this supposed edgeland. As Parker has noted, maps operate in this way, as 'a show of muscle, a graphic illustration of change or simply a bold, bright statement of territorial integrity.'⁵³ The 1893 map represents the spatial treatment of difference within cities. The other exists in an unacknowledged space at the centre so that the poor of the East End exist imaginatively beyond the city boundaries: as Christopher Stanley argues, they occupy 'the paradoxical inner city as outside city'. The absence at the centre of the Ordnance Survey map shows that:

The inner city, within the shadow of the inside city, is the outside city [...] the territory of the dispossessed urban poor that at once haunt the millennial city and at the same moment are absent in the account.⁵⁴

The sketch map shows the Jago as enisled; cut off from its own geographical context.

⁵³ Parker, *Map Addict*, p. 131.

⁵⁴ Christopher Stanley, 'Ethical Transgressions beyond the city wall' in *City Visions* pp. 91-106. (p. 93; p. 97).

H.G. Wells's criticism of *Jago* focused on this narrowness of place: he argued that Morrison was 'a man looking so nearly at Whitechapel that the wider world [...] is hidden from view.'⁵⁵ This criticism not only uses Whitechapel as a synecdoche of the entire East End including the fictional Jago, but also fails to recognise that Morrison did not intend the Jago to be representative of the city as a whole. Benvenuto has argued that Morrison portrays the Jago as 'self-contained and enclosed, a world by itself'.⁵⁶ The map, however, confirms that the Jago's isolation is caused by the outside, not due to its insistence on its own seclusion.

The inclusion of the map suggested that the realist novel would make privileged and fixed information available to the reader. This is emphasised by the graphic similarity of the Jago sketch map to Booth's poverty maps. Morrison's text replaces the map of a purportedly empty place with a map to a domain that must be reached in part by the reader's willingness to trust the authority of mapped place. Morrison challenges the reader to acknowledge that far from being empty space, the area was full of life and 'the "blank" areas were in our heads.'⁵⁷ This framing of realist place within real boundaries emphasises Morrison's disruption of the boundaries between real and realist place. Morrison's map thus goes beyond what Franco Moretti calls 'an asymmetry of the real and the imaginary – of geography, and literature', rather inverting the expected positions of these two.⁵⁸

III. Clearance: The Boundary Street Scheme

The Nichol was redeveloped beyond recognition under the 'Boundary Street Scheme', organised by the nascent London County Council. This was to be 'a mass clearance that would [...] prove an inspiration, a model of what was achievable.'⁵⁹ It responded to the perceived failure of earlier initiatives with unique ambition and vision. Slum clearance

⁵⁵ H.G. Wells, 'A Slum Novel' in *Saturday Review*, 28 November 1896, Vol. LXXXII, 573.

⁵⁶ Benvenuto, 'The Revealing Structure in *A Child of the Jago*', 154.

⁵⁷ Denis Wood, *Rethinking the Power of Maps*, (New York: Guilford Press, 2010), p. 133.

⁵⁸ Franco Moretti, *An Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900* (London and New York, Verso, 1999), p. 18.

⁵⁹ Wise, *The Blackest Streets*, p. 247.

programmes of the mid-Victorian period caused displacement and overcrowding in nearby areas. The ‘vogue’ for building philanthropic housing grew from the 1840s, but it failed to produce decent homes for the poor.⁶⁰ Model dwellings such as the drear Charlotte’s Buildings (named for the female philanthropist who funded them), described by Margaret Harkness in *A City Girl* (1888), were poorly designed, overcrowded, and lacked ventilation.⁶¹ These interventions in housing for the poor, uncoordinated and many privately funded, were often portrayed as unsuccessful, creating impersonal blocks dispassionately known as ‘Buildings’ or ‘model lodging-houses, workmen’s residences, and barracks.’⁶² In Nevinson’s *Neighbours of Ours* (1895) a discerning neighbour states; ‘you never know what comes out o’ Buildins.’⁶³ The ‘buildings’ are a step too far even for the slumming protagonist of Whiteing’s *No. 5. John Street* (1899). Sir Charles recoils from the model block on John Street, a ‘vast, towering packing-case for humanity, pierced for miasmatic air and uncertain light.’⁶⁴

The transformation of the Nichol slum (1890-1900) was pioneering in both its magnitude and its elaborate design. As Wise has argued, the new estate revolutionised ideas of what council housing could look like. The plans (Fig. 31; below) showed:

A central ornamental garden upon a small hillock, from which would radiate seven 40-60ft wide avenues, lined with stately apartment blocks in red brick with honey-coloured brick stripes, terracotta mouldings, soaring chimneys, large gables, and turrets with elegant little bay windows. Nothing like this had ever been contemplated for housing the poor. Too often, philanthropic housing looked like a punishment inflicted on the poor – an unconscious carrying over of prison-like attributes to the design of tenement blocks. But these structures had more in common with Norman Shaw’s exorbitantly priced Albert Hall Mansions apartments than with the barracks of Peabody and other charitable companies.⁶⁵

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 183.

⁶¹ As Deborah Mutch has noted, Charlotte’s Buildings were pseudonymously named for Katharine Buildings, in which Harkness worked as a rent collector: Mutch, editor, Margaret Harkness, *A City Girl*, (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2015), p. 42, n. 7.

⁶² Besant, *East London*, p. 222.

⁶³ Nevinson, *Neighbours of Ours*, p. 33.

⁶⁴ Whiteing, *No. 5 John Street*, p. 15.

⁶⁵ Wise, *The Blackest Streets*, pp. 256-257.

Planners act under the misapprehension that constructed place will be responded to unconsciously and correctly by those it is meant to control. At ground level, the new buildings did look similar to the grand West End apartment blocks Wise compares them to. The picture from above tells a different story.



Fig. 31. The Boundary Street Scheme Plan No. 27.⁶⁶

Besant expressed anxiety that this immense project had its shortcomings. He emphasised the enormity of scale and ambition of the design, stating that the plan created: ‘a small town whose streets are fifty feet wide, whose houses are five stories high.’⁶⁷ Besant wondered, however, about the fate of its former inhabitants; ‘what became of the five thousand while these fine palaces were being built?’⁶⁸ The result was, as Besant feared, typical of slum clearance programmes: only 11 of 5,719 residents of the Nichol were rehoused in the new buildings. As a writer in *The Speaker* magazine observed in 1900, using the already-accepted synonym for the Nichol; ‘the dispossessed children of the Jago have

⁶⁶ Wise, *The Blackest Streets*, p. 257.

⁶⁷ Besant, *East London*, p. 221.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

crowded into the poor streets of the immediate neighbourhood.⁶⁹ The sanitary inspector of the area, after the clearance, declared in words reminiscent of Morrison's 'What is a Realist?', 'we shift the position of the housing problem, but never solve it.'⁷⁰

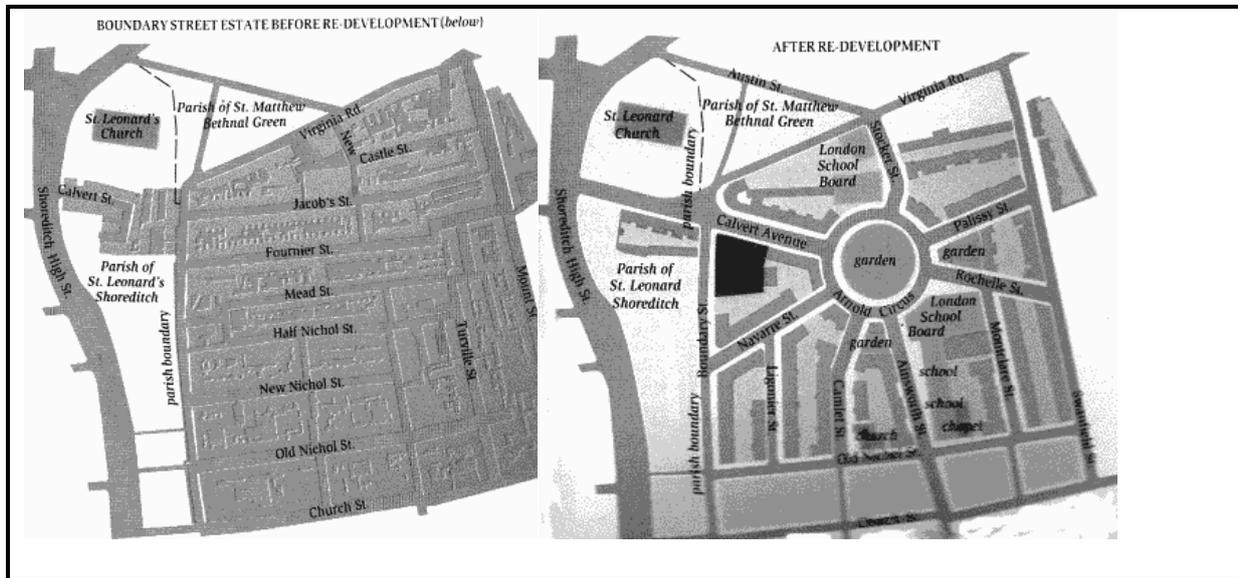


Fig. 32. Boundary Street before and after redevelopment

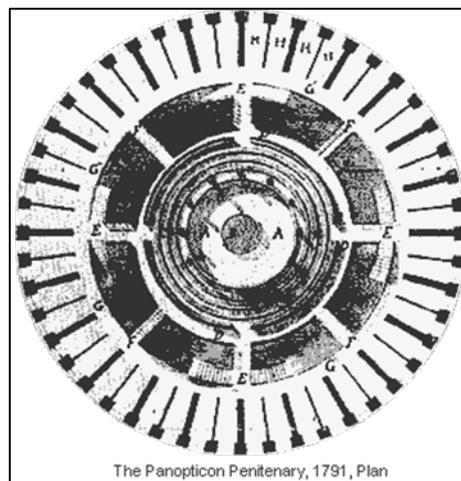


Fig 33. The Panopticon Penitentiary, 1791

Designs for the Boundary Street Estate were motivated by the urgency to bring light to places seen as not just architecturally but spiritually dark. As Ramasastry states, 'The removal of boundaries and the opening of congested space was translated into a mechanism

⁶⁹ L. Fisher, 'The Housing of the Poor' in *The Speaker: the liberal review* May 5 1900, Vol. 2. p. 147.

⁷⁰ Mr Foote, *The Municipal Journal*, 6th January 1898, cited in Robert Donald, 'Housing the Poor: Experiments and Problems' in *The Contemporary Review*, March 1900, 77, 323-333 (328)

The Boundary Street Estate, then, whilst recalling a prison structure, also anticipates a future of a 'higher and better form of industrial life'.⁷⁴ The new design reflects the dual experience of the slum's past – for the inhabitants, the Nichol could feel like a prison of poverty.⁷⁵ For slumming visitors, it had been a place of recreation.⁷⁶ Yet for Morrison, as a close reading of the mapped space within the text will show, it was the new cleared space that took on the feel of a prison. Wise makes a misreading of the plan when she neglects this aspect of the design. The slum dwellers would no longer be regulated by the police who feared them, but by the space itself.

It is quite persuasive to consider this pattern in relation to Jay's and Morrison's views on penal colonies for the poor. While Wise states that earlier social housing looked like a 'punishment', the new estate renders such punishment unnecessary.⁷⁷ Like many social housing projects of the nineteenth century, the estate was intended to manage the behaviour of the unmanageable East Enders, with proscriptions for cleanliness and work, and moral censure regarding use of space. The new estate, outwardly grand, was an erasure of the delinquent element.⁷⁸ The new space ought to allow the planners to monitor the 'barely mapped alleyways' and streets of the Nichol, because 'street improvements and regulation [operated as] forms of surveillance and social control'.⁷⁹ Yet in re-mapping the Nichol as the Jago, Morrison defies the purported success of this transformation.

IV. The Mappable Jago

Maps of the late-Victorian city represent the subservience of urban subjects to the space. This is in tension with Denis Wood's suggestion that maps can be used as forms of

⁷⁴ Howard, *Garden Cities*, p. 126.

⁷⁵ Samuel, *East End Underworld*, p. 1.

⁷⁶ Koven, *Slumming*, and Sandhu, *Night Haunts*, p. 11.

⁷⁷ Wise, *The Blackest Streets*, pp. 256-257.

⁷⁸ On regulations on the estate, see Wise, *The Blackest Streets*, p. 262.

⁷⁹ Peter Miles, Introduction to *A Child of the Jago*, p. ix.; Dennis, *Cities in Modernity*, p. 114.

protest. Wood contends that maps are not only engaged in demonstrating control over place along colonialist lines, but can be used to take back control of mapped places.⁸⁰ It seems however that a more accurate tenet is that: 'a map can only be challenged by another map.'⁸¹

Morrison's text describes a bound place with an interior life all its own: a microcosm with limited, hazardous routes out. It is important, however, that this is recognised through close not distant reading: through chorographic rather than cartographic practices. Moretti's excursions into the mapping of literature in recent years have argued that 'distant', empirical readings can produce 'a more rational literary history.'⁸² Morrison's text indicates not only how the lines of the map are used, but renders a subtle plotting of localities, which, like early chorography, demonstrate 'the qualities rather than the quantities of the things that it sets down.'⁸³ Casey makes the useful distinction between:

...*geography* and *chorography*, the latter referring specifically to the mapping of local regions and thus the particular configurations of land in these regions: hence their felt and lived landscape.⁸⁴

The estate into which the Nichol slum was transformed, Arnold Circus, is still there. It remains, however, a liminal space. For all its accessible wide avenues and proximity to Liverpool Street, Arnold Circus retains an unusual quietness and a sense of isolation due to the lack of traffic proceeding about its radial streets. Exploring Boundary Passage, which Morrison called 'the Posties', Whitehead has stated that this narrow alley retains 'a hint of the sinister.'⁸⁵ Such qualities cannot be enumerated.

The map Morrison provides is both general and particular. It both offers a panorama of the city space and limits that space to a local neighbourhood. This is the technique he

⁸⁰ Denis Wood calls this 'Counter-Mapping' in *Rethinking the Power of Maps* with John Fels and John Krygier (New York and London: The Guilford Press, 2010), part II.

⁸¹ Bernard Q. Nietschmann, *Maya Atlas* cited in Wood, *Rethinking the Power of Maps*, p.137.

⁸² Franco Moretti, *Graphs Maps Trees* (London and New York: Verso, 2005), p. 4.

⁸³ J. L. Berggren and Alexander Jones, *Ptolemy's Geography: An Annotated Translation of the Theoretical Chapters* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 58.

⁸⁴ Casey, *Representing Place*, p. 188.

⁸⁵ Whitehead, 'Beyond Boundary Passage', p. 135.

employs in the text of the novel. Reviewing *The Hole in the Wall* in 1902, without knowing about Morrison's personal history as a Londoner, American writer Elia Peattie said that one can either see London as a Londoner, 'microscopically' or as an artist does, the panorama, the whole.⁸⁶ The map allows *Jago* to achieve both of these.

The sketch map reveals the backstreets, those usually hidden from the middle-class view by the thoroughfares which are designed to mask them. Morrison challenges the Ordnance Survey's portrayal of an absence by engaging with the late-Victorian trope of slums as uncharted territory or foreign, unconquered land. In mapping the unmappable, Morrison casts himself as an explorer of the alternative communities hitherto as unexplored as the Mountains of the Moon. Morrison reminds us that the map is not the territory; but instead of disregarding mapping as representation, he replaces the map of a purportedly empty place with a map to a domain that must be reached in part by the reader's willingness to trust the authority of mapped place. He makes the place symbolic of communal neglect and communal misreading of the map. Through it he achieves what Masterman describes in *From the Abyss* (1902) as 'the creeping into conscious existence' of the population of the slum.⁸⁷

The inevitable failure of the clearance scheme is gestured towards in the selection of the epigraph to *Jago* which is taken from the book of Ezekiel. The passage selected by Morrison emphasises human accountability for the perpetual repair and ruination of the city:

One built up a wall, and lo, others daubed it with untempered mortar:
Say unto them which daub it with untempered mortar, that
it shall fall [...]
Lo, when the wall is fallen, shall it not be said unto you,
Where is the daubing wherewith ye have daubed it?⁸⁸

⁸⁶ 'Elia W. Peattie Calls Morrison's Novel "In Darkest London."' In *Chicago Daily Tribune*, (1872-1922); Oct 25, 1902; (17).

⁸⁷ C.F.G. Masterman, *From The Abyss: Of its Inhabitants by One of Them*, (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1980), p. 44.

⁸⁸ Ezekiel xiii.3. (10-12); Epigraph to *A Child of the Jago*.

When the first thirteen chapters of the novel were originally printed in serial form in the *New Review*, this epigraph prefaced every issue. The section refers to the destruction of Jerusalem by false prophets. In this selection of epigraph, Morrison aligns himself against innovations and sets up the city as always-already ruined. In William Chapman Sharpe's *Unreal Cities*, the book of Ezekiel is discussed in relation to Blake's poetry. Sharpe reveals that in the book of Ezekiel, God commands that those who sigh and weep over the state of the city are to be marked, and those so marked to be spared when all others are slayed:

Ezekiel's mark singles out those who are to be spared rather than punished, [but it is] a Cain-like sign of woe (and implicitly of weakness or helplessness) over the condition of the city.⁸⁹

Specified in proof to appear facing the first page of the novel, the epigraph cannot be overlooked.⁹⁰ This passage could refer to the poor design that made the Nichol slum so desperate. The actual 'daubing' used to build the eighteenth-century houses that comprised much of the slum was made from billysweet, a cheap alternative to mortar which neither set nor dried adequately.⁹¹ It is interesting to note that for Freemasons such as Morrison, this untempered mortar has a particular significance as a symbol of hypocrisy, the 'representation of evil as good.'⁹² Taken together with the map, therefore, the epigraph warns that the buildings with which the slum will be replaced will fail too.

In prefacing his novel with a map to a vanished place, Morrison causes that place to remain. As Moretti describes in 'Network Theory, Plot Analysis' (2011), the implication of

⁸⁹ William Chapman Sharpe, *Unreal Cities: Urban Figuration in Wordsworth, Baudelaire, Whitman, Eliot and Williams* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1990), p. 3.

⁹⁰ Tower Hamlets History Library, *A Child of the Jago* MSS, 1896, P/MIS/112/1.

⁹¹ Wise, *The Blackest Streets*, p. 16.

⁹² The aprons worn by the Freemasons were symbolic protection from improperly mixed or 'untempered' mortar, intended to remind them of their aim to create in their brotherhood a lasting stability, unity and beauty as their forefathers had created in their architecture as stonemasons. See Michael R. Poll, *Masonic Words and Phrases*, (London: Cornerstone, 2005), p. 95.

using spatial analysis is one of assigning permanence – ‘turning time into space’ ensures that ‘nothing ever disappears. What is done, cannot be undone.’⁹³ Re-mapping the Jago, Morrison reveals the ‘unreality of slum clearance policies’, which caused occupied place to be represented as blank space and which rehoused absurdly few of the people who had been dispossessed by the clearance.⁹⁴ Like Faulkner’s Yoknapatawpha County and Hardy’s Wessex, the Jago is not an entirely invented place but is analogous to the real place. In such places, the borders tend to mark the return to the real, so that for readers, only the borders of the realist place remain. These boundaries therefore persist as markers of place. Returning to today’s Boundary Street Estate, Whitehead notes that ‘the style and the money are now on what was the slum side of [Boundary Passage]. It’s the high street that feels drab and decayed.’⁹⁵ Exterior and interior have exchanged places: only the boundary lingers.

V. Going Straight

In the late-Victorian design of urban working-class housing, the insistence was upon ‘making the irregular straight, the cluttered orderly, the unbridled controlled.’⁹⁶ Slums challenged these efforts towards homogeneity. Indeed, their heterogeneity was a great part of their strange allure. In the article ‘An Unfashionable Slum in Liverpool’ published in religious magazine the *Quiver* in 1891, Arthur G. Symonds identified the appeal of the slum to contemporary commentators as one of heterogeneity:

In the worst slums of our great cities there is generally a something which redeems them from [...] [monotony]. Their irregularity, their dilapidation, their gloom, and that sense of the mystery of crime and sorrow which pervades them, lend some uniqueness to their outward appearance. The courts and alleys are crooked and winding; the angles of the houses are broken and rounded; and the darkness of the

⁹³ Moretti, ‘Network Theory, Plot Analysis’, Stanford Literary Lab Pamphlet 2, (2011), p. 3.

⁹⁴ Stedman Jones, *Outcast London*, p. 230.

⁹⁵ Whitehead, ‘Beyond Boundary Passage’, p. 138.

⁹⁶ James Winter, *London’s Teeming Streets, 1830-1914* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 32.

shadows themselves suggests unseen possibilities which possess the attraction and the terror of the unknown.⁹⁷

The making-straight of the streets of the Jago remove any value it has as place. Once transformed, it has no possibilities other than to be what it is. Similarly to ruins, which contain the potential to be revived, repaired, or admired as they exist in ruination, the only value of the slum lies in its potential to be repaired, and thus its value is removed when it is mended.

Slum dwellers in realist mapped novels face ‘the dire prospect of being trapped within representations themselves.’⁹⁸ That is, in the Jago, the Jagos experience the place as it has been represented by outsiders. The place in the early parts of the text is dark: the action of the Jago mostly takes place in the cross hatches of the map, the blackest spots. In this way Morrison shows the effect of the map as representation. The Jagos later experience the place as wasteland, as the OS map represented it. Finally they experience the place as the Panopticon-inspired design of the new estate. While being kept ignorant of the plans to redesign them by inflicting the view from above upon them, the Jagos express that they feel subjected to the view from above, the privileged view which they can never access. For them, the transformation of the slum does not result in greater freedom of movement. Rather, the new straight streets disorientate them: passage along them proves fatal.

With the transformation of the Jago, the movements of the inhabitants, which ought to be expanded, instead close down. This is due to the problem of homogenous, straight street design – the ‘nightmare of a world that is all streets’ discussed throughout late-nineteenth century fiction.⁹⁹ In Zola’s *L’Assommoir* (1877), Somerset Maugham’s *Liza of Lambeth*

⁹⁷ Arthur G. Symonds, ‘An Unfashionable Slum in Liverpool: Richmond Fair’, *Quiver* Vol. 29. Issue 361., Jan. 1894. 895-900 (895).

⁹⁸ Casey, *Representing Place*, p. 243.

⁹⁹ Besant, *East London*, p. 255.

(1897), and in all of Morrison's East End fiction, straight streets are shown to prohibit mobility and happiness.

The impossibility of spatial practice on straight streets was expressed by Maugham, a writer greatly influenced by Morrison, in his first novel *Liza of Lambeth*. This novel, like *Jago* and *Tales*, suggests that streets without alleviation from straight lines are endless and unliveable. Liza's street is described thus:

Vere Street, Lambeth, is a short, straight street leading out of the Westminster Bridge Road; it has forty houses on one side and forty houses on the other, and these eighty houses are very much more like one another than ever peas are like peas, or young ladies like young ladies. [...] [The houses] are perfectly flat, without a bow-window or even a projecting cornice or window-sill to break the straightness of the line from one end of the street to another.¹⁰⁰

Liza's difference from this undeviating place precipitates her separation from the community and eventually leads to her death. Straight streets present a similar problem of isolation in *L'Assommoir*. Gervaise, having been left alone in Paris by Lantier, views the straight streets – which ought to provide access to the city – as a trap:

[She] looked along the outer boulevards, to the left and to the right, her eyes pausing at either end, filled with a nameless dread, as if, from now on, her life would be lived out within this space, bounded by a slaughterhouse and a hospital.¹⁰¹

Straight lines are fatal in Morrison's poignant short story 'Behind the Shade'. The inhabitants of the 'odd box of a cottage' built at the end of a uniform, and very straight, street; 'two parallels of brick pierced with windows and doors'.¹⁰² The difference of the house to the street is distorted into the difference of the ladies from their locale. Their isolation in this house causes the street itself to attack them, as their occupation of the cottage, 'where the builder had found a remnant of land too small for another six-roomer' defies the otherwise uniform street (75). As Georges Perec once observed, buildings in a

¹⁰⁰ Maugham, *Liza of Lambeth*, p. 3.

¹⁰¹ Zola, *L'Assommoir*, p. 33.

¹⁰² Arthur Morrison, 'Behind the Shade' in *Tales of Mean Streets* (London: Faber, 2008), pp. 75-82. (p. 75.) Further references in the text.

street 'are expected to form a line, and it's a serious defect in them when they don't do so. They are then said to be 'subject to alignment', meaning that they can by rights be demolished, so as to be rebuilt in a straight line with others.'¹⁰³ Lacking the power to demolish the difference indicated by the house, the street itself silently attacks the women who are visibly different in their practice of space. In 'Behind the Shade' the odd box surrenders to the perils of isolation from locality. In the story, we never enter the odd box of a cottage until the final pages, when the wooden box on which one of the dead women is found, as if prepared for her paupers' funeral, echoes the shape of the 'odd box' of the cottage (81).

It is usual in slum texts for the 'other' to be a figure external in some way to the slum, penetrating or descending into it by force of will or decline from grace. In 'Behind the Shade' the others are part of the text, and part of the place. This is a tale about the punishment of otherness by geography. In such an area, like that described in *Liza of Lambeth*, there can be no escape because there can be no anomalies. The characteristics of this place are straight streets, but these streets, like those in the Jago, do not go anywhere. The very uniformity prevents difference and movement. As Krzak says, 'the drab environment is an inescapable trap.'¹⁰⁴

Slum fictions are obsessed with how bodies occupy space, and how movement leads to assimilation into place – that is, how places change in response to the passage through them of human bodies in perpetual motion. Mapped texts struggle against the problem that Pile and Thrift have observed, whereby:

The human subject is difficult to map for various reasons. There is the difficulty of mapping something that does not have precise boundaries [...] There is the difficulty of mapping something that is always on the move, culturally and in fact.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Georges Perec, *Species of Spaces and Other Pieces* ed. and translated by John Sturrock (London: Penguin Classics, 2008), p. 46.

¹⁰⁴ Krzak, Preface to *Tales of Mean Streets*, p. 14.

¹⁰⁵ Steve Pile and Nigel Thrift, *Mapping the Subject*, p. 1.

Slum dwellers, however, are not ‘always on the move culturally’, and they *do* have ‘precise boundaries.’ Describing the impact of modernity, *Jago* shows how circumscribed movement within slums conflicts with outward pressure to change. While Morrison’s early childhood had been characterised by ‘flitting’ between rented homes, for Dicky it is the house itself that is flitting. Reading the movement of its protagonists calls to mind Michel de Certeau’s assertion when discussing walkers and city maps:

Surveys of routes miss what was: the act itself of passing by. The operation of walking [or] wandering [...] the activity of passers-by, is transformed into points that draw a totalising and reversible line on the map. They allow us to grasp only a relic set in the nowhen of a surface of projection.¹⁰⁶

The paradox of the urban stroller having both a ‘totalising’ and ‘reversible’ influence on the map can be seen in *Jago*. The Jagos are the problem which ought to be solved by cartographic cleansing, but their resistance to it troubles the map – it is the inhabitants of the fictional slum that are the ‘relic’ which troubles the purported objectivity of the map. By using close reading, rather than Moretti’s ‘distant’ reading, activity and movement can be observed as a process of struggle against the totalising imperative of the map.

The peripatetic person in the late-nineteenth century was suspicious due to his or her perceived vagrancy, as Brantlinger and Ulin and more recently Adam Hansen have observed. The new streets aspire to quell this movement, which was thought to demonstrate slum-dwellers’ innate deviance.¹⁰⁷ Examining the representation of occupation of and movement through place within the text supports Morrison’s mapping of it. Dicky and Josh both move in and around the Jago in patterns of irregular repetition. The inability of slum dwellers to join modernity is due to the clash between their fixity within the slum borders and their

¹⁰⁶ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 97.

¹⁰⁷ Adam Hansen, ‘Exhibiting Vagrancy, 1851: Victorian London and the “Vagabond Savage”’. *Literary London: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Representation of London*, Volume 2 Number 2 (September 2004). <http://www.literarylondon.org/london-journal/september2004/hansen.html>. Accessed on 24/3/2015; Patrick Brantlinger and Donald Ulin, ‘Policing Nomads: Discourse and Social Control in Early Victorian England’ *Cultural Critique*, No. 25 (Autumn, 1993), 33-63.

perpetual movement, which in turn classes them as deviant. By mapping the Jago, Morrison proves even if unwittingly, that Dicky cannot be blamed for his fate, which arises from ‘the internalisation of the disease, geography.’¹⁰⁸

Although it is not clear whether Morrison himself drew the map to the Jago, a reading of his 1889 article for *The People* on ‘Jacob’s Island’ suggests his understanding of the effects of mapping on a similar place. The treatment of mapping in this article prefigures its treatment in the Jago. The technique he used in ‘Jacob’s Island’ and ‘Whitechapel’ is repeated in *Jago* - beginning at the known place ‘from where, off Shoreditch High St’, Morrison enables a reader to follow him to the unknown through this literary mapping of place: he altered the proofs to read ‘led to Old Jago Street’ rather than ‘led to Shoreditch High Street’; thus turning the place inside out; proceeding from the known to the unknown.¹⁰⁹

Morrison claims in the article that ‘not one man in a dozen could point exactly to Jacob’s Island on a map of London to save his life.’ Morrison instructs the reader of ‘Jacob’s Island’ precisely how to map the unknown place onto the known environment. This is consistent with what the map of the Jago portrays – the unknown site lurking behind the known streets:

Take [...] a map, and look for where St. Saviour’s Dock extends almost at right angles from the Thames into Bermondsey. Mill-street skirts the eastern bank of the dock, and turning from the east side of Mill-street, London-street leads to George’s-row. Draw a line from St. Saviour’s Dock, opposite the end of London-street, across Mill-street, down London-street, rather nearer the north side, across George’s-row and Bermondsey Wall into the river. Your line will be the Old Folly Ditch, and with the river and the dock will fulfil the conditions necessary to make an island, and this island will be Jacob’s Island.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Burgan, ‘Mapping Contagion’, p. 51.

¹⁰⁹ Tower Hamlets History Library, *A Child of the Jago* MSS, 1896, P/MIS/112/1., p. 1.

¹¹⁰ Morrison, ‘Cockney Corners XIII: Jacob’s Island’, p. 2. Further references will appear in text.

ended North at Honey Lane - there, the Jago [...] lay and festered; and half way along Old Jago Street a narrow archway gave upon Jago Court, the blackest hole in all that pit. (11).

The repetition of the conjunction 'where' draws the limits of place in text for the reader. The description of how to locate the place is reminiscent of that in 'Jacob's Island' in which the reader is incited to map the place. Beginning as he does in 'Jacob's Island' with St. Saviour's Dock as the mapped location, and moving into the unknown, Morrison describes where the Jago can be found. The Jago's limits are marked out: 'From where [...] to where [...] from where [...] to where [...] there' (11). This representation of space is deictic: it conveys geographical information, but the real places need to be located alongside the 'where' and 'there' in order for knowledge to be conveyed.

For pedestrians and dwellers streets ought to provide passageways and lead to other spaces. Slum places are scattered with streets that repudiate this; streets that seem to go nowhere. City planners of the nineteenth century allotted streets another purpose – as architect H.H. Statham wrote in 1896, street architecture ought to enable the 'planting [of] buildings as closely as possible together in towns', to be 'structurally united into one long mass.'¹¹² Richard Dennis discusses the importance of streets in modernity:

New or developed streets [...] demonstrated the potential for 'creative destruction' – the reasons for their construction and direction involved the destruction of undesirable, archaic or anachronistic elements of the old urban morphology.¹¹³

Unstreetly streets such as those Dicky and the Jagos use are archaic, unseemly, and must be destroyed. Thomas Beames pointed out in 1852 that the Great Fire of 1666 had not reached the East End, therefore its streets were uniquely ancient, crumbling and impassable, 'in a condition little removed from their original form.'¹¹⁴

¹¹² H. H. Statham, 'Street Architectures', *British Architect*, 1874-1919, December 11th 1896, 415-418 (415).

¹¹³ Dennis, *Cities in Modernity*, p. 113.

¹¹⁴ Beames, *The Rookeries*, p. 95.

In the Jago, streets are not strictly exterior spaces for passage and movement. For Dicky, 'a home is possible in the street', because the streets within the Jago do not operate as such: they are going nowhere.¹¹⁵ They are reminiscent, rather, of earlier nineteenth-century streets, which had a multiplicity of function, acting as both playground and workplace: the effect conveyed in *Jago* is of the blurring of boundaries between interior and exterior. When we first encounter the Jagos, they are sleeping on the streets due to unpleasantly hot weather:

Below the hot, heavy air lay a rank oppression on the contorted forms of those who made for sleep on the pavement [...] They were not there for lack of shelter, but because in this weather repose was less unlikely in the street than within doors (11).

'Within doors', however, is a myth in itself in the Jago. As Dicky enters his home, the 'first-floor back' we are told there are in fact very few front doors in the place:

Front doors were used merely as firewood in the Old Jago, and most had been burnt there many years ago. If perchance one could have been found still on its hinges, it stood ever open and would not shut. Thus at night the Jago doorways were a row of black holes, foul and forbidding (14).

In such a place, interior and exterior are blurred: 'rooms bleed into streets.'¹¹⁶ Wise has lamented the loss of this 'indiscriminate mixing of the outdoor (birds, animals, plants) with the indoor' after the building of the estate.¹¹⁷ But in the Jago the blurred boundaries cause simultaneously the loss of a streetly quality to the streets, and the loss of a homely quality to the houses. The unstreetly streets undertake a multiple role in the lives of their inhabitants due to this breakdown of the divisions between public and private, inside and outside. The place is marked by this overuse of the streets, which nineteenth-century urban planning sought to do away with.

The peculiarities of Dicky's childhood inhere in the overuse of the street. As Lewis Mumford has argued:

¹¹⁵ Marcus, *Apartment Stories*, p. 149.

¹¹⁶ Andrew Thacker, *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2009), p. 7.

¹¹⁷ Wise, *The Blackest Streets*, p. 260.

No serious recognition of the need for children's playgrounds came till after 1870, by which time the space needed could be acquired only at a colossal outlay. Hence the peculiar function of the over-developed street in the commercial plan: it was forced to take the place of the back garden and protected square of the medieval town, or of the open place and park of the baroque order. Thus this paved desert, adapted primarily to wheeled traffic, became also park, promenade and playground: a grim park, a dusty promenade, a dangerous playground.¹¹⁸

Similarly, in 'Jacob's Island', 'the playground is in the gutter' where 'innumerable children' play (2). Dicky seeks space for play and uses it, like the children in Harkness's *A City Girl*:

There was a rumour current in the Buildings that the company who had built the Charlotte block meant to buy [the waste land nearby] and lay it out as a pleasure-ground for casuals. George, the caretaker, knew different. He advised the children to make the most of the open space while they had it, which they did, building houses with the stones and bricks, shaping mud pies in the puddles and playing horses from north to south, from east to west of it.¹¹⁹

Plans to 'improve' the city do not accommodate the needs of its children, instead forcing them to grow in a shrinking space.

Dicky's movement is a repeated shift between street, stairs, room, gap-between-fences, streets, shop (to steal or work) street, stairs, room, stairs, gap-between-fences and so on. As a child, Dicky makes dens of these in-between places. In the manner of middle- and upper-class children making dens in their gardens or from chairs and sheets, he and Tommy Rann hide in 'a snug fastness in Jago Row' (31). Dicky uses the entire Jago as a 'dangerous playground.' The use of space by Dicky demonstrates his total assimilation into the Jago. He is immersed in the place: no corner of it is unhomelike to him, other than his home in the first floor back, which he avoids when possible. Other houses are useful merely as passages for movement. When Dicky steals the music box, he is flung into a house to escape his pursuers, and escapes through the court behind:

He turned one last corner and almost fell against a vast, fat, unkempt woman "Ere y'are, boy", the woman said, and flung him by the shoulder through the doorway by which she stood. He was saved [...] for he could never have reached the street's end.

¹¹⁸ Mumford, *The City in History*, p. 486.

¹¹⁹ Harkness, *A City Girl*, p.28.

[...] Dicky caught the stair-post for a moment's support, and then staggered out at the back of the house [...] The back door gave on a cobble-paved court [...] The court ended in an arched passage, through which he gained the street beyond (54-55).

Larry R. Ford argues that it is these in-between places, the alleys and courts, which are 'the ordinary, the everyday spaces' of cities.¹²⁰ However, as these internal streets are the ones that proved most difficult to cartographers, they took on rather a mythical quality: they are places in which anything might happen.

It is the spaces between streets that prove most useful for Dicky's passage through the place:

Dicky [...] carried his way deviously toward home. Working through the parts beyond Jago Row, he fetched round into Honey Lane, so coming at New Jago Street from the farther side. Choosing one of the houses whose backs gave on Jago Court, he slipped through the passage, and so, by the back yard, crawled through the broken fence into the court. Left and right were the fronts of houses, four a side. Before him, to the right of the narrow archway leading to Old Jago Street, was the window of his own home. He gained the back yard quietly (46).

In *The Princess Casamassima* (1886), James requires of Hyacinth that he is 'both sufficiently thoughtful and sufficiently disinherited' – poor enough to be wandering the streets of London, but with a bohemian background which lends a romance to his peregrinations.¹²¹ While Hyacinth takes on the role of the flâneur, absorbing sensations in the streets, Dicky moves furtively, always back to the Jago, and always via liminal routes - around corners, through narrow passageways and blind alleys. His movements are not always willing – violence, fear of pursuit, and the bitter weather in turn 'whipped Dicky Perrott home' (133). All Dicky's movements serve to reveal his subservience to the slum and the effectiveness with which it binds him into place.

¹²⁰ Larry R. Ford, *The Spaces Between Buildings* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), p. 4.

¹²¹ Henry James, *The Princess Casamassima*, ed. David Brewer [1886] (London: Penguin, 1987). p. 43.

Dicky's performance of place through alleys and corners is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's description of the houses of Paris as 'stone wings or scenery [*steinerne Couliissen*] between which one walks.'¹²² As Marcus discusses, Benjamin's description:

...conjures contradictory spatial images. *Couliissen* can mean the wings of a theatre, which in the sentence's ambiguous syntax would make either the houses themselves or the space between them into hallways leading to a stage. If the houses are the wings, they become passages to and from the stage that is the street; if the spaces between them are wings, then the streets become enclosed spaces leading to domestic theatre.¹²³

In the mapping of Dicky's routes into and out of the Jago, Morrison brings the question of which of the lines of the map come into relief during usage. In 'Jacob's Island', Morrison made a similar observation to Benjamin's: descending into the Tower subway, one experienced the city as backstage: 'the increasing closeness of the air, provoke[d] vague recollections of a descent from among frames and carpenters and ropes and pulleys to the dimmest recesses behind and below the stage of a theatre' (2). By understanding that the crosshatches of the map are as used as passages as much as the white lines, we can understand how place operates, and see it from backstage.

Marginality is performed in liminal places: alleys, cellars and holes. Perec has argued that 'contrary to the buildings, which almost always belong to someone, the streets in principle belong to no one.'¹²⁴ However, this was not the case for Victorian streets, in which neglectful private owners allowed for 'the perpetuation of hundreds of miserable little skeins of foot-pavement running, or rather limping, between rows of decayed and fever-haunted houses.'¹²⁵ Victorian streets always belonged to someone, and the Jagos can only resist this governance of the street by using in-between places for passage.

¹²² Walter Benjamin cited in Marcus, *Apartment Stories*, p. 13.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹²⁴ Perec, *Species of Spaces*, p. 47.

¹²⁵ Sala cited in Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, p. 16.

The interpolation of the outsider, Sturt, into the Jago transforms the physical space, and interrupts the repeated patterns of Dicky's movement. When Jago Court is destroyed in the first stage of the transformation of the place, the houses are turned inside out by Sturt's intervention. Dicky is found engaged in 'home industries' on a pile of his neighbours' belongings in the 'bivouac' that arises in the street whilst the displaced Jagos wait for Father Sturt to re-house them (91). The inverted nature of the Jago with which the novel began has been accentuated rather than assuaged. Sturt has tried to cure the Jago with the very plague that caused the conditions there. McLaughlin makes a terse analysis of William Booth's similarly misguided solution to the problem of the East End; 'to make a road clear through it':

It is precisely this solution or "Way Out" that urban historians point to as creating the horrific overcrowding of the East End in the first place [...] Booth's solution to Darkest England is its very condition of possibility.¹²⁶

Morrison reveals that Sturt's solutions are likewise the condition of their perpetuation. Sturt has halted Dicky's continual movement, thinking thus to cure his potential vagrancy. This instance, following the destruction of his home in Jago Court, is the first time we see him behave as though he is 'at home':

The bivouac in Old Jago Street melted away [...] Father Sturt's task [of re-housing those he had dispossessed] was nearly over, when, returning to Old Jago Street, he saw Dicky Perrott sitting by a still-remaining heap [...] with a baby on it, and absorbed in the weaving of rush bags (91-92).

This stillness, however, is a problem in itself. In G.R. Sims's collection of sketches, *Living London* (1901), Morrison wrote of 'Loafing London' with his typically sardonic mock-anthropological tone:

It is in London that the loafer attains his proper perfection – even the perfection of specialisation. [...] the East-End loafer differs in professional style from the loafer of the West...¹²⁷

¹²⁶ McLaughlin, *Writing the Urban Jungle*, p. 85.

¹²⁷ Arthur Morrison, 'Loafing London' in G.R. Sims *Living London*, p. 357.

This depiction of the loafer is reminiscent of Dickens's identification, in the 1862 article 'Night Walks', of men who suffer from 'Dry Rot': 'The first strong external revelation of the Dry Rot in men, is a tendency to lurk and lounge; to be at street-corners without intelligible reason'.¹²⁸ For both Morrison and Dickens, men who do not walk are enfeebled. Harkness too picks up on the stillness of men as a problem, identifying with heavy irony in her 1889 novel *In Darkest London* the East End loafer, 'monarch of all he surveys', who in reality has no power or agency.¹²⁹ Dicky's perpetual movement, then, tells us something about the promise of his character. He is not indolent: he is ever on the move, though going nowhere. The boundaries of the map work with the narrative to illustrate that although he has the will and the capacity to escape, he must always return to the centre.

Sturt's interventions ought to open up space for Dicky, as he gets him engaged as a shop-boy at Grinder's store on Bethnal Green Road. However, as Keating has observed, 'ultimately, the power of the slum is greater than the power of the priest.'¹³⁰ Sturt's destruction serves merely to emphasise the power of the repetitive pattern of movement in which Dicky is trapped. Father Sturt's planned 'improvements' perpetuate Dicky's repetition so that his movement out to Bethnal Green Road is in fact a movement back into the Jago. He returns to the Jago, after being sacked, not through streets but through 'dark turnings' (101). The Jago maintains its control in spite of movement beyond its physical limits. Lynsey Hanley's recent work insists on the importance of this psychological aspect of living in marginal places: it is 'the wall in the head.'¹³¹ We can see the representation of this most clearly in the fact that Dicky, on contemplating death, anticipates heaven as Father Sturt's sitting room:

¹²⁸ Charles Dickens, 'Night Walks', in *All the Year Round*, Vol. 3; 65; Jul 21 1860. 348-352, (350).

¹²⁹ Margaret Harkness, *In Darkest London* (Cambridge: Black Apollo Press, 2003), p. 13.

¹³⁰ Keating, *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction*, p. 181.

¹³¹ Lynsey Hanley, *Estates: An Intimate History* (London: Granta, 2008), p. 148. Hanley describes this phenomenon in relation to living in badly planned council housing, echoing Morrison's distaste for 'barracks' style blocks and uniformity.

It would be a comfortable thing for himself if he could die then and there. But it would never do for mother and the children to be left helpless. How good for them all to go off easily together, and wake in some pleasant place, say a place like Father Sturt's sitting room (163).

Even heaven cannot be imagined to be beyond the Jago's boundaries.

Dicky in this central section of the novel in fact moves further afield than Morrison's map suggests. Dicky seeks work and leisure as far away as St Paul's, Norton Folgate, Mile End and Stepney. In each of these places, however, his difference as a 'Jago' is recognised; and these other places prove to have their own impenetrable boundaries. The docks, for example, are 'guarded jealously by the pirate boys of the neighbourhood' (134). Morrison's map is a map of spatial practice, delineating the area to which Dicky is imaginatively and culturally bound.

Dicky's walks should be compared with those of Johnny in *To London Town* (1899). Through his explorations, Johnny becomes as much at home in the docks as he had been in Epping Forest. He occupies the privileged position of the flâneur. The everyday customs of the region pass into Johnny's consciousness as he strolls:

In his walks [...] he observed one or two matters. As to costume he perceived that the men wore blue dungaree jackets with large bone buttons [...] He also saw that whereas yesterday the back yards were brisk with fluttering linen, today they held scarce any [...] For a woman fell in her neighbours' respect the later in the week her washing day came (88).

In *To London Town*, straying emerges as a positive approach to the city, in a way that recalls Benjamin, particularly in the context of Johnny's moving from Epping Forest to London:

[T]o lose oneself in a city – as one loses oneself in a forest – that calls for quite a different schooling. Then, signboards and street names, passers-by, roofs, kiosks, or bars must speak to the wanderer like a cracking twig under his feet in the forest.¹³²

¹³² Benjamin, *A Berlin Chronicle*, cited in Alan Woods and Ralph Rumney, *The Map is Not the Territory* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 79.

To get lost, for Johnny, will always be a safer bet than for Dicky, because *To London Town* is located so firmly in a historical geography – locations such as Artichoke Tavern and Sir Walter Raleigh’s House are signs of a recognisable, not shameful and not merely literary, history persisting unthreateningly in Johnny’s present.¹³³ The contrast with Dicky’s movement illustrates the failure of Jagos to successfully inscribe place by walking. Johnny is successful in claiming London for himself because of his walks. As de Certeau argues, ‘the street geometrically defined by urban planning is transformed into a space by walkers.’¹³⁴ Nead too supports this view of walking as gaining of power by walkers; she argues that ‘the everyday spaces of the street resist the rational, geometric organisation of the aerial, planner’s viewpoint’.¹³⁵ However, this is only possible for a certain class of walker. Dicky is unable to move beyond the boundaries drawn out for him on the map. There is no possibility of his getting lost – he always finds his way back to the Jago.

The Jago is not adapted to modern movement. By Mumford’s analysis it far predates nineteenth-century planning, because no vehicles penetrate the interior. The only cart that comes into the Jago fails to travel through it:

There was a clatter on the stones of Luck Row, and a light van came rattling into Old Jago Street [...] The sight was so novel that for a moment the gang merely grinned. This man must be a greenhorn – new to the neighbourhood – to venture a load of goods up Luck Row. [...] He was pale and flustered, and he called wildly, as he looked this way and that: ‘A man’s stole somethin’ auf my van. Where’s ‘e gawn?’ [...] The carman [...] was knocked off the van in a heap [...] the senseless carman was put on the floor of the van, the tailboard was raised, and one of the gang led the horse away, to lose the whole thing in the busy streets (84-85).

The failure of the carriage to pass through the place demonstrates that the ‘Jago’ is a particularly ‘dangerous playground’ for interlopers. The Jagos violently reclaim the area for pedestrians. Ford states that ‘with the rise of horse-drawn [...] vehicles, the street became less a part of the community and more of a place for transient strangers, people passing

¹³³ O’Neill on Artichoke Tavern, *My East End*, pp. 64-65.

¹³⁴ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 117.

¹³⁵ Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, p. 75.

through.’¹³⁶ The theft of the carriage is therefore not simply a theft but an act of resistance by the Jagos to modernising forces which make their semi-private streets public.

The north and east sides of Morrison’s sketch map fade into indistinctness. This enhances the textual representation of the outer limits as irrelevant to the Jago. Mr Beveridge tells Dicky repeatedly that he is of the Jago and cannot escape it. He tells Dicky to hope to become one of the ‘Igh Mob, which is ‘the best the world has for you, for the Jago’s got you, and that’s the only way out, except gaol and the gallows’ (60). There is no distance in the mapped text of the novel: it must be provided by the reader, who is the only aspect of distance in relation to the text. The reader is intended and expected to provide the ‘relativity’ which Wells thought the text was lacking. Aside from jail, Josh’s trip to Canonbury is the furthest a Jago travels in the novel. This journey emphasises the inescapability of the Jago. Josh unwittingly steals from ‘so very high a mobsman that that it would have been a slander and a libel, and a very great expense, to write him down a mobsman at all’ (117). Such a man comes from the Jago to infect reputable neighbourhoods. This ‘way out’ of the Jago is in fact a way back in. Stealing from the mobsman is more dangerous than other thefts because it is a betrayal of Jago principles – the high mob are a ‘pattern’ to which Jagos ought to aspire (60). Yet even this accidental betrayal of values cannot give Josh a way out. The theft of the watch and the resultant jail sentence consolidate his belonging to the Jago and assimilates him so thoroughly into the Rann faction that Bill Rann becomes his ‘brother-in-law’ for a time (141).

The Jago is comprised of misplaced fragments, gaps and orifices. It is an everted space, where stairs are broken and their railings are found outside. The Jago is experienced by its inhabitants as a ruin; it is ancient and deteriorating. It also, however, holds some of the appeal which ruins have, in that it can be used non-deterministically, as Dicky uses upturned market barrows as dens. Even when he is able to go beyond the Jago bounds, Dicky seeks

¹³⁶ Ford, *Spaces Between Buildings*, pp. 6-7.

spaces that in their ruined state seem appropriate to him. The slum's inhabitants are so aligned to their ruined home that they are known as 'Jagos.' In Shoreditch High Street, outside the Jago, Dicky sees that 'A shop had been boarded up after a fire [...] [one could] sit [...] safe from interference. Here he took his seat' (53). Even in the space of commerce and modernity, the Jagos associate themselves with ruins. Father Sturt thinks it is the people themselves who have created the ruin, that the Jago is 'a howling sea of human wreckage.' (195). Morrison's view is less clear, however. In spite of Morrison's own friendship with and admiration for Jay, Morrison represents Sturt as ultimately unsuccessful, not to say misguided. His efforts in razing the slum are collaborated with by the LCC, but Morrison presents the LCC's efforts as more effective, though less compassionate to the Jagos.

Sturt's demolition of Jago Court is greeted with 'a rush of applications for rooms in the doomed houses, each applicant demanding to be accommodated by the eviction of somebody already established, but now disinterestedly discovered to be a bad tenant.' In this passage ruination is a mutual process – Sturt's plan destroys, but the moral ruination of the Jagos infects. When the house-wreckers establish a hoarding around the buildings to be destroyed, it vanishes, and 'there was a loud crackling where the Jagos boiled their pots.' (89). The emptying of the houses by the wreckers is couched in positive terms: they are 'letting light and air at last into the subterraneous basements where men and women had swarmed, and bred, and died, like wolves in their lairs' (93).

Sturt's removal of the Court precedes the entire clearance of the slum, to which the character Jerry Gullen's response is that "The street's clean ruined. Wot's the good o' livin' ere now? Wy, a man mustn't even do a click, [that is, steal] blimy!" (141). Jerry's repugnance at the cleared space is due to its perceived moral improvement. Jerry's resistance to this is apparent in this ironic juxtaposition of 'clean' with 'ruined'. Though an ordinary usage of the slang 'clean', the implication is that by being made clean, the place has been ruined.

However, for other characters the ruination of the Jago as it is recreated is positive in surprising ways. The razing of the slum is revealed only gradually as a shattering transformation.

Josh's final attempt to escape the Jago makes his belonging-to the Jago absolute. He is consumed and surrounded on all sides by the Jago; he is buried alive in the ruined slum. The destruction of the slum concomitantly disorients and awakens Josh. After murdering the informer Weech, Josh attempts to escape into the warren of the Jago but is thwarted by the clearance: 'he had forgotten the demolition [...] the place of it lay suddenly before him – an open waste [...] skirted by the straight streets' (151). However, the demolition of the already-ruined place also prompts the introduction of interior monologue exposing the psychological reality of Josh. The Jago was intensely overcrowded, so that the exposed cellar in the razed slum into which Josh falls allows him, against will or direction, to be alone for the first time in the text. Accompanying this is a shift in the change of address – Morrison shifts to free indirect address, revealing Josh's thoughts for the first time. In the cleared space of the destroyed slum, self-consciousness is possible:

He had been a fool to think of the cellar: why not any corner among the walls above? [...] Far better to have struck out boldly across the streets by Columbia Market to the canal: who could have seen the smears in the darkness [...] He was trapped like a rat [...] He might have crawled up the steps on hands and knees, but what was the use of that? (152).

However, it is also revealed that this self-consciousness is restricted, in the same way that the slum's boundaries restricted movement. Now that he is not at home in the place, his thoughts are inhibited, they are 'eager, trivial, crowded'; he feels that they chase each other (153).

Immobile, Josh cannot think clearly – 'to take heed for the future [...] [was] impossible, sitting there inactive' (153). Josh is thwarted because he awakens not into his own dream, but into Sturt's.

In a novel of topographical exactitude, Morrison's decision not to portray the new space in the radial design, which he would have seen, is intriguing. The straight streets he portrays as comprising the new slum are the architectural manifestation of Josh's undesirability – the newly formed city has no space for him. The action of the 'creeping' county council legislators means that for Josh; 'the open place of possibility becomes the closed space of totality.'¹³⁷ Straight streets are an impossibility for Josh. After murdering Weech for getting Dicky sacked when he was "goin' straight", Josh can never 'go straight' on the new straight streets (150).

We can compare Josh's experience with the aesthetic and experiential value of straight lines in the baroque city, as described by Lewis Mumford:

Movement in a straight line along an avenue was not merely an economy but a special pleasure: it brought into the city the stimulus and exhilaration of swift motion, which hitherto only the horseman had known galloping over the fields or through the hunting forest. It was possible to recreate this pleasure aesthetically by the regular setting of buildings [...] whose horizontal lines tended towards the same vanishing point as that towards which the carriage itself was rolling. In walking, the eye courts variety, but above this gait, movement demands repetition of the units that are to be seen.¹³⁸

The straight line affords a privileged viewpoint. In nineteenth-century urban design, parallel lines operate for the visual pleasure of carriage riders, not for the lesser experience of pedestrians.

For Josh, the new streets do not radiate, they encircle: they trap, providing not ways out but dead ends. Josh's experience of place closes down as the development continues: the 'open waste' is enclosed by 'the straight streets and the yellow barracks' (151). Here the novel again recalls the failure of 'improvements' noted in 'Jacob's Island.' In the article, Morrison describes the prominent Peabody Buildings which seem to cover 'every inch' of ground. The new buildings are 'ugly, bare, comfortless, yellow brick abominations' (2). He

¹³⁷ Stanley, *City Visions*, p. 92.

¹³⁸ Mumford, *The City in History*, p. 422.

describes them as ‘great plain expanses of rough, yellow brick [...] unlovely prisons [...] in which to pack away out of sight so much heavy, day-to-day, uncomplaining, empty life’ (2). Reading this interpretation alongside *Jago* clarifies that the cleared space, for Josh, retains the characteristics of Morrison’s map – straight streets, boundedness: a trap.¹³⁹

As Josh faces execution, his thoughts relate again to space: ‘it was dark in the passage but the door led into the yard, where it was light and open, and the sparrows were twittering [...] This was the place’ (160). Josh’s trial and hanging are the stylistic highpoints in the novel. Even the *San Francisco Chronicle*, which was equivocal about Morrison’s success in the novel, stated that ‘no better work has been done in recent fiction than the description of the trial and hanging of Josh.’¹⁴⁰ Morrison suggests that it is best for Josh to die: as a Jago, he can only belong in the ruin of the Jago. However, the presentation of Josh’s thoughts to the reader suggests what Josh may have been, had he ever had a space to himself, a space between ruin and reincarnation. Concomitantly with the opening up of space, Josh remains trapped. The pathos is that Josh has awakened to himself only to be put to death.

Dicky’s fatal stabbing occurs by the site of the ruined houses, at the open waste the destruction has created. The opened space is the precursor to the revelation of Dicky’s thoughts to the reader; like Josh, the open space opens up interior dialogue, but also as for Josh, the place that seems like a solution is a place that will destroy. In the cleared space, Dicky walks

... in a sort of numb, embittered fury. What should he do now? [...] So much crying [...] and so much trying not to, til his head was like to burst [...] What was this unendurable stupor that clung about him like a net? (162-163).

The absence where there used to be the courts and corners that dictated his movement is threatening. It becomes instantly inhabited by the opposing gang. It was the ruin that preceded destruction, the place that destroyed itself, which provided a home, and shelter, for Dicky and Josh, transitory and

¹³⁹ For an interesting discussion on the cultural context of the colour yellow see Sabine Doran, *The Culture of Yellow: Or, The Visual Politics of Late Modernity* (Edinburgh: A&C Black Publishers Ltd., 2013).

¹⁴⁰ ‘Books and Authors’, *San Francisco Chronicle*, Sunday December 27th, 1896, 4.

incomplete as it was. The map remains to illustrate the inhibited movement of the Jagos – Dicky’s passage could be shown ‘on city maps in such a way as to transcribe their paths ... But these thick or thin curves only refer, like words, to the absence of what has passed by.’¹⁴¹ The clearance does successfully inculcate Josh and Dicky into the experience of modernity; their inner monologues being similar to Berman’s description of the soul of modernity, experienced as:

Agitation, and turbulence, psychic dizziness and drunkenness, expansion of experiential possibilities [...] self-enlargement and self-derangement, phantoms in the street and in the soul – [this] is the atmosphere in which the modern soul is born.¹⁴²

Modernity, however, has no room for the Jagos. Their experiences of the place at street level reflect the three mappings of the Nichol: as a trap; as a wasteland; as a prison.

In ‘A County Council Improvement’ (1897), an article he wrote for the *Saturday Review* on the Boundary Street Clearance Scheme following the publication of the novel, Morrison’s response to the clearance is ambivalent. He agrees that there was no realistic solution other than the clearance, given the appalling conditions he notes were the norm in the Nichol, where rooms ‘were called rooms solely because humanly occupied’ but he also disparages the eventual effects. As he noted in the novel, the rents were too high for the pre-existing residents. The new rents were ‘impossible and absurd’ for the casual labouring class. The result, Morrison observed, was that ‘the Nichol has been merely “moved on”; and a sum of £300,000 has been spent by the County Council’. ‘Truly’, he states, ‘the native of the Old Nichol might well sit in bewilderment in these new rooms, but he does not, because he is not there.’¹⁴³ It is this bewilderment that he renders so effectively in *Jago*. Both Dicky and Josh experience the new estate as a place in which they are not.

¹⁴¹ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 97.

¹⁴² Berman, *All That is Solid Melts into Air*, p. 18.

¹⁴³ Arthur Morrison, ‘A County Council Improvement’ in *Saturday Review* 8 May 1897, 504.



Fig. 36. The Building of the Boundary Street Estate: c. 1895,
London Metropolitan Archives.

In mapping the Jago, Morrison mediates between lost place and real space. The use of a seemingly objective tool of the map causes the lost place to remain, and the reader to discover that there are ‘many more geographies lying within the familiar terrain of the city.’¹⁴⁴ The Sketch Plan of the Old Jago achieves both a destabilisation of the official mapping of the area, and the historical signification of the word ‘Jago.’ Hillis Miller argues that:

If the landscape is prior to the novel and outside it, then it cannot be an extratextual ground giving the novel referential reality. If it is not part of the novel, in some way inside it as well as outside, then it is irrelevant to it. But if the landscape is inside the novel then it is determined by it and so cannot constitute its ground. The same thing may be said of the relation of any two members of the series: novel and map; real map and imaginary map; landscape and map.¹⁴⁵

Through the map, the prior landscape, the Nichol, which no longer has a material existence, is absorbed into the fiction of the ‘Jago’ and so becomes determined by it. Mapping the slum from above purports to make the city comprehensive; it suggests the possibility of “‘seeing the whole”, of looking down on, totalising the most immoderate of human texts’ – that is, the

¹⁴⁴ Simon Foxell, *Mapping London: Making Sense of the City* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2007), p. 13.

¹⁴⁵ Hillis Miller, *Topographies*, p. 21.

city itself.¹⁴⁶ It is only by reading places as chorographic that we can look at place from all angles and destabilise the authorial position of the mapmaker: we can worry a new map into being. Obliterated from history by the Ordnance Survey, the slum is resurrected as place in this new guise. The Nichol returns as the Jago, ‘to disturb and unsettle the confidence of the modern.’¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p. 92.

¹⁴⁷ Nead, *Victorian Babylon*, p. 8.

4

AUTHORS, CRITICS, READERS

Speaking on 'The Art of Fiction' in April 1884, Walter Besant declared that 'The unlucky dramatist can complain that his piece was badly mounted and badly acted. The novelist cannot, because he is sure not to be badly read.'¹ However, in one of the climactic episodes of his career, Besant's protégé Morrison found this *not* to be the case. In December 1896, Arthur Morrison wrote a letter of appreciation to his U.S. publisher, Herbert S. Stone. Jubilant with the success of the publication of *Jago* in America, Morrison merrily described to Stone some of the responses to the novel, trying not to take offence at wild misreadings:

The reviews are full of a desire to be kind, but disregard of the formality of reading has caused improvements in my story that come upon me like a punch in the stomach. One paper assures me that Dicky's father was in a machine shop, that the cosh-carriers invariably killed their victims, which he only did once. [...] Dicky joins the pawnbroking interest, and Weech, having [...] suddenly transformed himself into the pawnbroker [...] gives him the sack – and then there is a complaint that I don't sufficiently explain all this tangle. I'd like someone else to try first.²

Morrison observed a serious problem in what he saw as the growing distinction between reading and reviewing; he made the caustic suggestion that books ought to be 'read as well as reviewed.'³ Although written in jest, the letter is a clue to Morrison's feelings regarding the accountability of the author.

Morrison's letter to Stone reflects a wider concern of the late-Victorian period regarding the loss of the mutuality of narration. Janice Carlisle suggests that the canon of Victorian authors at mid-century viewed reading as 'a mutual activity, including both author and reader'.⁴ Carlisle claims that 'the [mid-Victorian] novelist wrote as if his art were intimately connected to life both in its mimetic capacities and in its potential effect on his

¹ Walter Besant, *The Art of Fiction*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1902), p. 39.

² Curiously, the error of reading Weech as a 'pawnbroker' was repeated *after* Morrison wrote the letter, in 'Recent Novels', *The Spectator*, 26th December 1896 Vol. 77 Issue 3574, 942-944 (943) and in 'Books and Authors', *San Francisco Chronicle*, Sunday December 26th 1896, p. 4. These articles appearing after the letter to Stone suggest either the repetition of these errors from earlier articles (which I have not been able to locate) or that the reviews had been out in an earlier edition – it has not been possible to verify which of these is the case.

³ Arthur Morrison to Herbert S. Stone, Dec 9th 1896, in Miles ed. *Jago*, p. 167.

⁴ Janice Carlisle, *The Sense of an Audience: Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot at Mid-Century* (Georgia: The University of Georgia Press, 1981), p. 15.

reader.’⁵ Anthony Trollope expressed similar concerns to Morrison – though less jovially – in his *Autobiography* (1883):

Much of the criticism which we now have is very bad indeed; – so bad as to be open to the charge both of dishonesty and incapacity. Books are criticised without being read.⁶

Writing in 1876, Trollope described a problem that intensified throughout the late-Victorian period. Late-Victorian realism intensified distrust in its readers and critics, and its practitioners were disturbed by the possibility of a widening gulf between reality, representation and reception.

The increasing disruption of the relationship between author and reader in the later part of the century can be ascribed to two central reasons. Firstly, as realism avowed more ferociously its depiction of ‘things as they are’, the reception of such narratives as ‘untrue’ came to imply irresponsibility or negligence on the part of the reader. This was a particular concern when that which was represented was human suffering as described in slum fiction. Secondly, disquieting speculations about the habits and tastes of readers increased in response to the widening of literacy in the late 1800s. The position and qualifications of the ‘new reader’ were in question.⁷

Recent scholarship has located anxieties surrounding reading in the Victorian period on sensationalism, aestheticism and New Woman fiction.⁸ However, the reading of realism inspired enormous anxieties regarding the representation of material reality and the possibility of literature conveying truth. These concerns were expressed by readers and authors as well as by critics, who demonstrated an increasingly fretful and paternalistic

⁵ Carlisle, *The Sense of an Audience*, p. 9.

⁶ Anthony Trollope, *An Autobiography: And Other Writings* ed. by Nicholas Shrimpton, (Oxford: OUP, 2014), pp. 120-121.

⁷ Martyn Lyons, ‘New Readers in the Nineteenth Century: Women, Children, Workers,’ in *A History of Reading in the West* ed. Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), pp. 313-344.

⁸ Kate Flint suggests that sensation fiction and New Woman fiction caused the greatest concern, in *The Woman Reader, 1837-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 15.

criticism. Katherine Kearns observes that realist literature requires collaboration between author and reader, so that:

Realism cannot begin if it has its back up; rather, it must assume a willing and competent audience that will know at the opening gambit the rules of this most everyday of language games.⁹

The first part of this chapter examines the difficulties that realism produces in the relationships between readers, authors and critics, contextualising the publication of Morrison's major works at a period when realism already had its 'back up'.

The second part of the chapter posits that the conception of the average reader was increasingly unstable as the expansion of literacy following the 1870 Education Act led to discussions about what was read and how by 'new readers'. Morrison was suspicious of both the limited provisions of the Education Act and attempts to resist it or reach beyond what it offered. Seeing himself always as an exception among working-class men, Morrison disapproved of movements such as those Jonathan Rose describes, whereby:

Working people had to create their own network of informal self-schooling programs. This they accomplished by improvising a vast grass-roots movement, which had no central organisation, but [...] touched more students than all organised adult educational facilities combined. It never had a formal title, but was generally known as "mutual improvement."¹⁰

For Morrison, those who attempted to reach beyond the allotted educational facilities were to be mocked:

Those who took themselves seriously debated and Mutually-Improved with pomp. Others, subject to savage fits of wanting-to-know, made short rushes at random evening classes, with intervals of disgusted apathy ('A Street', 19).

The final part of the chapter observes how Morrison's later work responded to criticisms of *Tales* and *Jago*. Self-conscious realist writers revealed their own understanding of their responsibility to readers of realism by featuring certain kinds of readers in their texts,

⁹ Katherine Kearns, *Nineteenth Century Literary Realism Through the Looking Glass* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 5.

¹⁰ Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 57.

demonstrating therein their anxieties towards the development of literacy in the period. Morrison's shift in the representation of readers from the earlier text *Tales* to *To London Town* demonstrates his attentiveness to the critics of his earlier work. Besant's claim that a the novelist could not be badly read and that therefore any representational failure was 'his own fault', seems to have been taken on by Morrison in his later works.¹¹ The move towards romantic realism allowed him to situate the ideal reader of his work within the text, exhibiting his distrust in his own methods and repudiating his aspirations to critical realism.

I. Reception

In January 1897, *The Academy* asked a selection of 'prominent men and women' to state the titles of the two books which 'had most pleased and interested' them in 1896. Some replies responded facetiously to the clumsily phrased question: Max Beerbohm listed 'Shakespeare. The Bible' while stage manager Wilson Barrett selected 'The Bible. Shakespeare.' However, the realist author William Pett Ridge replied to the request with apparent sincerity. Making a clear distinction between pleasure and interest, Pett Ridge stated that: 'The book which pleased me most was *Margaret Ogilvy*. The book which interested me most was *Jago*.'¹² The distinction observed here suggests Pett Ridge's sensitive understanding that fiction of the slums does not hold the pleasure of its reader as its primary aim. As Findlater wrote in 1904, the approach to slum fiction had changed: Dickens wrote 'in that decent age when an author still thought he owed his readers some apology for introducing them into low society. These days are long gone by.'¹³

The repudiation of the pleasure of the reader of slum fiction is made apparent by Morrison in his 1897 article, 'What is a Realist?' and in his 1895 article written for *The Athenaeum*, 'Authors, Libraries and the Public'. Morrison demonstrates the belief that his

¹¹ Besant, *The Art of Fiction*, p. 38.

¹² 'Popular Books of 1896', (1897) *The Academy and literature*, 1869-1902, 0269-333X, (1289), 77-78. (78).

¹³ Findlater, 'The Slum Movement in Fiction', p. 68.

primary responsibility as an author was to make available a picture of the world as he saw it, not to shield a reader from confronting the reality he described. Where other slum narratives used ‘the novelist’s own confession of recent ignorance [...] [to lessen] the severity of his rebuke to the reader’, Morrison does not expect the reader to be ignorant of the slums.¹⁴ These two articles are the sum of Morrison’s writing about writing. In them he defends the position of the author and alerts readers and critics to their accountability in their response to texts. Morrison did not view art as having a responsibility to protect the reader from the ordinary horrors of working-class life.

‘Authors, Libraries and the Public’ contributed to contemporary debates over the necessity of artistic freedom for writers. It is similar in tone, though slightly less angry, than George Moore’s *Literature at Nurse* (1885), in which Moore argued that the libraries had so much control that the librarian had become ‘the author of modern English fiction’.¹⁵ Morrison’s article is consistent with Keating’s observation that at this period a chasm opened up between authors and the means of making their work public: ‘no longer were their interests seen to be of the same kind, and no longer was there an implicit agreement between them on what was allowable in fiction.’¹⁶ In the article, Morrison expressed frustration at the paternalistic attitude of the libraries. The article denounced the ‘irresponsible, arbitrary and [...] intolerable’ censorship demonstrated by both libraries and booksellers.¹⁷ Morrison suggested that the censorship enacted by the libraries was dictated entirely by commercial concerns. He condemned such censorship bluntly as both ‘impudent’ and ‘stupid’ (536). Morrison deplored the intervention of the libraries which positioned themselves as ‘the benevolent middlemen of letters, the connecting link between the starving, unbusinesslike writer and the public, hungry and athirst for something to read’ (536).

¹⁴ Keating, *The Working Classes*, p. 33.

¹⁵ Moore, *Literature at Nurse*, p. 20.

¹⁶ Keating, *The Haunted Study*, p. 253.

¹⁷ Arthur Morrison, ‘Authors, Libraries and the Public’ in *The Athenaeum*; Apr 27 1895, 3522; 536-537 (536). Further references will appear in the text.

Scrutinising the system, Morrison found that his book *Tales of Mean Streets*, though not readily displayed at the libraries of Messrs Smith and Sons due to its perceived immorality, was nonetheless available for purchase from them. He stated that the morality they proclaimed as the reason for withholding certain publications was merely ‘a convenient wrapper for library wear, but unsuitable in the keen business atmosphere of the shop, where shillings are to be gained’ (536). The libraries had material influence on the works produced in this climate; books were ‘cut down ruthlessly’ and restored at pains by their authors in order to fit the whims of the libraries (537). This ‘tyranny’ had been exerted on Morrison’s own work, with objections raised particularly to ‘Lizerunt’. Morrison’s argument here is not that the booksellers and libraries ought not to profit from his hard work, but that their differential application of morals is both blatant and an affront to good salesmanship.

Morrison’s plea for collaboration between authors and publishers in this essay had previously been demanded by Walter Besant’s Incorporated Society of Authors, founded in 1883. The Society offered support to writers, focusing on the strengthening of laws surrounding copyright, both in Britain and abroad. Besant’s lecture on ‘The Art of Fiction’ furthered his ideas, suggesting that literature ought to be given the same level of respect as visual art and prescribing how ‘good’ literature was to be achieved. Morrison’s article suggested that the libraries were ‘despots’ and tradesmen, who ought to exhibit a degree of humility. ‘My shoemaker’, he declared, ‘does not dictate to me the pattern, size, and colour of the boots I shall wear; he executes my order’ (536). As Keating has noted, Besant’s Society was attacked in a similar way: ‘early attempts to discredit the Society of Authors tried to portray its members as mere tradesmen’, so that Morrison’s retaliation against the libraries using these terms serves as a support of Besant’s project.¹⁸ Henry James responded to Besant’s claims with a lecture of the same title in September 1884. In this, James identified

¹⁸ Keating, *The Haunted Study*, p. 29.

the anxiety that if literature were permitted to perform the same representations as visual art, it would be feared as 'insidious'.¹⁹ Language, James suggested, was feared as having an *a priori* existence which would allow writers to slip meaning past unwitting readers.

The results of 'irresponsible' publishing had been made starkly clear with the recent imprisonment of Zola's publisher, Vizetelly, in 1889 for 'obscenity'. Zola apparently approved of the 'guilty' verdict, seeing it as evidence that the highest authorities in England had understood his work.²⁰ Morrison did not entirely share such a nonchalant attitude: he was concerned at the prospect of loss of sales, and he had probably thought his deliberate delicacy regarding sexuality would protect him from censure.

Concerns regarding the moralistic criticisms of literature persisted into the 1890s. Yet reviewers concomitantly became more important. Nevinson, the author of the East End stories *Neighbours of Ours* (1895), recounted the days when he edited the *Daily Chronicle* in 1899-1903 as 'those fortunate days for literature' when '[the review] was a rather important position. Three whole columns of the paper were nearly always given to review [...] and hundreds of thousands of people took the *Chronicle* for those columns and nothing else.'²¹ Besant also voiced distrust of critics, stating: 'I, for one, feel irritated when the critics begin to appraise, compare, and to estimate [the artists of fiction].'²² The East End publication *Bow Bells* wrote of the urgency for readers to submit to the guidance of critics, because the 'mischief caused' by such 'degenerate' books 'is incalculable'.²³ Running alongside this article was one describing how best to read in a manner that would not harm one's ocular

¹⁹ Henry James, 'The Art of Fiction' in Walter Besant and Henry James *The Art of Fiction* (Boston, Cupples and Hurd, 1884) pp. 51-85. (p. 57).

²⁰ Cummins, 'The Transmission of Emile Zola', p. 116.

²¹ Nevinson cited in Waller, *Writers, Readers*, p. 117.

²² Besant, *The Art of Fiction*, p. 85.

²³ Anon., 'Books and Readers', *Bow bells: a magazine of general literature and art for family reading* 35.452 (Aug 28, 1896): 227-227.

health. How to read, what to read, and in what physical position to read, were all prescribed, demonstrating serious anxiety that readers did not know how to perform reading.²⁴

Yet authors increasingly required criticism to mediate between their work and a growing market for literature. Without criticism, as Morrison recognised, it was impossible to allege that a work had ‘said something that was worth being said.’²⁵ As experiments in realism progressed in England, the ‘suspicion of [literature’s] artfulness’ became a suspicion of literature’s artlessness.²⁶ That is, as realist authors became more detached from their texts in the pursuit of unadorned realism, disquiet grew among readers and critics. The superiority accorded to the critic was fought against by authors who often responded by denigrating reviews, suggesting that they resulted from incapacity and inexperience on the part of the critic. In late-Victorian England, Brantlinger has suggested, ‘the advent of realism [...] involved both a process of disillusionment and a loss of critical energy.’²⁷ While the process of disillusionment seems clear, critical energy was revived by the apparent impossibility of agreeing on pictures of reality.

Responding to, and sometimes wilfully causing these anxieties, authors interrogated the reading practices of reviewers and the general public. When reality as represented in fiction was questioned by reviewers, the blame was frequently levelled at poor reading. This probing of reading practices by authors, however, suggests that they seek an ideal reader, so do not attempt to communicate universality in their depiction of material truths which they nonetheless insist upon. This is certainly true of Gissing, who demanded ‘a competent reader’ for his works.²⁸ Of his first novel, *Workers in the Dawn* (1880), Gissing wrote that ‘it is not a

²⁴ ‘Flora’ Health, Beauty and the Toilet, *Bow bells: a magazine of general literature and art for family reading* 35.452 (Aug 28, 1896): 227-227.

²⁵ Arthur Morrison, ‘What is a Realist?’ reprinted as ‘Preface to the Third Edition’, in Miles, pp. 3-8. All further references will appear in parentheses in the text.

²⁶ Mark Spilka, ‘Henry James and Walter Besant: “The Art of Fiction” Controversy’ in *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Winter, 1973), 101-119 (113).

²⁷ Patrick Brantlinger, *The Spirit of Reform: British Literature and Politics, 1832-1867* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), p. 208.

²⁸ Morley Roberts, ‘George Gissing and His Critics’, in *The Bookman*, 47.280 Jan. 1915, 123-124. (123).

book for women and children, but for thinking and struggling men.’²⁹ Gissing’s desired reader is a man like himself. His statement is reminiscent of James Greenwood’s, who had implied that correct readings of slum writing could actually discharge the responsibility of the reader towards the suffering poor. In *The Seven Curses of London* (1869) Greenwood wrote that:

this work of ours is designed for the perusal of thinking men and women; [...] it is not intended as an amusing work, but as an endeavour to portray to Londoners the curses of London in a plain and unvarnished way, in hope that they may be stirred to some sort of absolution from them.³⁰

The suggestion is that the duty of the reader *can* be discharged by reading.

The relationship of Morrison to his readers and critics complicates the problem noted by George Becker of the ‘serious psychological barrier to the maintenance of objectivity’ by which the realist author seeks or assumes the implication of his reader in ‘the same act of discovery, the same “experiment,” as he.’³¹ Morrison entirely divorces his role as an author from the role of the reader, assigning – somewhat warily, as his letter to Stone indicates – full responsibility to readers and critics for their own response.

Working-class reading practices were a cause of concern, as Brantlinger suggests, from the 1790s onwards, when a radical working-class press emerged.³² However, these qualms were heightened by the expansion of literacy after the Education Act of 1870.³³ The Act expanded primary school education to the age of thirteen and set the terms for the establishment of numerous board schools, enabling access to schooling that went beyond Ragged Schools, Dame Schools and National Schools.³⁴ Additional Education Acts followed up to 1893, strengthening the authority of the Education Department which was intended to

²⁹ Flint, *The Woman Reader*, p. 143.

³⁰ James Greenwood, *The Seven Curses of London*, introduction by Jeffrey Richards (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), pp. 90-91.

³¹ George G. Becker, *Documents of Modern Literary Realism* (Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 33.

³² Patrick Brantlinger, *The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass-Literacy in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 24.

³³ Flint, *The Woman Reader*, p. 13.

³⁴ Anon., ‘The Elementary Education Act’, *Ragged School Union magazine*, (Dec. 1870): 272-280.

‘supply the deficiencies’ of a previously disjointed system.³⁵ The coming of age of the first wave of children educated under these Acts meant that working-class reading practices were under increasing surveillance in the late 1880s and 1890s. The 1891 Act in particular raised concerns, as it eliminated fee-paying. The prospect of free education, as the liberal paper *The Speaker* noted, ‘seriously perturbed [...] the Old Guard of Conservatism’.³⁶ ‘Is free education a bribe? [...] Is it socialism?’ asked journalist and author T.E. Kebbel in *The Nineteenth Century*.³⁷ Disquietingly to some, reading became increasingly privatised and unsupervised. The dangers of reading to the health and wellbeing of all readers was a concern.³⁸ It was, though, the new generation of school-boarded literates that became the focus of anxieties about a degeneration of literacy and literature.

Conservative critics maintained that reading was a privilege that ought to be held by those who sought it out for themselves, following the values of self-help established by Samuel Smiles.³⁹ This view is reflected in Joseph Shaylor’s *The Pleasures of Literature and the Solace of Books* (1889). Comprised of thoughts on books by leading intellectuals from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, the book looks nostalgically back to bygone eras of great reading by great readers. Introducing the book, Andrew Lang, critic and author of several volumes of fairy tales, suggested that prior to the 1870 Education Act:

People who deserved to be able to read, did read, and now that everyone can read, few people deserve to do so, for few go beyond a newspaper. It is but a small minority who even aspire to study a novel.⁴⁰

Lang suggests that the expansion of literacy to the masses degraded literature itself, lamenting that ‘authors debase their wares, to captivate indolent women, and the man on the

³⁵ Ibid., p. 273.

³⁶ Anon., ‘The Outlook for Free Education’ in *The Speaker: the liberal review* 3 (May 30, 1891): 628-629. (628)

³⁷ T.E. Kebbel, ‘Is Free Education a Bribe?’ in *The Nineteenth century: a monthly review*, Jun 1891 Vol. 29 Issue 72 1022-1026 (1022).

³⁸ See for example, n. 23.; John Browning, *How to Use Our Eyes and how to preserve them by the aid of spectacles*, (London: Chatto and Windus, 1883), p. 25.

³⁹ Samuel Smiles, *Self Help* [1859] ed. by Peter Sinnema (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

⁴⁰ Andrew Lang, Introduction to Joseph Shaylor, ed., *The Pleasures of Literature and the Solace of Books*, (London: Wells Gardner Darton & Co., 1898), pp. xi-xxi (pp. xi-xii).

omnibus.’⁴¹ Lang sees the extension of education as a failure which brutalised culture: ‘Education has not increased, I believe it has diminished, the number of readers of anything more abstruse than the last novel whose author had noisy backers.’⁴² Lang was certainly not alone in his concerns. Many periodicals published articles on the nature and form of reading practiced by the newly literate, often viewing these as directly threatening to the establishment. In ‘What the Working Classes Read’ (1900), Edward Salmon stated that ‘every working man’s paper resorts to the coarsest attacks on the wealthy and high-placed’.⁴³

Anxieties surrounding the effects of the Education Acts were heightened as its consequences were felt in the succeeding generations. It had been hoped that the expansion of literacy would have positive effects throughout society, because these working-class readers would ‘turn aside from vicious amusements’ in favour of reading.⁴⁴ However, when the first generation of those educated at board schools became parents, apprehensions emerged that they would transfer their literacy and their poor reading habits on to their children. In 1906 James Haslam, working-class author of the historical novel *The Handloom Weaver’s Daughter* (1904), grieved that the promise of the extension of literacy had not been fulfilled:

Thirty years ago, when the Free Education Act was passed, sanguine people imagined that a new era was dawning for the British race. ‘The Three R’s’ were to lead magically to higher planes of morality, politer manners, purer thoughts. Familiarity with the writings of the great sages would gradually lessen crime, drunkenness, and ill-living of every kind. In a single generation a marvellous transformation would surely take place. The contrast between these expectations and the present reality is enough to make the most robust optimist a temporary cynic.

Instead, Haslam found in his investigations for the *Manchester City News* that the working classes were reading ‘pernicious trash.’⁴⁵ Such reactionary explorations also suggested that illiteracy had been pervasive among the working classes prior to the Act. Ignoring the

⁴¹ Ibid., p. xii.

⁴² Ibid., p. xx.

⁴³ Edward Salmon, ‘What the Working Classes Read’, *The Nineteenth Century: a monthly review*, Vol. 20.113; (Jul. 1886) 108-117 (108).

⁴⁴ G. Holden Pike, ‘General Readers in East London’, *Good Words*, January 1896, 668-670. (669)

⁴⁵ James Haslam, *The Press and the People: An Estimate of Reading in Working-class Districts* Reprinted from the *Manchester City News* (Manchester, 1906), p. 3.

prevalence of auto-didacticism (revealed in twentieth-century studies such as E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963) and Richard Hoggart's *The Uses of Literacy* (1957)), anxious commentators suggested that new readers were excluded from 'real reading' by their taste and their reading practices.⁴⁶

Perspectives such as Augustine Birrell's seem rare. Birrell, a Liberal politician, proposed that, contrary to its reputation as 'pernicious', cheap literature 'made many young lives happy, and fostered better taste than either or both the Universities.'⁴⁷ Thompson suggests that collective reading, ballads and songs enabled inclusion into cultural debate.⁴⁸ However, increasingly these practices could not compete with individual reading. The exclusion of new readers was attempted within books and articles which discussed and disparaged working-class reading habits. Making working-class, as well as young and female readers the subject of much investigation dismissed them from discourse, perpetuating the segregation of literary culture.⁴⁹

The self-conscious inclusion of reading figures in these realist texts reveals that the reader was a source of unease for the author of late-Victorian realism. The reception of their work is anticipated in the ways their characters read. The increasing power of the reader is a threat to the late-Victorian author, for as Waller suggests 'the reading public could not be prevented from talking about authors and books [...] personal recommendations by one reader to another sold more books than did reviews.'⁵⁰

As the late-Victorian realist absents themselves from the text, evidence of the limits of their own perceived accountability and the expectations of their readers are to be found in the inclusion of reading figures. Marking the extreme self-consciousness of the late-Victorian

⁴⁶ Walter Allen, *Reading a Novel* (London: Phoenix House, 1963), p. 12.

⁴⁷ Augustine Birrell, *Essays About Men, Women and Books* (London: Elliot Stock, 1894), p. 142.

⁴⁸ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 782.

⁴⁹ See for example Margarita Yates, 'Do Our Girls Take an Interest in Literature?' in *The Monthly review* 23.67 (Apr 1906): 120-132.

⁵⁰ Waller, *Writers, Readers*, p. 136.

realist, the practice also absolves the author from responsibility for how the text is received. In Morrison's fiction it enables the implication of the importance of the reader without using direct address. Use of the fictional reader assigns responsibility to the actual reader without requiring the author to intrude into the text, so that realism is retained and 'the novel [...] gets off scot-free.'⁵¹ The figure of the reader in realist fiction enables the realist to express anxiety about good reading, particularly by working-class readers, and allows them to explore the possibility of good reading of their novels. Morrison's perceived responsibility towards his own readers was transformed by the discussions he had with the critic H.D. Traill, which, revealing troubled understandings of responsibility towards the text on both sides, captures some of the paradoxes in the reception of realism at this time.

II. H.D. Traill

Late-Victorian readers and critics responded to both realist and romantic representations of the slums as a challenge to material concepts of truth and reality. It is the slum itself, rather than a text's generic alignment, that leads to this search for material confirmation in these texts. Whiteing, author of *No. 5 John Street*, who described his slum novel as 'romantic literature', recalled in his 1902 Preface that 'the more realistic interrogatories are sometimes singularly bald. Is the house known to the London Directory? In which of the innumerable John Streets does it stand? Did the writer actually live in it?'⁵² Across all genres, critics shared an anxiety towards the pursuit of the real, measuring the success of the work against its likelihood in actuality.

Realism was perceived as a confrontation with actuality: it was described as 'combative' by one of its major proponents, Gissing.⁵³ It was propelled by an insistence on the underlying truth and material reality of the represented, and equally by the right of the

⁵¹ Byerly, *Realism, Representation, and the Arts*, p. 6.

⁵² Richard Whiteing, 'Preface' [1902] to *No. 5 John Street*, p. viii; p.i.

⁵³ George Gissing, 'The Place of Realism in Fiction', in *Humanitarian*, July 1895, Vol VII. No. 1, 14-16 (14).

artist not to be impeded from artistic expression by responsibility for that reality. The results of the reader's experience of slum fiction as confrontation with the real has been described by Becker as 'the crushing novelty of the slum', for which the shocked reader assigns responsibility to the author.⁵⁴ A reviewer of *Tales*, satiated by the horrors of the text, declared bluntly that 'we hope to hear from [Morrison] again, but not too much or too soon.'⁵⁵ Mrs Margaret Oliphant was affronted on reading *Jago* because 'fiction is scarcely the medium for a lesson taught in such miserable detail, and in colours so dark and terrible.'⁵⁶ Mrs Oliphant was not alone in feeling that fiction had to take great care in its responsibility to its readers, precisely because they would not know which details to believe.

In the repeated reception of slum texts as novelties, readers and critics of late-Victorian fiction challenged again and again the material truth of the slum. Whether the pictures presented represented the real or exaggerated the real was queried by many: as Mrs Oliphant wrote of *Jago*, 'we can never be sure that [fiction] does not add a light or heap on a darkness [...] we should very much like to know which is true.'⁵⁷ Peter Rabinowitz has argued that issues surrounding the truth of literary accounts have always been part of literary criticism, but that such issues 'have become both more intricate and more compelling as literature has grown progressively more self-conscious and labyrinthine in its dealings with reality.'⁵⁸ This is demonstrable in the reception of slum literature. The materiality of the basis of slum fiction was seen as essential so that slum fiction could achieve material benefits; as a critic said in praise of *Jago*, 'it ought to do solid works in its generation.'⁵⁹ The phrase 'solid works' suggests both the moral and material capabilities of the book. Christian action, it

⁵⁴ George G. Becker, *Documents of Literary Realism*, (Princeton University Press, 1963), p. 31.

⁵⁵ Anon., 'Tales of Mean Streets', *Saturday review of politics, literature, science and art* 78. 2040 (Dec 1, 1894): 605-606., (606)

⁵⁶ Mrs Oliphant, 'A Raid among Books', Dec. 1896, *Blackwood's Magazine*, 160 (974), 822-846. (843)

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 844.

⁵⁸ Peter Rabinowitz, 'Truth in Fiction: A Reexamination of Audiences', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (Autumn, 1977), 121-141, (p. 123).

⁵⁹ *Daily Chronicle*, c. 1894/5, extract as printed in the first edition of *A Child of the Jago*, Miles, 'Morrison and His Critics', p. 223.

implies, could be achieved by the novel, which thus held the potential for actual effects in the real world. The troubled reception of slum literature projected the need for an active solution to the problem of the slums. Accounts of slums in the late-Victorian period were expected to become accounts *for* slums.

Such a demand was made when satirical journalist H.D. Traill offered his vituperative examination of *Jago*, initially in an article for the *Fortnightly Review* in January 1897 'The New Realism', and then, alongside a consideration of *Tales*, as the title essay in his collection *The New Fiction* later that year. Traill was both impressed and disquieted by Morrison's work. He appreciated Morrison's 'vividly and vigorously drawn' characters, and his pleasing 'command of pathos.'⁶⁰ Nonetheless, Traill was made uneasy, particularly by *Jago*. His description of the text as 'New Realism' did not refer to a sense of reality provided by the text. He upbraids the novel for being at once realist and unrealistic:

What, however, has most astonished one of Mr Morrison's critics fresh from a perusal of *A Child of the Jago*, is the impression of extraordinary unreality which, taken as a whole, it leaves behind it. To a critic opposed to the theories and methods of so-called realism, this is naturally rather disconcerting (9).

The ultimate reality of the fictional place is under examination. The destruction of the slum which takes place in the novel is used by Traill to deduce that the novel is an unsuccessful representation:

No wonder that many who know the East-End of London well have protested against this picture. The houses in that area [...] have been cleared of its former occupants and their dens, and the original of the *Jago* has, it is admitted, ceased to exist. But I will make bold to say that as described by Mr Morrison [...] it never did and never could exist (13).

The urban landscape was not a mirror of the text, therefore the novel was, for Traill, a failure of realism. For other readers, however, the very absence of the site on which the novel was based projected the realist text into historical fact, so that the novel as a whole operated as a *mise-en-abyme*, filling in the abyss created when the slum was razed and remaining as a relic

⁶⁰ Traill, *The New Fiction*, pp. 8-9. Further references will appear in the text.

to tell the history of the place. Traill's criticism may seem to follow a natural spirit of inquiry. As Kearns has stated, 'it is the nature of critical commentary to engage itself with its texts as if it were possible to find the real, [the] untransmuted.'⁶¹ This ought to inhere in the site itself, place being a stable referent which confirms the novels' verisimilitude. In the case of the Jago, its referent the Nichol had already been cleared.

Other reviewers clung hopefully to the unreality of the Jago. Mrs Oliphant relied on the word of 'an authority very well qualified to speak on the subject' who comfortingly asserted that 'such a den of horrors as the Jago is so little common that she, with an immense experience of the slums, finds it difficult to believe in its existence.'⁶² This criticism relies on the comparative likelihood of the Jago's reality. Since it is atypical, it is deemed unreal. Traill's criticism, however, dismisses the reality of the Jago entirely. Traill expressed his disbelief not only in the fiction, due to the removal of its referent, but in the referent itself. Yet in the 'New Fiction' Traill unwittingly refers to the Nichol as the Jago, supporting Furst's view and defeating his own declaration that Morrison's picture is unrealistic (14; 18).

Traill's criticism prompted a debate which was essential in forming an image of Morrison as a reluctant realist. Traill's identification of the 'New Realism' was undermined somewhat by his jocular aphorism that 'nowadays, not to be new is to be nothing' (2). Comparing Morrison to Stephen Crane, who had recently published *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* (1893), he evaluated Morrison as the leader of this new movement in literature, whilst deriding the school itself, 'of which the two most obvious things to be said are that it is unreal with the falsity of the half-truth, and as old as the habit of exaggeration' (2).

Morrison was provoked by Traill's criticism and he retaliated, repudiating his purported aspiration to realism but insisting upon the novel's truth. 'What is a Realist?' reveals Morrison's feelings of literary superiority despite his lack of familiarity with current

⁶¹ Kearns, *Nineteenth-Century Literary Realism*, p. 29.

⁶² Oliphant, 'A Raid among Books', 842.

trends in literature or adherence to any movement. This emerges concomitantly with his increasing confidence in his own abilities as a writer. He exploits each of his criticisms to their fullest potential, using them to claim for the underlying reality of his work, and expounding his distaste for the limitations placed on art by genre categories. The question mark in the title of Morrison's article suggests the impossibility of ever resolving the definition: Morrison repudiated the term 'realism', which he reasonably suggests is unreliable, not only in its application but in its meaning.

The essay demonstrates a reverse intellectual snobbery surrounding realism, which, Morrison claims, was a term used by 'schoolmen and sophisters' who desired to 'pigeon-hole' all art (3; 4). Differentiating between readers who offer kindly criticism and reviewers who use the term 'realist' negatively, Morrison pointed to the fallibility of the term 'realist' which was used indiscriminately as either 'praise', or 'irremediable reproach'(3). The essay is characterised by paradox, expressing, as Pamela Fox states, that 'Morrison both desires and refuses to occupy a dominant cultural position.'⁶³ The boundaries between author and critic are troubled by the movement of the author into criticism, prompted by a realism which the critic attempts to refute but cannot avoid accepting.

In 'The Place of Realism in Fiction', an 1895 journal colloquium, Dr William Barry, author of romance *The New Antigone* (1887), wrote that 'here is the truth against which photographic Realism will always be dashed in pieces: supreme art is Revelation.'⁶⁴ Late-Victorian realism works in the same way that mid-Victorian realism purported to – as a mirror held up to life. But when this mirror reflected the lives of the very poor, it acted as both reflection and revelation. Morrison gazes with incredulity at the East, from the East. This point of view combined with his aesthetic desire to represent the East 'as he sees it', makes Morrison unfathomable to Traill: Morrison's account acts as both reflection and

⁶³ Fox, *Class Fictions*, p. 112.

⁶⁴ William Barry, 'The Place of Realism in Fiction', *Humanitarian* July 1895 Vol VII No. 1, 6-9 (9).

revelation.⁶⁵ In *Reticence in Literature* (1915), the author and critic Arthur Waugh suggested that realism is antithetical to the imagination, arguing that ‘the truly representative literature of every age is the creative, which shows its people its natural face in a glass.’⁶⁶ Inevitably, such a statement about the 1890s is reminiscent of Wilde’s ‘Preface’ to *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891):

The nineteenth century dislike of realism is the rage of Caliban seeing his own face in a glass. The nineteenth century dislike of romanticism is the rage of Caliban not seeing his own face in a glass.⁶⁷

Waugh’s rage, and the rage against realism throughout this period, is the rage of Caliban seeing an *other* face in his own glass: these novels proffer another reality, which proves to be simply the other side of a single reality.

Traill initially levelled the criticism that Morrison’s realist prose was unsuccessful: ‘It is certainly not realism [...] the total effect of the story is unreal’ (371). Morrison’s response was a baffled repudiation: ‘I have never called myself a realist and I have never put forward any work of mine as realism’ (3). Morrison was, as Miles notes, ‘distrustful of any monolithic concept of realism’, but he nonetheless defended the truthfulness of his story.⁶⁸ Traill believed that Morrison was claiming that art and life have equal claim upon an apodictic reality. This analysis by Traill is supported by a reading of ‘What is a Realist?’ Morrison’s view is that an artist must be allowed the freedom to represent life: ‘If the community have left horrible places and horrible lives before [the artist’s] eyes [...] to picture these places and these lives becomes not merely his privilege, but his duty’(4-5). Morrison collapses the boundaries between art and life. In this way his work represents a move away from the mid-

⁶⁵ The term ‘revelation’ was frequently used in non-fiction accounts of the East End, e.g. ‘More revelations of Bethnal Green’, *The Builder*, Vol. 21, No. 1082, 31 October 1863.

⁶⁶ Arthur Waugh, *Reticence in Literature and Other Papers* (London: J.G. Wilson, 1915), p. 6.

⁶⁷ Wilde, ‘Preface’ to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, pp. 5-6. (p. 5).

⁶⁸ Miles, ‘Introduction’, xxiii.

Victorian practice as discussed by Carlisle, whereby ‘the novelist was always careful not to proclaim that the two [art and life] have the same ontological status.’⁶⁹

Traill professed to be baffled by Morrison’s technique, averring that ‘photographic realism’ did not necessarily mean a true picture of life. Traill adopts an unusual rhetorical position in which he describes the critic not as himself but in the third person, as an anti-realist critic who would be:

preparing himself to detect and expose the aesthetic and artistic defects of a supposed product of literary photography, when to his amazement he discovers that the photograph, though it seems distinct enough to the gaze which concentrates itself successively on the various parts of the picture, yet fades, when the attempt is made to view it in its entirety, into a mere blur (9-10).

Morrison was interested in but not unswervingly trustful of photography; he understood the implications of the assumed connection between realism, naturalism and photography.

Morrison knew that, as Frierson has observed, ‘the naturalists did not forbid rearrangement’ so that ‘literary photography’ was a myth.⁷⁰

Morrison’s intensely visual sensibility had been elucidated in his 1892 article on ‘Instantaneous Photography’ published in *The Strand* magazine. Rather than providing a solution to the realist depiction of the world, Morrison observed in this article in earnest what he later noted in jest in his detective series: ‘photography upsets everything.’⁷¹ The article showed that the development of photography had transformed what was visible to the eye: by revealing the limitations of human vision, photography troubled the idea of what was real. Instantaneous photography revealed the unreliability of human perception and forced Morrison to conclude that ‘the eye is a most treacherous guide.’⁷² Benjamin later recognised this aspect of photography as the ‘optical unconscious’ – the camera allows us to ‘see’ things we had previously not been able to acknowledge, things that were always on the periphery of

⁶⁹ Carlisle, *The Sense of an Audience*, p. 8.

⁷⁰ Frierson, *The English Novel in Transition*, p. 17.

⁷¹ Arthur Morrison, *Martin Hewitt: Investigator* (1894), p. 87.

⁷² Arthur Morrison ‘Instantaneous Photographs’ in *The Strand Magazine*, 3 (Jan 1892), 629-638 (631).

human vision.⁷³ The development of photography transformed the practice of realism: no longer could it be said that ‘the human eye sees in the physical world the facts of human life.’⁷⁴

The use of the term ‘photographic’ contributed to the transformation of late-Victorian understandings of reality, realism and art. As Waugh suggested, the nature of fiction in the late 1800s was discussed in relation to ‘the fidelity of the Kodak.’⁷⁵ Used by Waugh to critique ‘brutal’ realism, it was also used to praise fidelity to life in literature. Troubling the acceptance of the sufficiency of language in representation, the notion of the ‘photographic’ was a concept with which Morrison’s art collided. ‘Photographic realism’ emerged as a complex term: realism was not only judged as insufficient in comparison with ‘Kodak reality’ but it could also, like photography, present realities beyond the ordinary human capacity to interpret the world. Barry stated that realism was ‘the Kodak unsleeping and pitiless turned upon private life’.⁷⁶ This representational disparity informed the reception of Morrison’s realist fiction as simultaneously too real and not real enough.

Not only truth but ‘ultimate truth’ was sought in the realist writings of the 1890s.⁷⁷ But these truths were always mistrusted: if realist methods were purely photographic, what would become of ‘really great imaginative writing’?⁷⁸ For Waugh, the fear was that realism would ‘blunder on resolutely with an indomitable and damning sincerity, till all is said that can be said, and art is lost in photography.’⁷⁹ The ‘miserable detail’ which critics saw in Morrison’s work acts as a criticism of its likeness to the

⁷³ Walter Benjamin, ‘A Short History of Photography’ in *Classic Essays on Photography* ed. by Alan Trachtenberg, (New Haven, Conn.: Leete Island Books, 1980), pp.199-217, (p. 204).

⁷⁴ Carlisle, *The Sense of an Audience*, p. 12.

⁷⁵ Waugh, *Reticence in Literature*, p. 21.

⁷⁶ Barry, ‘The Place of Realism’, p. 8.

⁷⁷ ‘Ultimate truth’ – see ‘In London Town’, *Bookman*, (Nov. 1899) 59; Findlater ‘The Slum Movement in Fiction’, 447-54.

⁷⁸ ‘Mr Arthur Morrison’, *Academy* (4 Dec 1897) 493.

⁷⁹ Waugh, *Reticence in Literature* p. 7.

photographic.⁸⁰ He recorded truths unpalatable to many and invisible to most. Morrison's article draws attention to the unreality of nineteenth-century photographic processing, but it also provides clues as to his own complex understanding of realism. Labelling Morrison's realist fiction as 'photographic realism' obfuscates his relation to naturalism, and only clarifies the paradoxes innate within the term.

Morrison counters Traill's attack, arguing that Traill practises what he derides:

[Traill] announces [...] gratuitously, that realists 'insist' on a certain 'process' in the production of fiction; he proceeds himself to 'insist' on a particular 'process', which he presents ready mixed and of his own discovery.⁸¹

The 'New Realism' was, as far as Morrison could see, an appropriate container for Traill's argument. As one of its purported proponents, he undermines the existence of such a movement, insisting rather on his own unique mode of representation of the reality of the place. Morrison expected an active reader, one similar to his description of a beholder of Japanese art who, in turn, ought to interpret a painting as they would a poem, acting as a 'collaborator' who can themselves interpret 'even [...] the subtlest suggestion' made by the author.⁸²

Morrison's assertive tone in the piece perhaps comes from his knowledge that he was in good company in writing of a place which reviewers claimed to disbelieve in. In the 1850 Preface to *Oliver Twist* (1838) Dickens felt the need to state that Jacob's Island *did* exist. The assertion that it did not (as noted in Chapter 2) had been used as a criticism of the novel itself. When Sir Peter Laurie criticised Dickens's depiction of Jacob's Island in 1849, noting its recent demolition, Dickens retorted in his usual jovial style. Asserting that Laurie must believe that writing of things caused them no longer to exist, he joked that since he had lampooned Laurie as Alderman Cute in *The Chimes* (1844), he could not possibly

⁸⁰ Oliphant, 'A Raid Among Books', 843.

⁸¹ Morrison in Miles, 'Morrison and his Critics', p. 237.

⁸² Morrison, *The Painters of Japan*, (London: Jack, 1911).p. 4.

exist.⁸³ Morrison's debt to Dickens can therefore be seen not only in his fiction but in his responses to criticism.

Traill's interpretation of the aesthetics of the novel is that it engages in 'the idealising method [...] that it is the idealisation of ugliness, instead of beauty, is mere detail' (14).

Morrison's response was that:

They who know nothing of beauty, who are innately incapable of comprehending it, mistake it for mere prettiness, and call aloud for comfits; and among them that cannot understand, such definitions of the aims of art are bandied, as mean, if they mean anything, that art finds its most perfect expression in pink lollipops and gilt boxes (4).

Morrison's view on beauty in art was more accurately recognised by a reviewer of *Tales* who stated that 'the very truth makes for beauty'.⁸⁴ Morrison saw his responsibility in creating art, not in dictating how the reader ought to interpret the material.

Relating his process to visual art allowed Morrison to clarify the shortcomings of the term realism. Morrison compared himself to the Japanese artist Hiroshigé (1797-1858), who 'in flat defiance of all the canons of Tosa and Kano' – his predecessors – 'adventurously drew a cast shadow', thereby receiving the label of 'realist'.⁸⁵ In this comparison Morrison creates the impression of the Jago as the cast shadow of West London – it was always there: *not* drawing it did not alleviate it. He also alludes to Suzuki Harunobu (1718-70) whose work represented scenes of ordinary people in urban settings. These works greatly influenced Western impressionists such as Manet, Whistler and Van Gogh. Comparing his work to Constable and Corot, Morrison asks to be situated among those who have, as he sees it, transitioned from realist to 'classic' (4). Morrison asserts his aesthetic sympathies to suggest that not only are the boundaries of literature shifting but that they are ultimately always

⁸³ Joyce records this exchange in *Capital Offenses*, pp. 101-103.

⁸⁴ Anon., 'Short Stories', *The Athenaeum*, 3500 (Nov 24, 1894): 712-713.

⁸⁵ Hiroshigé rebelled against the parent school of Chinese painting, for whom shadows were 'something purely accidental, and therefore not worth delineating.' Basil Stewart, 'Ando Hiroshigé: A Guide to Japanese Prints,' http://www.hiroshige.org.uk/hiroshige/stewart/chapter_08.htm [Last accessed 13 March 2015].

surmounted by time. Morrison's understanding of realism is temporally bound. Birrell

mocked the desire of writers to be seen in this way:

They want to be classics in their own lifetime, and to be spoken about and written of as if they were already embalmed in the memory of a grateful nation. To speak or write lightly of departed genius is offensive, but people who have the luck to be alive must not expect to be taken quite so seriously.⁸⁶

Maltz suggests that Morrison's comparison of his writing with visual art de-historicises the concept of realism 'by assigning it to earlier, less gritty visual art'⁸⁷. Yet Keating asserts that Morrison's comparison of his work with Japanese art is simply a ploy to evade Traill's greater knowledge of literature.⁸⁸ Morrison's view however could be taken as evidence of his progressive thinking – his views prefigure Gillian Beer's, that 'the realistic novels of one age or audience have an uncanny way of becoming "romances" in another setting.'⁸⁹ Morrison is also uncharacteristically demonstrating sympathy with Besant's 'The Art of Fiction' by insisting on the sympathy of literary art with visual art and asserting the lack of boundaries between them. In other articles Morrison makes comparisons to Japanese culture rather than to more obvious examples, and does so due to his preoccupation with Japan rather than to a fear of his own shortcomings.⁹⁰

In *Jago* as in much of his other writing Morrison disturbs the urban explorer's 'need for the reader's guide to be guided himself' and the responsibility of the writer to provide such a guide for the reader.⁹¹ In slum fiction, as Mary Ellen Keppler has noted, it was deemed necessary to have figures who could act as the 'reader's surrogates'.⁹² These could be the author or a middle-class explorer with whom the reader can identify. It is a trope of slum fiction which Morrison rejects in *Jago*. Although he was believed at this time to be a middle-

⁸⁶ Birrell, *Essays*, p. 191; 213.

⁸⁷ Maltz, *A Child of the Jago*, p.56 n. 2.

⁸⁸ Keating, 'Biographical Study', p. 28.

⁸⁹ Gillian Beer, *The Romance*, (London: Methuen, 1970), p. 5.

⁹⁰ For example in his reference to the Ainu in Morrison, 'A County Council Improvement', 505 (see Chapter 1).

⁹¹ Sharpe, *New York Nocturne*, p. 55.

⁹² Mary Ellen Keppler, 'Playing "Theayter": Dramatic Performance in the Late-Victorian Fictional Slum', *Victorian Review*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Winter 2003), 1-18 (13.)

class writer exposing the slums like so many others, his detachment from the text makes his relationship to it unusual. Some readers understood this authorial detachment as increasing the responsibility of the reader. Mrs Oliphant stated that to read the novel was ‘to place yourself voluntarily in a spot reeking with every odious smell and sight, among savages’ (842). Without middle-class character guides or authorial intervention, the reader had to assume a responsibility for the text itself and for their position in relation to it.

For Traill, Morrison’s self-effacement is therefore deeply threatening. Traill derides it as ‘cynical self-repression’ (18). It leaves him with a feeling not of vicarious excitement but of alarm; he:

comes out from the Jago with the feelings, not as he had expected, of a man who has just paid a visit to the actual district under the protection of the police, but of one who has awakened from the dream of a prolonged sojourn in some fairyland of horror (10).

It is Morrison’s realist technique of distancing himself as author from the text that causes this, but the effect is unreal to the unprepared Traill: without a middle-class guide he experiences the Jago as ‘unreal and phantasmagoric’ (15). Yet his use of the phrase ‘comes out from the Jago’ suggests his thorough immersion in the site as represented in the novel. Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth’s declaration that ‘realistic novels demonstrate the power of narrative consciousness to occupy one mind after another’ is not, for Traill, met by *Jago*, yet the associated effect of this boundary-crossing consciousness is achieved. Despite Traill’s resistance and with great discomfort, he does ‘experience place coextensively alongside the protagonists.’⁹³

Traill was furious that he did not, on finishing the novel, feel that he had been slumming, that is, vicariously and safely exploring a slum district as an outsider. Instead, he felt that he had been there. George Sims boasted in *The Mysteries of Modern London* (1906): ‘I have never asked for [Police] assistance in my journeyings into dark places.’⁹⁴ While for Sims this is a marker of his authenticity and courage as a slummer, Traill’s criticism of *Jago*

⁹³ Elizabeth Deeds Ermarth cited in Furst, *All is True*, p. 143.

⁹⁴ Sims, *The Mysteries of Modern London*, p. 12; cited in Seltzer, ‘The Princess Casamassima: Realism and the Fantasy of Surveillance’ p. 509.

is precisely that he does not feel that he has been escorted through the Jago by police. The necessity of police assistance in exploring slums was a common trope, and had been used by Dickens, Jerrold, and other social investigators. Traill is both upbraiding Morrison for not following the trope and admiring his inventiveness. Rather than allowing the immersive qualities of the novel to mark the successful psychological realism of the account, Traill resists his own response. It is because Traill does experience the place, but not as a tourist attraction, that he dismisses it as unreal.

Traill's main difficulty, as Henkle observes, is that 'realism for Traill [...] means that characters will always stand in for human subjects, and by this he means figures whose sensibility are registered on terms readily associated with middle-class values'.⁹⁵ One of Morrison's challenges to his readers is his statement that they are disappointed to 'find the pages nowhere illuminated by a marquis' (5). The urban literature of the 1820s-40s had provided diversion in the popular subgenre of 'silver-fork' fiction, focusing on the lives of the aristocracy. Rather than portraying 'things as they are', these novels endeavoured to portray 'manners as they are'.⁹⁶ Almost from its inception, the genre was mocked for its escapism and sentimentalism in its treatment of the recent past.⁹⁷ Slum fiction could only challenge such representations by successfully bringing slums into middle-class consciousness. In *Heretics*, (1905) Chesterton suggested that the difficulties of interpreting slum fiction were experienced on both sides – neither the author nor the reader has a true experience of the slum:

The men who write it, and the men who read it, are men of the middle classes or the upper classes [...] the fact that it is the life as the refined man sees it proves that it cannot be the life as the unrefined man lives it. Rich men write stories about poor men

⁹⁵ Henkle, 'Morrison, Gissing and the Stark Reality' in *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Spring, 1992), 302-320 (p. 309).

⁹⁶ Sutherland, citing Mrs Gore, *The Longman Companion to Victorian Fiction*, p. 584.

⁹⁷ Tamara S. Wagner, 'The Silver Fork Novel', *Victorian Web*, 12 Dec 2002, <http://www.victorianweb.org/genre/silverfork.html> [Last accessed 1 August 2015]

[...] The slum novelist gains his whole effect by the fact that some detail is strange to the reader; but that detail by the nature of the case cannot be strange in itself.⁹⁸

Morrison's class position at this time was 'a complex web' of cross-class poses.⁹⁹ Yet beneath his posturing as a middle-class writer coming into the slum, he insists upon its familiarity, evading the pattern of continual 'rediscovery' of the East End as an unfamiliar site. Indeed, the task of the reader of slum fiction is to bear witness to 'the unrepresentable and the sublime from the margin and to enable other voices to tell other stories': it is Traill's failure to bear witness that is at issue here.¹⁰⁰

Traill states that the bleakness of life should be explored in the lives of the suburban middle-class rather than in the 'mean streets', as he believes these would be more representative of reality. Declaring that Morrison's great descriptive skill ought to be directed in other avenues, Traill insisted that he would use such skill entirely differently:

[If I] had Mr Morrison's fine descriptive gift, I would select a street quite other than mean, a street consisting, not of poverty-stricken little houses, but of 'eligible' suburban villas [...] I would undertake to describe it and the daily lives of its inhabitants – the daily journey of men to their business; the daily resumption by the women of their burden of household duties [...] I would undertake to so describe these things, that the heart of the reader would sink and shrink within him at the thought of man's lot upon earth, and, perhaps, burn with anger at the spiritless patience in which man endures it...(21).

Traill seems here to have entirely misread *Tales* and the relentless diurnal pattern of ordinary lives described therein. Waugh recollects a similar proposal by Traill:

I remember H.D. Traill saying once that, as he walked down any squalid suburban street, he could picture behind the soiled window-curtains a series of domestic tragedies as poignant and hopeless as any that have ever held the stage. [...] I very much doubt whether it is a true *interpretation* of life [...] The critic who sees squalor and misery in every grade of life, material or spiritual, that lies immediately below his own, falls inevitably short of revelation, because he is simply imputing to the world himself and his own impressions.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Chesterton, *Heretics*, p. 280.

⁹⁹ Koven, *Slumming*, p. 296. n. 32.

¹⁰⁰ Bell and Haddour, *City Visions*, p. 93.

¹⁰¹ Waugh, *Reticence in Literature*, p. xiii.

Waugh here uncovers Traill's incapacity for expansion of experience, which must necessarily affect his authenticity as a writer and critic. The base typicality that Traill considers to be absent is a defining feature of *Tales*, and the hallmark of Morrison's artistic aim. It seems merely that what is typical to Traill inheres in middle-class normality. Yet the aim he would wish to produce in his hypothetical reader is precisely that which Morrison has produced in him – the sinking of the heart at the prospect of humanity.

For some readers, however, this 'continuity of consciousness' was achieved by Morrison without ill-effects.¹⁰² Clementina Black remarked that:

As to the truth of the picture, discussion has raged, the criticism having mainly followed, in substance, that old lady who said of the Darwinian theory: 'My dear, I don't believe it is true, and if it is, it ought to be hushed up.'¹⁰³

Recognising the reluctance of readers to believe in the truth, or to allow it to be represented lest it shatter their paradigm, Black's suggestion is that the reader has a responsibility to expand their own minds to believe in works like Morrison's, to accept the dissemination of truths they may see as unpalatable or which they wished to believe were improbable.

Morrison's attitude towards truth in 'What is a Realist?' is conflicted, however. In writing *Jago*, Morrison deliberately included facts representative of the slum which he felt readers would repudiate as untrue. He says 'I have seen and heard things that persons sitting in committee rooms would call diabolical fable' (7). He asserts that he elected not to include these, however: 'it was none of my design to write of extreme instances: typical facts were all I wanted; these, I knew, would be met – or shirked – with incredulity' (7). However, he also suggests that the critic who attempts to empirically disprove specific instances in *Jago* would be 'rash', insisting somewhat threateningly upon the innate reality of his novel. Traill recognises the deliberation with which Morrison included such unbelievable facts, arguing that exaggeration can be seen in the selection of details which though true 'have been so

¹⁰² Deeds Ermarth in Furst, *All is True*, p. 143.

¹⁰³ Clementina Black, 'A Septet of Stories', in *The New Century Review*, 1.2 (February 1897). 168-76. (170).

selected as to render the total impression false' (24). Morrison deliberately destabilises his reader's expectations, and Traill, the readers' representative, therefore struggles.

Morrison reserved particular ire for those who felt he ought to have written of the Jago 'weeping'. Morrison declares; in terms which elucidate both his detached narrative style and his lack of desire to protect his reader from the text: 'I have learned better than to thrust myself and my emotions between [the characters] and my reader.' He asserts that readers want him:

...to do their weeping for them, as a sort of emotional bedesman [...] [to]make public parade of sympathy in their behalf, so that they may keep their own sympathy for themselves, and win comfort from the belief that they are eased of their just responsibility by vicarious snivelling (6-7).

Morrison identifies the ability of the slum novel to perform catharsis for the reader: alerting the reader to this he insists on their responsibility for the text.

The implied reader is similarly challenged within the text of *Tales*. Hunter suggests that Morrison imagines the reader in the figure of the student doctor who fails to intervene between Lizerunt and her violent husband. Hunter persuasively argues that in Morrison's East End fiction 'the flatly descriptive, affectless surface of the writing is designed to give the reader no grapple point.'¹⁰⁴ As Murfin notes, Morrison sees his readers as: "'snivelling" malcontents, trying to escape the duty they bear to society.' Morrison punishes them for their neglect 'through the experience of reading.'¹⁰⁵

Morrison suggests that the author's responsibility towards the slum is entirely different to that of the public. Morrison states that it is 'the artist's privilege to seek his material where he pleases [...] If the community have left horrible places and horrible lives before his eyes, then the fault is the community's' (4). He sees his own duty as fulfilled in the exposure of the community's fault. In electing to include details that seem unreal, Morrison

¹⁰⁴ Hunter, 'Arthur Morrison and the Tyranny of Sentimental Charity', 301.

¹⁰⁵ Murfin, 'Flashes from the Slums', 18.

elevates reality above realism and deliberately disarms his reader by trying to suggest the extraordinary truth beneath his fiction. James suggested that ‘in every novel the work is divided between the writer and the reader; but the writer makes the reader very much as he makes his characters.’¹⁰⁶ Morrison makes his reader distrustful: he makes a reader prepared to disbelieve in the reality of realism. Morrison therefore gets the reader he deserves, and even perhaps desires, in *Trill*. However, the ‘facts’ Morrison alludes to *do* fit into his total picture of the *Jago*. In this sense he is not unreliable, since his use of the unlikely facts does not depart from the inner reality of the text.¹⁰⁷

The novel was produced at a point of cultural saturation with slum fiction, raising questions about the continuing imaginative response to the slum. *Jago* seems to signify an imaginative end-point in the fictional representation of the slum. Such discussions were further complicated by the preponderance of social investigative slum texts. As Koven has identified:

If the experience of finding the same story in a novel and in a philanthropic report made each narrative seem more authentic and true, it must also have destabilised expectations of the relationship of fact to fiction. This was part of a much broader problem confronting readers in an age when many novelists, not just writers of tracts, drew on reports produced by social investigations whose authors, for their part, often deployed novelistic conventions in presenting their own ‘facts.’¹⁰⁸

This reflexivity complicates the subjectivity of any account: saturation with slum writing of all genres destabilised reality.

In the review ‘How Realistic Fiction is Written’ in the *St James’s Gazette*, Morrison was attacked on the grounds of plagiarism: the critic stated that the book replicated Jay’s so closely that ‘the reader was impressed by such realistic fiction only because of “his own ignorance of the subject”’.¹⁰⁹ ‘C.R.’ in *The Academy* defended Morrison against these charges, stating that Morrison’s method of observation over eighteen months spent in the

¹⁰⁶ James, *Literary Criticism*, I. 922.

¹⁰⁷ On ‘Ideal narrative audiences’ see Rabinowitz, ‘Truth in Fiction’, p. 134.

¹⁰⁸ Koven, *Slumming*, pp. 97-98.

¹⁰⁹ Cited in Keating, *Jago*, p. 26.

Nichol naturally led to some similarities between his account and Jay's.¹¹⁰ In 'What is a Realist?' Morrison enacted his own defence by inverting the argument of the *St James's* critic. He claims that Traill fails to understand his depiction of the Jago simply because he never witnessed it in actuality: 'Mr Traill knows nothing of the Jago at all: therefore he refuses to believe it. That is all.'¹¹¹ Henkle's support for Morrison on this count is compelling. Henkle argues that repeated representations of social problems are read as plagiarism rather than a continuing response to the same problems, because 'mass culture transforms originally realistic accounts into representations that one can read as repetitive diversions which present no danger to the dominant system.'¹¹² While this goes some way to discharging the accusations of plagiarism, the result is Traill's disbelief in the fictional account due to a lack of experience in the real world. This seems rather an odd thing to dismiss by a writer whose project was to bring the unknown East End into the consciousness of the West.

Morrison asked in 'What is a Realist?' that Traill 'trot out his experts' to prove the unreality of the novel, implying his positivistic belief that the truth exists, and that it can be proven – even if, in this instance, by absence of evidence. Yet Traill seemed to share this belief – he accepted, and supplied testimonials by charity workers, wholesalers and priests who had worked in the area, when he revised his essay in *The New Fiction* (24-26). Both author and critic therefore express the belief that the realist account bears a social responsibility towards the verifiable reality of urban poverty. Morrison's essay takes a stand between the novel and history as a written, non-fiction record of reality that holds dear its own claims to truth.

¹¹⁰ C.R. 'The Methods of Mr Morrison', 531.

¹¹¹ Arthur Morrison, What is a Realist? *The New Review*, Vol XVI, March 1897, Issue 94, 326-336 (333). (This line was removed when printed as the 'Preface to the Third Edition').

¹¹² Henkle, 'Morrison, Gissing, and the Stark Reality', 312.

Morrison provides his own definition of a realist as ‘a simple writer of tales, who takes whatever means lie to hand to present life as he sees it’ (3). His understanding of realism is subjective, relying on his own vision of life. Morrison asserts the accuracy and sincerity but also the innovation of his work. Determined to obey only his artistic integrity and his social conscience, he repudiated ‘the feeble plea that the function of imagination is the distortion of fact’ (4). He thereby set himself in opposition to critics like Waugh, for whom imagination ought to ‘[make] plain the rough places of life.’ For Waugh, literature was required as the ‘amulet’ against the realities of life; it ought to ‘spread peace and beauty in a home [...] the true function of literature is to make for every man a home of the soul.’¹¹³

Morrison prefigures this criticism, using domestic imagery to argue that readers who dispute the realistic treatment of the Jago ‘believe it to be the sole function of art to minister to their personal comfort – as upholstery does’ (5). This was certainly true of Harry Quilter, who had read *Tales* and was aggrieved, that it had not attempted ‘to give pleasure – to be delightful’. Without these qualities, Quilter stated, it could not be considered art.¹¹⁴ Emily Cuming observes that this had been the intention of Mayhew’s slum writings, which addressed his reader sitting ‘beside your snug sea-coal fire, in your cosy easy chair’ in order to compare their own comfort to the suffering of his subjects.¹¹⁵ In ‘A Raid among Books’ Mrs Oliphant described *Jago* as ‘a gruesome book to sit down to by the fireside after a day’s work’, misunderstanding that to discomfit was Morrison’s intention.¹¹⁶ He entirely spurned the role of his book to provide comfort to the reader.

In its insistence that the reader should believe in the author’s claims to represent ‘things as they are’, ‘What is a Realist?’ illustrates the destruction of the relationship of trust between authors and readers. Negative responses, Morrison asserts, come from bad reading:

¹¹³ Waugh, *Reticence in Literature* pp. xiii-xiv.

¹¹⁴ Harry Quilter, ‘The Gospel of Intensity’, *The Contemporary Review*, 67 (Jun 1895): 761-782. (769)

¹¹⁵ Emily Cuming, ‘Home is home be it never so homely’: Reading Mid-Victorian Slum Interiors’, *Journal of Victorian Culture* 2013, Vol. 18, No. 3, 368–386 (380).

¹¹⁶ Oliphant, ‘A Raid Among Books’, 841.

‘finding truth where they had looked for the materials of another debauch of self-delusion, [readers] scream aloud, they protest’ (329). Morrison paradoxically insists in a concrete reality beyond the text and aims to represent his relation to the Jago/Nichol as unique and individual, even contingent. He describes his encounter with the place as ‘my fate [...] my experience’ (5). Yet he also avers that it ought to be acknowledged by all. Morris defines realism broadly as ‘any writing that is based upon an [...] assumption that it is possible to communicate about a reality beyond the writing.’¹¹⁷ In ‘What is a Realist?’, therefore, Morrison enacts his own disbelief in realism, despite his belief in the positivist ‘reality beyond’ his writing. Morrison implies that Traill’s failure to understand the reality of the Jago is due to his having not witnessed the Nichol; therefore the suggestion is that Morrison does not expect his fiction to operate as realism, as it cannot convey something beyond itself.

At the close of ‘What is a Realist?’ Morrison unfeasibly suggests his unconcern at Traill’s accusations: ‘whether I am [a realist] or not is no concern of mine’ (8). Yet the impact of Traill’s critique is clear not only in the existence of the paradoxical ‘What is a Realist?’ itself but in Morrison’s later work. Traill’s criticism transformed Morrison’s relationship to his novel and encouraged him to voice his expectations of his readers clearly for the first time. It also, however, allowed him to continue to mystify his readers. Hunter suggests that the debates surrounding the publication of *Tales* and *Jago* influenced Morrison permanently, leading to the abandonment ‘first [of] the naturalistic mode in which he excelled, and then the East End as a subject altogether.’¹¹⁸ Maltz’s analysis supports this; she suggests that in *The Hole in the Wall* (1902) ‘It is as if Morrison had been receptive to Traill’s critiques and had attempted to act on them.’¹¹⁹ Morrison’s feigned indifference at the close of ‘What is a Realist?’ cannot disguise the significance of these discussions on his work. Morrison’s increased awareness of his readers, prompted by this discussion, is clear in

¹¹⁷ Morris, *Realism*, p. 6.

¹¹⁸ Hunter, ‘Arthur Morrison and the Tyranny of Sentimental Charity’, 292.

¹¹⁹ Maltz, *Maritime Subculture*, 38.

the shift in his representation of readers in the later works. 'What is a Realist?' suggests that Morrison has both 'the wit and the will' to make his harshest criticisms into an 'advertisement', but his later fiction submitted to the criticisms prompted by *Jago*, adhering to the despotic critics and libraries.¹²⁰ D.A. Miller's observations on the self-policing of the writer seem apt:

Even the blandest (or bluffest) scholarly work fears getting into trouble: less with the adversaries whose particular attacks it keeps busy anticipating through what, but for the spectacle of this very activity, might be perceived as a lack of *authorisation*.¹²¹

Morrison closed 'What is a Realist?' by anticipating future criticism, saying 'if I write other tales different in scope and design, I shall adhere to fact or neglect it as may seem good to me' (8).

III. Readers

In Whiteing's slum novel *No. 5 John Street* (1899), the social investigator Sir Charles performs an act of beneficent education, reading *The Arabian Nights* to Tilda, the slum woman he admires. The framing device of the story troubles Tilda:

She could stand a lie, she was pleased to say, as well as anybody; but she added, somewhat illogically, that she didn't like the feller as told it to pretend it was the truth. I assured her she was quite warranted in saying that she didn't believe 'a blessed word of it'.¹²²

Tilda's distaste for figurative literature is represented as comically uncivilised. Appearing within a text of complex generic make up, the framing of the fictional text within the real text places the reader in a position of both familiarity and distance. The unreality of the fairy tale is a plea for the greater reality of the story being related by Sir Charles, despite this novel's generic instability. This is a demonstration of Alison Byerly's claims about the inclusion of artworks into realism, whereby 'particular forms of art' – in this case, a fairytale – are used 'to signal hypocrisy, self-delusion, deceit.' Including such indications of art's limitations

¹²⁰ Morrison, 'Authors, Libraries and the Public', p. 536.

¹²¹ D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1988), p. vii.

¹²² Whiteing, *No. 5 John Street*, p. 236.

‘does not render the novelist’s own art more suspect’. Rather, it allows the novelist to accommodate – or perhaps pander to – readers’ ‘sophisticated doubts about representation by forcing someone else to take the fall.’¹²³

Anxiety in representing readers is evident throughout Morrison’s work. In the culturally isolated places bordering slums described in *Tales*, literacy battles with older forms of storytelling and knowledge transfer, particularly gossip, for supremacy. In such places gossip controls inhabitants by maintaining respectability through the vocal transfer of surveillance. Working-class literacy is represented as being distrusted as much by the inhabitants of such streets as by the commentating classes. Writers who chose the working class as their subject portrayed themselves as uniquely capable of bridging the chasm between readers and places governed by oral language. Simultaneously, these texts represent anxieties about working-class reading practices and profess the improbability of the emergence of a radical working-class literature in the East End.

The conflict between reading practices and orality in working-class areas is apparent in *Tales* and *To London Town*. In ‘A Street’, Morrison states that literature is excluded from the typically dreary working-class household of the East End:

Nobody reads poetry or romance. [...] A Sunday paper in some few houses provides such reading as this street is disposed to achieve. Now and again a penny novel has been found among the private treasures of a growing daughter, and has been wrathfully confiscated.¹²⁴

In ‘Behind the Shade’, a disquieting and bleak tale, the conflict between orality and literacy is represented as a grave concern. Female literacy challenges the status quo, yet is no guarantee of social mobility. Gossip persists as the intimate form of orality that is threatening in its ability to circulate falsehoods as truths. It is sufficiently powerful to increase isolation from literacy, maintain neighbourhood boundaries, and dictate women’s place within them.

¹²³ Byerly, *Realism, Representation, and the Arts*, p. 6.

¹²⁴ Arthur Morrison, ‘A Street’ in *Tales of Mean Streets* [1894] (London: Faber and Faber, 2008) pp. 19-28. (pp. 27-28). Hereafter notes will appear in the text as ‘AS’.

Literacy is presented as the troubling aspiration of many working-class characters in *Tales*. *To London Town*, however, intends to reassure a middle-class reader that the reading practices of the working classes operate within safe boundaries, and that gossip too can be controlled. As Henley noted, '[Morrison's] critics hailed his conversion to optimism in *To London Town* as fluently as they had bewailed his plunge into pessimism in *Jago*.'¹²⁵ *To London Town* was so reassuring to critics that even the violent death of Grandfather May was dismissed insouciantly by one, who observed blithely that it is 'true, there is something of a murder...'¹²⁶ In *To London Town* Morrison keeps literacy and orality separate in order to present a more benign vision of the East End.

In the texts discussed, gossip and reading are distinct, but both can be dangerous. In 1860 Francis Turner Palgrave, who went on to select the ever-popular *Golden Treasury of Poetry* in 1861, suggested that people 'go to books for something almost similar to what they find in social conversation. Reading tends to become only another kind of gossip.'¹²⁷ In the later century, however, both the characters and authors of these texts suggest a discomfiting disparity between orality and literacy. They demonstrate the difficult transformation of neighbourhoods of oral transfer into reading communities. Morrison's later work develops the possibility of a bond between author and reader. In *To London Town* Morrison demonstrates a 'recognition of the literary culture which he shared with his audience' making every effort to assimilate to this culture and not to challenge it.¹²⁸ After the controversies surrounding the readings of his earlier fiction, Morrison shows greater consideration towards his middle-class reader *and* to his working-class subject. In *To London Town* Morrison alleviates his anxieties about the reception of his work by illustrating the ideal way to read.

¹²⁵ W.E. Henley, 'Some Novels of 1899', *The North American Review*, Vol. 170, No. 519 (Feb., 1900), 253-262 (p. 258).

¹²⁶ Anon., 'Novels: *To London Town*', *Saturday Review*, 9 Sept 1899, 88:2289, (336).

¹²⁷ F.T. Palgrave, 'On Readers in 1760 and 1860,' *Macmillan's Magazine*, I, (1860), 488-9, cited in Flint, *The Woman Reader*, pp. 47-48.

¹²⁸ Carlisle, *The Sense of an Audience*, p. 6.

IV. 'Reading Nothing and Considering Nothing': Futile Literacy in *Tales of Mean Streets* (1894)

In *Tales of Mean Streets* (1894), Hunter has suggested, the short story form colludes with the subjects in a refusal 'to bring the city and its inhabitants into any sort of narrative order.'¹²⁹ The mean streets have their own order, however, which conflicts with external developments. In the clashes between orality and literacy the collection demonstrates struggles towards truth and knowledge caused by the isolation of the mean streets from the world of the written word. In these areas, education provided by 'the grim Board School three grim streets off' produces only 'a fathomless ignorance' (22; 28). This representation was supported in Masterman's *The Heart of the Empire* (1901). Masterman stated that the modern city limited access to literacy, so that the common man 'reared in block dwellings with occasional glimpse of murky sky' was cut off from the city itself and from the literacy which can surmount physical distance: 'he never writes to the Times: his grievances never become articulate [...] he never rises to ordered, intelligible utterance.'¹³⁰

The short story 'Squire Napper' echoes the characters of Noddy Boffin and Silas Wegg of Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-65) in the paver Bill Napper and Minns, a soap-box orator. Napper unexpectedly receives £300 on the death of his brother in Australia. He spends much of his sudden fortune on a barrel of beer, and he leaves work. Becoming bored, he engages Minns at Mile End Waste, selecting him from among 'speakers of all sorts' because of his adaptability: Minns is 'always denouncing something'.¹³¹ Whereas in *Our Mutual Friend* Noddy aims to redress his illiteracy by asking Wegg to read Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Napper engages Minns to 'denounce' at his home, saving him the trouble of going to the Waste:

¹²⁹ Hunter, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Short Story*, pp. 39-40.

¹³⁰ Masterman, *The Heart of the Empire*, p. 12.

¹³¹ Morrison, 'Squire Napper' in *Tales of Mean Streets*, pp. 125-141 (p. 136). Further references will appear in the text.

‘Tipp us the Teetotal an’ Down-with-the-Public-‘Ouse,’ Bill would request, and the orator [...] would oblige in that line till most of the strong phrases had run out, and had begun to recur. Then Bill would say, ‘Now come the Rights O’ Labour caper’ (137).

Minns and his partner misinterpret Napper’s pleasure at being orated to as a sign of interest in their cause, and attempt to secure some of his £300 for a ‘a new weekly paper [...] that should rear its head on behalf of the down-trodden toilers, and make its mighty voice heard with dread by the bloated circles of Class and Privilege’ (138). Napper greets this request with laughter: having refused a cheque for his inheritance from the lawyers thinking they were trying to have him on, he believes he can recognise a con when he sees one, and he most often sees one in the written word. Although Napper is not perspicacious enough to realise it, in securing the oration for himself he has revealed Minns’s hypocrisy. Napper’s refusal to engage with the printed word, though not creditable, is reasonable in this instance. In spite of the insistence on the comic foolhardiness of Napper, ‘Squire Napper’ is ultimately as grim as other stories in the collection, as his interval of wealth is simultaneously interminable and extremely brief without access to the written word. Nonetheless, ‘Squire Napper’ may have been reassuring to a conservative middle-class readership, as it shows the lack of interest of the working class in a radical press.

In ‘Behind the Shade’, Morrison takes the authorial objectivity of late-Victorian realism to its limit, combining a journalistic style with a passive narrative voice to efface himself as author from the text. Passive phrases such as ‘it was said’; ‘it was generally held’ and ‘there was a discovery’ are used to convey that the central characters of the story are talked about but are themselves almost silent (78). The narrative voice mimics that of the Victorian third person narrator but is loaded with judgments about Mrs and Miss Perkins which are the mutually agreed upon ideas of their neighbours. Employing gossip as the narrative mode, Morrison assigns responsibility for exclusion from literacy to the gossiping neighbours who disdain the literate exceptions in their neighbourhood. The story is composed

of fragments of hearsay passed along an East End street. Using this anonymous and unaccountable voice to represent the collective, Morrison achieves the effect of an unmediated outpouring of the street's opinion.

Mrs and Miss Perkins move to a desolately uniform East End street after the death of Mr Perkins. We never hear of their experiences there from the women themselves. Instantly isolated by the situation of their 'odd box of a cottage' at the end of the street, Mrs and Miss Perkins accentuate their difference by refusing to engage in gossip.¹³² As local sentiment declines from being too proud to send children to the Board School, the Perkins's undersubscribed Dame School fails. Like Haslam, Morrison suggests that the expansion of education decreases its value. The Perkins's education is disrespected and oral language, not literacy, gains power.

Neighbours who are suspicious of the pretensions to gentility they perceive in Mrs and Miss Perkins use gossip to maintain surveillance and to control the otherness the women represent. Information about the Perkins women is circulated, but not usually ascribed to a speaker. The passive narrative voice spreads damning stories against them. Ire is raised when Miss Perkins places an advertisement for piano lessons in her window: 'it was not approved by the street' (77, 78). Rather than understanding the advertisement as evidence of the Perkins's increasing need for money, the street reads it as evidence of their 'grasping spirit' and ostentatiousness, as the Perkins have their own piano. The street's resistance to this advertisement reveals the frailty of the written word in this place. As the written word is misinterpreted and its usage is disdained, talk becomes malicious and has powerful effects.

Through gossip, the street feels that it gains knowledge about the women: 'the neighbours knew the history of the Perkinses [...] with little disagreement: having told it to each other' (76). What the street does not know is invented: ignorance of facts only fuels

¹³² Morrison, 'Behind the Shade', in *Tales of Mean Streets*, pp. 75-82. (p. 75.) Further references will appear in the text.

gossip. The Perkinses are transformed into a story that the street tells itself. The street accepts spoken language as an accurate representation of visible evidence. Miss Perkins, who begins sewing shirts at home to support herself and her mother, is seen:

... in broad daylight, with a package in newspaper, she made such haste past a shop-window where stood Mrs Webster and Mrs Jones, that she tripped on the broken sole of one shoe, and fell headlong [...] it was plain to see that [her parcel] was made up of cheap shirts, cut out ready for the stitching. The street had the news the same hour (78).

The newspaper itself is of no use in conveying information – the street uses an oral system to spread news. In the mean streets it is gossip, and not the written word, that is ‘the eye and the ear and the tongue of the people.’¹³³ Through this system what the street hears is that Miss Perkins, in taking home piece-work is ‘taking bread out of the mouths of them that wanted it’ (78). The idea that this is ‘plain to see’ is an expression of the street’s opinion. Treating language as a game of ‘whisper down the lane’ the street has disregarded that which is plain to see – the poverty evidenced by Miss Perkins’s broken shoe. Gossip prevents Miss Perkins from working to support her mother, hastening their destitution. This is achieved by a resentful neighbour saying ‘a few plain words in the right quarter’ (78). Gossip becomes not only malicious but dangerous: Morrison reveals that ‘plain words’ are no such thing.

This understanding of the nuances of the most ostensibly ordinary form of discourse, gossip, shows that Morrison does not make a distinction between the accountability of spoken language and literary language. Both are capable of misleading. This is central to Morrison’s realist aesthetic, as Morrison perceives the extraordinary in the ordinary. ‘Behind the Shade’ conveys the anxiety that even in its most everyday uses, language can misrepresent, so that ‘no use of language enjoys [a] direct, unproblematically representational relation to reality.’¹³⁴

¹³³ W.T. Stead: ‘The Press is at once the eye and the ear and the tongue of the people’; ‘Government Through Journalism’, *The Contemporary Review*, Vol. 49, May, 1886, pp. 653-674.

¹³⁴ Warhol, *Gendered Interventions*, p. 193.

Eventually the women are found dead in the cottage, their reserve having been misinterpreted as pretension, and all their activities having been misconstrued through gossip. Even the report of their deaths in the newspaper is passed to the reader through the medium of gossip. Language which manifests itself as gossip cannot be meaningfully translated into print: 'the papers printed coarse drawings of the house, and in leaderettes demanded the abolition of something, or the reform of something else' (82). As a site governed by orality, not by literacy, the street preserves itself from a representative record of what has occurred which would turn their 'evening's fame' into infamy (82). Morrison conveys the chasm between the oral and the written word, suggesting that in the mean streets, gossip is practised to the deliberate exclusion of literacy.

Both oral and written accounts are revealed as unreliable in *Tales*. In 'Behind the Shade' newspapers appear as wrappings for work materials and finally as the newspaper bed on which Miss Perkins dies. These non-deterministic uses reflect the redundancy of the written word in mean streets, whose inhabitants occupy a space between a world of orality and the literacy of the new 'reading public'. The ability of the author to represent these places, apparently beyond language, is a marker of his unusual practice of realism. He assumes a privileged position as the mediator between the press and the people, who he presents as incapable of comprehending each other.

In *Tales* Morrison unearths the menace in the ordinary. He conveys the horror of the everyday urban experience with an 'everyday' mode of speech to render it extraordinary and tragic. Transforming places considered unknowable into the knowable realm of print, *Tales* brings sites governed by orality disquietingly near to the late-Victorian reader. The epistemology of the slum margin is told through gossip in order to convey its distance and separateness from the world of the written word. Paradoxically he has in 'A Street' disputed previous sensational visions of the East End, yet he conveys the disconcerting impression that

‘Behind the Shade’ is told by the street itself, a street which cannot be otherwise reached by written language.

Such a vacuum in the East End is a myth which Morrison did not take the responsibility to counter. In 1896 journalist and editor G. Holden Pike wrote of the hitherto accepted impression of the area, stating that ‘the general idea suggested is that of a hard struggle for life [...] a struggle which, from a scientist’s point of view, may not always end with the survival of the fittest.’¹³⁵ This, Pike declared, was not accurate, as could be proven by the success of the new free Bethnal Green Library. Any anxieties that the Library would either not be used, or would be used for the reading of ‘sensational’ or other disreputable fiction were proven incorrect. The readers chose well and behaved well. Morrison’s selective representation of the East End disputes such successes despite the apparently shared desire to represent the East End accurately.

Tales is about, not for, the working class. ‘Seeing nothing, reading nothing, and considering nothing’, Morrison suggests that inhabitants of these streets consign *themselves* to a dullness too ignorant to be desperate (28). Collapsing the threat of working-class literacy, Morrison reassures the middle-class reader that radical change will not be forged in such places. Henry Woodd Nevinson, disappointed at the sales of *Neighbours of Ours* in comparison to those of *Tales* ascribed the latter’s greater success to this, stating that it ‘flatters the bourgeois idea of the working man.’¹³⁶ Nonetheless, *Tales* also disturbs the middle-class reader with evidence of the irreparable rift between literacy and the East End streets.

V. Reading and Romance: *To London Town* (1899)

In *To London Town*, Morrison redresses the image of the East End as a place beyond literature and literacy. After the criticisms levelled at *Jago*, Morrison uses *To London Town*

¹³⁵ G. Holden Pike, “‘General Readers’ in East London”, *Good Words*, January 1896, 668-670 (669).

¹³⁶ Angela V. John, ‘Henry W. Nevinson: *Neighbours of Ours* (1895)’, *London Fictions* (2013) <http://www.londonfictions.com/hw-nevinson-neighbours-of-ours.html> [Last accessed 1 Feb 2014]

to demonstrate an increasing sense of responsibility towards his readers. The novel reimagines East Enders as migrants from Epping Forest who have both the entrepreneurial spirit and the imagination to survive in the city. It is a realist romance. The romance operates in both senses of the word: it is a quest, whereby the hero Johnny seeks himself and a future in the city, and there is a central love story between Johnny and the seamstress Nora. Unlike 'A Street' in which literacy is unusual and in which for young people in love there is 'no exchangement of promises, no troth-plight, no engagement, no love-talk', romance can take place in *To London Town* because of the inclusion of romances and because of the lack of gossip in Harbour Lane (27). In Bessy May's reading practices the novel demonstrates a self-conscious reimagining of the romance plot and a plea for a benign East End novel which can be safely assimilated into a history of reading. It redresses the hopelessness of the working-class reader as identified by Haslam. While Haslam's paternalistic article concedes that 'one can well understand how welcome the glamour of romance, whether wholesome or spurious, would be in a locality where life was trodden by grim realities' it is not that sort of romance that Bessy reads, and her locality is not grim.¹³⁷ Containing romance within a realist novel, Morrison evades the Scylla of the label 'realist' and the Charybdis of the 'romance' such as Haslam criticises in *The Press and the People*. The characters are advantageously situated within Epping Forest. City readers were a particular cause of concern, as Masterman noted:

Upon these city generations there has operated the now widely spread influence of thirty years of elementary school teaching. The result is a *mental* change; each individual has been endowed with the power of reading, and a certain dim and cloudy capacity for comprehending what he reads. Hence the vogue of the new sensational press, with its enormous circulation and baneful influence; the perpetual demand of the reader for fiercer excitement ('more chops, bloody ones, with gristle!')¹³⁸

Morrison addressees such concerns by bringing literacy and the hero in from the countryside.

¹³⁷ Haslam, *The Press and the People*, p. 4.

¹³⁸ Masterman, ed., *The Heart of the Empire*, p. 8.

Reading practices in *To London Town* are deeply gendered. The novel counters Mary Hammond's argument that 'no one by the late nineteenth century was feminising the now canonised "classic" romances of Sir Walter Scott.'¹³⁹ Johnny is never seen reading one of these romances which Bessy loves. Hammond however does recognise that reading practices were gendered. The novel supplants the reading of romances onto a female character to retain the masculine ideal of the male protagonist. Hammond's suggestion that 'realism implied masculinity, the romance femininity' is helpful to our understanding of Morrison's method of combining realism and romance in the novel.¹⁴⁰ Revising impressions of the literature consumed by working-class readers, in *To London Town* Morrison provides an alternative image of reading youth and the reading working class. Articles such as 'Do Our Girls Take an Interest in Literature?' and 'What Girls Read' discussed their subject with paternalistic concern, expressing doubt at the ability of young readers to select morally appropriate literature.¹⁴¹ The impression of the reading girl as a type who 'reads chiefly rubbish and does not know her standard authors' is challenged in the figure of Bessy.¹⁴² Although she reads romance novels, they are not of the trashy variety deplored by concerned critics.

In the pastoral idyll of Epping Forest as the novel opens, Bessy's novels collaborate with the forest to create the atmosphere of romance. The location enhances Bessy's delight in the books. Reading connects her to the place she occupies in the forest. She is in isolation yet under supervision from her nearby grandfather. Bessy's interpretation of the novels also reveals that the state of the forest is an imagined one – beyond the novels she reads, there is the quiet threat that the forest will change. When Bessy decides that 'the tale was best enjoyed with many pauses; pauses filled with the smell of the meadowsweet, and with the

¹³⁹ Mary Hammond, *Reading, Publishing and the Formation of Literary Taste in England, 1880-1914* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2006), p. 5.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁴¹ Edward G. Salmon, 'What Girls Read' in *The Nineteenth century: a monthly review*, Mar. 1877-Dec. 1900 Vol. 20.116 (Oct 1886): 515-529.

¹⁴² Yates, 'Do Our Girls Take an Interest in Literature?' p. 122.

fantasy that abode in the woods' it is swiftly revealed that she is creating a fantasy of the woods themselves.¹⁴³ The author employs the mock-heroic to remark that in Bessy's imagination, 'the sudden plaint of an errant cow [became] the growling of an ogre in the forest' (4). This comic interlocation however does not disrupt the continued descriptions of the beauty of the forest. Epping is described in romantic language:

The Western hillsides grew more glorious, and the sunlight, peeping under heavy boughs, flung along the sward, gilt the tree-boles whose shadows veined it, and lit nooks under bushes where the wake-robin raised its scarlet mace of berries (4).

Haslam's paternalistic anxieties about literacy in Manchester are mainly focused on what women read and where they read it.¹⁴⁴ Bessy's idyllic locality makes her a reassuring female reader. She could not be further from the threatening figure of Dicky in *Jago*, whose literacy is only ever represented as a menace to the middle-class reader, fitting him for greater crimes.

The expansion of London towards Epping Forest is apparent in 'some subtle influence from the great smoky province [...] London grew and grew, and washed nearer and still nearer' (25). The changes that the expansion of London will bring to the forest cannot be prevented by the hero Johnny; he cannot save Epping. What he can save – what is revealed as worth saving – is Bessy's right to read romances. In making his hero physically defend but not engage in such reading Morrison creates this realist romance which alludes to the masculine romances of Scott.

London provides Bessy with alternatives to the romance of the forest. In the city she 'had seen great things [...] more wonderful than all her palaces of romance' (163). The romance novel therefore retains a role even without Epping Forest. It is the context through which Bessy can appreciate the fantastic aspects of the city. Bessy's reading practices can therefore be appropriated by London readers, and are comparable to the delights of London. Johnny, the hero of the realist romance, cannot be allowed to dream of the past, as the

¹⁴³ Arthur Morrison, *To London Town* (London: Methuen and Co., 1899), pp. 3-4. Further references will appear in the text. Sadly we do not know what Traill thought of Morrison's later works, as he died in February 1900.

¹⁴⁴ Haslam, *The Press and the People*, p. 16.

romance novels allow Bessy to do. For Johnny, who reads only technical books and the newspaper, his dreams are of London and of Nora. He is engaged in the present reality, and he dreams only of the future. Morrison, however, in writing a reader such as Bessy May, suggests nostalgia for readers of the past.

Butson, the bigamous, violent stepfather, is finally challenged when Johnny witnesses Butson burning Bessy's novels and striking her. Resenting her reading as a 'waste of time' which he thinks could be spent in earning money to help keep him, Butson lights his pipe with pages ripped from the old romances. As Flint suggests, reading could be regarded as 'dangerously useless, a thief of time which might be spent on housewifely duties.'¹⁴⁵ The horror of the book burning in this scene is greater than that of the violence to the girl: its cruelty causes her greater than physical pain. We know little of Bessy other than her love of books, her vulnerability and physical disability. That she reads is the most important aspect of Bessy's character for the reader. The disrespect Butson has for literature is central to his emasculation and his redundancy as the head of the household. Bessy's reading and her ability to fill her leisure time with literature prepares her for the lower middle-class life which her brother's career as an engineer will ensure.¹⁴⁶

For Johnny and Bessy, the worlds of reading and orality are kept beneficially separate. In Harbour Lane, the houses are so arranged that gossip is thwarted. In this Docklands community Morrison so fondly describes, mutual aid and friendship thrive because the design of the streets precludes gossip. The alternate organisation of front and back yards in Harbour Lane makes back fence conversations impracticable (230). When Butson is revealed to be a bigamist, the family are able to leave and re-establish themselves elsewhere with no long-lasting effects, as gossip has exacted no harm and cemented no untruths about them.

¹⁴⁵ Flint, *The Woman Reader*, p. 11.

¹⁴⁶ Flint, *The Woman Reader*, p. 11.

The materiality of Bessy's books illustrates their longevity and the almost human limits of their lifespan. In Epping Forest Bessy reads 'a tattered old book' upon which the marks of many readings over a period of time are evident:

The book needed a careful separation, being open at back as well as at front; likewise great heed lest the leaves fell into confusion: for, since they were worn into a shape more oval than rectangular, the page numbers had gone, and in places corners of the text had gone too (2-3).

In Gissing's *Thyrza* (1887), the extreme disquiet regarding what types of literature are passed between generations is pivotal to the novel: it inspires Walter Egremont's plan to inform the people of Lambeth about 'good' literature.¹⁴⁷ Bessy's books have been passed to her from her grandfather. The collection includes *The Sicilian Romance* (1790); *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678); *Susan Hopley* (1841), and *The Scottish Chiefs* (1810): popular literature of the seventeenth, eighteenth and earlier nineteenth centuries. Generally conservative works, these texts represent a shared history of reading popular literature which denies the threat of recent literacy among working-class readers. Having these works selected for her by her grandfather places Bessy's literacy within patriarchal parameters.

Susan Hopley (1852) is subtitled '*The Life of a Maid Servant*'. Jonathan Rose recounts the story of Mary Ann Ashford, 'a London domestic servant, [who] saw an advertisement for *Susan Hopley, or the Life of a Maid Servant*. She was intrigued, since she so rarely saw such women in print, except for the occasional newspaper crime story.'¹⁴⁸ The first chapter of *Susan Hopley* is inscribed to 'The Gentle Reader', which Bessy certainly is. The novel describes the benefits of literacy for Susan, which is inscribed as a gift from her employer Mrs Leeson. But this literacy is contained within a hierarchy which is comfortable for Mrs Leeson. While her son Harry is educated by the local clergyman, Susan and her brother Andrew are taught by the Leeson's servant Dobbs, who obtained her instruction from

¹⁴⁷ George Gissing, *Thyrza*, introduced by Pierre Coustillas, (Brighton: Victorian Secrets, 2013).

¹⁴⁸ Rose, *The Intellectual Life*, p. 20.

the Leasons, at their discretion. Thus the iterated images of readers are contained in conservative cultural standards. Although in the ‘Diary of Jane Porter’ by Ina White in 1897 *The Scottish Chiefs* is described as almost forgotten by contemporary readers, White describes it as a book ‘over which our parents bestowed their tears and enthusiasms.’¹⁴⁹ Both *Susan Hopley* and *The Scottish Chiefs* appear in Clement K. Shorter’s selection of The Hundred Best Novels for *The Bookman* in 1898 (at positions 48 and 20 respectively).¹⁵⁰ These novels therefore would not provoke anxiety as the radical papers in *Thyrza* do; rather, they invoke a literary nostalgia. The reader of *To London Town* would be sufficiently familiar with the type of literature Bessy enjoys to see her as a positive representation of their own reading practices. The narrow precepts of her reading are reassuring. As a female reader, it is particularly important that Bessy not read contemporary fiction with its risky innovations. She also does not allow reading to distract her from her domestic role. Bessy does not go out of the house to seek new books, never venturing into the heterosocial space of the library, as *Thyrza* does, to her detriment.¹⁵¹ Bessy’s reading practices are entirely unthreatening.

The books Bessy reads are so transformed by reading that they belong to the reader as much as to the author. The stories are known so well that they could be recited ‘from pure memory’ if they were to be lost, as if proceeding from the reader (11). It seems that Morrison may be lamenting the kinds of friendly reading that his previous works could not inspire. In the ‘Preface’ to *To London Town* Morrison claimed:

I designed this story, and, indeed, began to write it, between the publication of *Tales of Mean Streets* and that of *A Child of the Jago*, to be read together with those books.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Ina Mary White, ‘Art VII: The Diary of Jane Porter, *The Scottish Review*, 1882-1920; Apr 1897; 29, *British Periodicals* 321-337 (322).

¹⁵⁰ Clement K. Shorter, ‘The Hundred Best Novels’, *The Bookman*, 13.77 (Feb 1898) 144-145.

¹⁵¹ Flint suggests that libraries were ‘recognised trysting spots’; *The Woman Reader*, p. 4.

¹⁵² As Jeremy Parrott notes, this Preface appears from the first printing of *To London Town*. See *Arthur Morrison: A Bibliography of First Editions* (Szeged: Kakapo Press, 2007), p.29.

Morrison retrospectively gathers together the books which inspired antagonistic criticism. He attempts to assuage the effects of their innovation and their perceived similarities to experimental realism. The inclusion of the friendly readings of Bessy suggests the kind of readings Morrison intended to inspire. By linking his more innovative texts with the realist romance of *To London Town* Morrison hopes his works can endure like the romances in the text. A review in *The Bookman* suggests that he succeeded:

The reproaches sometimes cast at Mr Morrison that his 'Tales of Mean Streets' and his 'A Child of the Jago' gave a one-sided and a very miserable account of East London life, must now cease. It was not a wanton delight in gloom that made him write so harshly of existence in the wildernesses of bricks and mortar. He writes his report of life in chapters, and not in one alone can he tell the ultimate truth.¹⁵³

However, *To London Town* never reaches the sophistication of language used in *Tales*, nor does it have the forcefulness of *Jago*. Maugham wrote in the 'Preface' to *Liza of Lambeth* of his critics of that novel: 'I suppose it is asking too much from a critic, who is often hurried and always ill-paid, that he should take the trouble to indicate an author's faults in such a way that he may be enabled to correct them [...] he must learn his trade at the expense of the public.'¹⁵⁴ Morrison's work was changed by his most fervent critic, but, in the case of *To London Town*, it was not improved.

VI. The Writing Subject in *The Hole in the Wall* (1902)

In the historical detective story *The Hole in the Wall*, Morrison's protagonist is another orphan boy. Half the story is told by an omniscient narrator in third person, and half in first person by the child Stevy, aged seven at the opening of the novel. The use of the dual narrative technique is a continuation of Morrison's efforts throughout his East End writings to represent the duality of the area. It is exciting and hazardous; engaging and threatening.

¹⁵³ Anon., 'In London Town', *The Bookman*, (Nov. 1899), Vol., 17, Issue 98, 58-59., (58.)

¹⁵⁴ Maugham, Preface to *Liza of Lambeth*, pp. v-xx (pp. xi-xiii).

Stevy is an adept reader of the city, within the limits of his innocence. In allowing Stevy to tell his own history, Morrison makes Stevy one of his more relatable characters, and a unique writing subject in his oeuvre. The novel is far less bleak than either *Tales* or *Jago*. Having Stevy speak directly to the reader makes it possible for Morrison to portray the East End with the softness of reminiscence without denying its brutality. Engaging with the contemporary concerns about the responsibility of literature, the reviewer in *The Speaker* categorised the novel as a ‘bloodthirsty melodrama’ and a ‘bone shattering adventure’, but sanguinely observed that it would be enjoyed by all: ‘the tastes of the educated and uneducated reader differ [...] very little in these matters.’¹⁵⁵ The recognition of the duality of the novel is also apparent in *The Athenaeum*, whose reviewer was reminded of the ‘careful and exact workmanship’ of *Tales*, now combined with ‘real picturesqueness’.¹⁵⁶

Like many of the sites that fascinated Morrison, Ratcliff Highway, described by Stevy in the novel as ‘foul and picturesque’, had been frequently written about. Stevy’s description is reminiscent of Pierce Egan’s *Life in London* (1820), which, as Keating has noted, made the highway seem ‘picturesque’ and prompted slumming visitors who ‘waited eagerly for a fight to break out.’¹⁵⁷ V.S. Pritchett’s reading of *The Hole in the Wall*, based on its topographical precision and the detailed senses it evokes, is that ‘there was a London like this, we are convinced.’ Yet the description of Ratcliff Highway by Stevy relies much on his child’s eye view and is not an attempt to render an objective reality. As C. H. Peake asserts, to ‘treat it as an “authentic commemoration” of a community [as Pritchett had] is to expose it to critical questions which it is not designed to answer.’¹⁵⁸ The novel never achieves the extraordinary impression of capturing history on the move as *Jago* did; instead it looks back, not without nostalgia, at the docks of thirty years before.

¹⁵⁵ Anon., ‘The Hole in the Wall’, *The Speaker: The liberal review*, November 22nd 1902, 212.

¹⁵⁶ Anon., ‘The Hole in the Wall’, *The Athenaeum*, September 27th 1902, (3909), 407.

¹⁵⁷ Pierce Egan, *Life in London* (London: Sherwood, 1820); Keating ‘Fact and Fiction in the East End’, p. 588.

¹⁵⁸ Peake, ‘Re-readings: *The Hole in the Wall*’ (41).

In the notorious Bluegate Fields, under the protection of his feared grandfather, Stevy is able to discern the significance of adult behaviours that may threaten him. His success at doing so is a result of his ability to read not only newspapers, but the numerous signs, notices and images around him which indicate the dangers and threats of the docks of the 1860s. Stevy's innocence protects him but never blinds him. His ability to comprehend the significance of the photograph of the criminal Marr as a clue to the mystery surrounding the disappearance of his father's ship at sea reflects his wider sensibilities regarding the accuracy or otherwise of images with which he is constantly presented. Grandfather Nat's pub, the 'Hole in the Wall' of the title, is decorated throughout with amateur paintings of ships 'with painful blue skies over them, and very even-waved seas beneath' (41). These laboured and inexpert images offend Stevy's visual sensibility. Although he is a child, he perceives the childishness of the 'painful' blue skies which do not meet the 'even-waved seas.' He is able to deduce that such images provide no useful clues as to his father's ship, but the photograph becomes increasingly interesting to him. As Grandfather Nat attempts to piece together the recent disturbances in the pub, Stevy witnesses his reading of the photograph:

Once or twice [Grandfather Nat] turned his eyes aside, and then back again to the picture, as though searching his memory for some old face; then I thought he would toss it away as something valueless but [...] he returned the card to its place and locked the box (121).

The photograph only appears in the parts of the dual narrative related by Stevy. As such, it takes on a particular relationship to the boy orphaned by the photograph's subject. It indicates the fall of a man from a respectable height – the rarity of the photograph in the years preceding the near-history of *The Hole in the Wall* alone suggests this. The photograph represents the reversal of Marr's prospects in life, seemingly cemented by having a solicitous stout mother to sit in a portrait with him, which Stevy lacks.

The photograph sets up a binary between Stevy and Marr: if Marr can fall from respectability, Stevy can aspire to it. The photograph represents the potential self-fashioning

of Stevy. Viewing Marr's photographic portrait places Stevy in a position of power. The photograph is a representation of a past reality against which Stevy's own experiences can be counted on as 'real'. It also gives him knowledge of himself. As Jennifer Green-Lewis has argued, the use of photographs to capture criminality in the late nineteenth century, and the subsequent display of these photographs created a distance between the 'us' of the – middle-class – viewers and the 'them' of the photographic subjects: 'viewers [...] saw themselves as unlike the unreal or abnormal subjects of the photographs.'¹⁵⁹ More than any of Morrison's East End protagonists Stevy reflects the reality of the reader because he is not the other of the photographic subject, but a character with a voice of his own. This is ultimately reassuring to the reader, because 'when misery becomes articulate it is generally a sign that the worst is over.'¹⁶⁰

Stevy's urban sensibility is displayed in his understanding that language provides clues to the visual: he is fascinated by the 'Found Drowned' bills pasted at the wharf stairs, and tries to imagine the physical appearances of the persons described: 'The woman – they guessed her age at twenty-two – wore one earring; and I entangled myself in conjectures as to what had become of the other' (91). Stevy's ability to read is central to the novel's plot, as it allows him to read a letter from his father to his Grandfather Nat, detailing his father's suspicions, which are later realised, that his ship will be scuttled for the insurance money.

The novel is framed by Stevy in the act of writing, recalling what he witnessed as a child: 'I can see it now as I write' (222). Stevy is Morrison's final iteration of the boy child in East London, and he is the most appealing to the reader. Becoming the author of his own history, Stevy is uniquely connected to a reading public; unlike any other of Morrison's protagonists, he speaks directly to them. His survival of the sometimes brutal East End

¹⁵⁹ Jennifer Green-Lewis, *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 223.

¹⁶⁰ R.J. Mitchell and M.D.R. Leys, *A History of London Life* (London: Longman's, Green & Co.), p. 253.

through his literacy – not only of the written word but of the city itself – makes Stevy an engaging adventure story hero. The dual narrative technique, alternating between the omniscient narrator and the innocent child’s eye view, reflects the two images of the East End Morrison had always intended to convey: its horror and its homeliness enable it to act as a point of departure for Stevy, for whom the close of the narrative is a beginning: he ‘went to school at last’ (222).

The reader’s relationship to Stevy is not, as in the case of Dicky Perrott, achieved through apparently unmediated access to his thoughts. Stevy’s narrative is his personal history, softened by nostalgia but sharpened by adult knowledge: he can now read Ratcliff Highway as not only ‘picturesque’ but also ‘foul’ (64). Stevy’s story provides a reader with both the ‘adventure hero’, as Bivona and Henkle identify, and the reassurance that the London he describes is past and gone.¹⁶¹ In this final episode of the lost boy in London, Morrison like Gissing identifies a writing subject like himself – one for whom the story ends, rather more happily than Dicky’s, with ‘another way out’ – by becoming the author of a history which he was able to shape himself. But Stevy is also the character which ‘armchair slummers’, readers of East End literature, wished it would provide for them – the orphan boy hero; a survivor; an exception: a writer.

VII. Reading and the return of the author in ‘Cross Coves’ (1905)

Morrison’s *Divers Vanities* is an incongruous collection of short stories. The first part of the collection, ‘Cross Coves’, opens with an epigraph selected from French poet Villon’s the *Ballade des Pendus*, or ‘Ballad of the Lost’, which translates as follows:

Human brothers who live after us,
Do not have (your) hearts hardened against us,
For, if you take pity on us poor (fellows),

¹⁶¹ Bivona and Henkle, *Imagination of Class*, p. 110.

God will sooner have mercy on you.

This epigraph sets up a peculiar relation of the author to the text. It incriminates Morrison as one of the ‘cross coves’. Yet in these stories, Morrison uses a framing device: imitating Clarence Rook’s *Hooligan Nights* (1899), the narrator is a journalist interested in the phenomenon of young ‘coves’ or rascals, who listens to their adventures in a pub. Ostensibly taking place within many of the same places and with much of the same subject matter of *Tales* and *Jago*, the narrator-journalist effects a comforting distance, allowing for a lightness of touch.

The first story, ‘Chance of the Game’, introduces Spotto Bird, a pickpocket, who stumbles upon an alms-house while running from the police. Here he meets Martha Hardy, who has laid out a ‘dumb cake’, according to the tradition that on St. Agnes’s Eve, if a young girl leaves a cake carved with her initials on a table, she will see her intended husband. Martha’s isolation due to her mother’s illness is poignant, and she tells Spotto, who she thinks is her future husband, that she gets ‘very down sometimes, except for reading.’¹⁶² She asks Spotto whether he ever reads ‘Home Slop’ – a parody of girls’ magazines, which is “full of such beautiful tales!” Spotto is ‘repelled’ by Martha, but sympathetic towards her: ‘she left him puzzled, uncomfortable – somewhat abashed’ (6). On parting, Martha gives Spotto a locket. He appraises its value carefully before returning it to Martha secretly. Spotto knows that without the evidence of the locket being gone, the fanciful Martha will believe the success of the dumb cake was ‘a sleep-walking dream’ (6). He represents his act to himself as self-serving; the locket being so cheap that it would be beneath his dignity to take it. Yet his understanding that for Martha the return of the locket would be a dream shows his empathy for her and his inveiglement into the romances she reads of in her ‘Home Slop.’ Even bad

¹⁶² Morrison, *Divers Vanities* (London: Methuen, 1905), p. 6.

reading has good effects: it prompts Spotto's uncharacteristic kindness in aiding Martha's romantic fantasies.

In 'Spotto's Reclamation' Spotto encounters foolish philanthropist Mr Bullwinkle, a member of the 'Anti-Shampooing League' (10). Morrison mocks pseudo-science to express Bullwinkle's comic misguidedness. Bullwinkle asks Spotto whether he can read and write, by which means, Bullwinkle suggests, Spotto ought to have learned that he was suffering from the 'disease' of crime. Spotto is proficient at both reading and writing, but it has been a part of his criminal activities: it was, he recalls, 'a particularly dexterous piece of writing that first procured – but that was an unpleasant memory' (10). This piece of writing, presumably some fraud committed by Spotto, is precisely what made him a criminal. Similarly Dicky, is told by Mr Beveridge to "learn all you can, learn to read and write [...] stop at nothing" in pursuit of a criminal career (60). In 'Cross Coves' the representation of literacy as both bathetic and negatively enabling rests on the paradoxes previously established in *Tales* and *To London Town*. In 'Cross Coves' the journalist-narrator allows Morrison to distance himself from his subjects. His authorial position is made irreproachable by this re-positioning, so that despite discussing similarly bleak subjects to those portrayed in *Tales* and *Jago* he is not held accountable for them.

Morrison's exchange with Traill caused him to leave behind the disquieting narrative techniques of his earlier work; the 'flatly affectless' *Tales* and disquieting *Jago*.¹⁶³ *Divers Vanities* and *Tales* illustrate conservative concerns regarding the expansion of literacy. *To London Town* and *The Hole in the Wall* show a positive literacy explored in, respectively, the popular fiction of the past and the popular view of the docks of the past. Neither attempt to address the literature of the present. In *Tales*, the reader is threatened with the insufficiency of language to convey meaning, and, further, in the Preface to *Jago* held responsible for

¹⁶³ Hunter, 'Arthur Morrison and the Tyranny of Sentimental Charity', 301.

urban suffering. If the contemporary reception of *To London Town* and *The Hole in the Wall* are markers of their success, we can concur with Walter Ong that:

If the writer succeeds in writing, it is generally because he can fictionalise in his imagination an audience he has learnt to know not from daily life but from earlier writers who were fictionalising in their imaginations earlier writers...¹⁶⁴

In providing an ideal reader in the form of Bessy, and an engaging narrator in Stevy, Morrison expresses sympathy towards his readers and quells his own anxiety about potential misreadings of his novels. In doing so, he achieves two novels that have the possibility to be not only about, but also for, a working-class readership. However, in locating readership only with Bessy, and writing solely with Stevy, Morrison denies the possibility of wider-reaching effects of ‘good’ reading: it is a characteristic of unique, self-helping characters. In his own family, Morrison was ‘the first generation of common readers who became professional writers.’¹⁶⁵ Morrison’s plea for the exclusivity of literacy is aligned to his view of himself as exceptional yet humble. Of Morrison’s contribution to East End fiction it has been said that:

In the early 1890s, the urban poor acquire a voice. [...] the voice of one who was born in the East End of lower working-class parents, grew up there, worked there, and chose it as his subject.¹⁶⁶

By the turn of the century it was clear that this voice was aligned with those who helped themselves. Morrison, like Lang, insisted upon reading as a practice performed by those who ‘deserved’ to learn how.

¹⁶⁴ Walter Ong, ‘The Writer’s Audience is Always a Fiction’ in *PMLA*, Vol. 90. No. 1 (Jan., 1975), 9-21. (11.)

¹⁶⁵ Rose, *The Intellectual Life*, p. 3.

¹⁶⁶ Henkle, ‘Morrison, Gissing, and the Stark Reality’, p. 302.

CONCLUSION

'ANOTHER WAY OUT'

‘Another Way Out’

I.

In *Divers Vanities* (1905), Morrison returned to the Jago. Presenting an alternate end to Dicky Perrott’s life in the short story ‘Teacher and Taught’, Morrison recast the criminal’s acolyte as Flash Povey, a ‘toff’ whose success has enabled him to leave the Jago area and live in Dalston. Having obeyed the rule of the Jago, Povey has risen from casual pickpocketing, in which he was schooled by Skibby Legg, to become a gangster. Povey’s fury at seeing the man who taught him thievery is expressed with bitter pathos. He declares: ‘You took me in hand – a boy that might have been anything – and you showed me an easier game than hard work. [...] There was only one way for me after that, and I took it, and here I am’ (98). Abashed and terrified, Legg spends the remainder of his life in fear and is found drowned in the canal one morning. The ending to the story as the two men die separately, one of natural causes and the other of suicide, is reminiscent of Morrison’s earlier style in its abruptness and understatement. Without further encounter the relations between the men are unresolved. No transformation is achieved even in death, as Legg’s horror and descent into instability is due to fear, not regret. The Jago persists beyond the boundaries of the novel: unlike Legg and Povey, the place itself cannot be destroyed.

The achievement of the transfiguration of the Jago into an historical sign was the apogee of Morrison’s experimental form and as such shaped his future endeavours. The replacement of ‘Nichol’ with ‘Jago’ in popular usage marks the novel as what Jameson has called ‘the irrevocable’, that ‘from which there is no turning back: the act one drags about with one like a ball and chain.’¹¹ For Morrison, the transubstantiation of the Jago into a place understood as historical made *Jago* the ball and chain against which his future work strained. Although he produced interesting work after it, his peregrinations into the territory of urban

¹ Jameson, *Antinomies*, p. 20.

realism in *Tales* and *Jago* are those by which he is remembered. In *Jago* this is particularly due to the framing of the novel with the map, which contributes to its status as both a relic and a legend: fantasy and history are both retained in the lines of the map. The map works as an epitaph and eulogy to the slum space. His later work neither achieved such stylistic innovation nor provoked such censure, as Morrison anticipated when he produced it. He was both contented by this and humbled by it. In the perpetuation of the *Jago*, Morrison became that for which he once chided Daniel Defoe: ‘a realistic old deceiver.’²

Morrison’s work is never entirely resistant to the middle-class picture. There are many moments when he boldly satirises the efforts of the ‘Sentimental-Cocksure’ to achieve change in the East End. He mocked the imagined East End; but by altering his writing style after *Jago* Morrison abstained from providing a continued resistance to the outsiders’ view of it. Indeed, as his biography shows, he became an outsider himself. Thus Morrison’s attempt to reframe the picture never entirely redraws it. The irony and satire evident in his earlier work and the complexity of his rhetorical technique disappear in his later writing, which examined similar subjects but lack the realism of style he achieved in his more innovative texts, *Tales* and *Jago*.

The charm that the East End held for outsiders was well understood by Morrison: that anything is possible about the unknown. Morrison’s refusal to allow outsiders to describe his East End is apparent in his texts but his writing offers concomitantly both clarity and mystification. Morrison revealed details about lives lived east of the Aldgate Pump that had escaped the observation of many other writers of his time. He only occasionally decoded the values of East End lives that might seem unusual to readers, and did so using an ethnographic voice, thus destabilising the ability of contemporary journalistic and ethnographic accounts to make superior claims to truth. For the most part, he presented the lives of the East Enders as

² ‘Whitechapel’, 1022.

they interpreted them themselves, affecting an insouciant tone while knowingly representing appalling realities. Never wholly assuming a role as the ‘interpreter of poor folk’, from ‘Whitechapel’ onwards Morrison portrayed the East End as both brutally ordinary and ultimately inexplicable.³

However, it is also clear from his earliest writing in ‘Jacob’s Island’ that Morrison was aware of the East End as a place that had repeatedly been written about: that East London was itself a palimpsest. No matter how much he endeavoured to transform its imaginings with a brutally realistic and stark prose, he would also, in both fiction and non-fiction, inevitably be contributing to its symbolic status.

II.

Although there has been regular interest in Morrison in literary studies, this thesis has endeavoured to explicate the particular critical focus on his East End writings, and to consider not only why this is particularly of interest now, but to indicate ways that we may wish to proceed further in studies of Morrison. In a recent article focusing on gossip and female respectability in Morrison’s mean streets, I have outlined my areas of future interest – the under-examined gender relations in Morrison’s fiction would be a fascinating starting-point for further study.

His folk stories of Essex, particularly *Cunning Murrell*, are also due for critical assessment. Indeed the continuing London-centricity of literary studies is due a turn at some point, in which project Morrison’s rural works would be an interesting line of enquiry. Further, the current interest in science and magic in Victorian literature could be explored in Murrell’s ‘geomancy’, and the links between the folk tales Murrell inspired, his pseudoscientific practices and scientific naturalism would make this an interesting

³ Frierson, *The English Novel in Transition*, p. xii.

interdisciplinary project.⁴ It would allow a further interrogation of Morrison's style by situating him among a group of writers of rural histories, a group which he was, as ever, on the margins of.

Researching this project I also discovered that James Joyce was influenced by Morrison.⁵ The connections between Morrison's short stories and the formal qualities of modernism would be a fascinating project. This thesis has sought to look back at some of those who influenced Morrison, but to look forward at those influenced by him would be intriguing.

This study has undertaken an historical reading of the place of the slum in the fiction of Arthur Morrison and some of his contemporaries. Without attempting by any means to situate Morrison in the canon, my intent has been to make clear that Morrison made a contribution to the late-Victorian literature of the East End which, arising from his own deep knowledge of the place, was subtle, affecting, substantial and permanent.

III.

Recently, funding was allotted to support the opening of a women's history museum in the East End of London, only for the managers to use the funding to open a Jack the Ripper museum. As Lauren Johnson has written, the museum's choice to focus on the murders shows that 'too often, "interesting" history means "violent"'.⁶ Making discomfort accessible remains a profitable pursuit. The myth of the East End as a site of sex and death persists. Although Morrison's work by no means offers an alternative history for women of the East

⁴ See for example the current research project at St Anne's, Oxford, 'Diseases of Modern Life: Nineteenth-Century Perspectives' and recent studies in folk and fairy tales, magic and science such as Alison Butler's *Victorian Occultism and the Making of Modern Magic: Invoking Tradition* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011) and Melanie Keene's *Science in Wonderland: The Scientific Fairy Tales of Victorian Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

⁵ Hunter, *The Cambridge Introduction to the Short Story in English*, p. 50.

⁶ Lauren Johnson, 'Jack the Ripper, Interesting History and Masculine Violence', July 30th 2015, <https://laurenjohnson1.wordpress.com/2015/07/30/jack-the-ripper-interesting-history-and-masculine-violence/> accessed 30th July 2015; see also Tansy Hoskins, 'How the Jack the Ripper Industry distorts the East End', <http://www.theguardian.com/cities/2015/aug/04/jack-the-ripper-industry-distort-london-east-end-prostitution-cable-street-museum/> accessed 4th August 2015.

End, his ironic, economical style and bleak images of the desperate poor counter the myth of the East End as a site of vicarious excitement.

The fiction that the East End is ‘fit only for paupers, criminals and the despondent’ persisted until relatively recently.⁷ The current generation of gentrifiers are sold on the ‘gritty’ history and indeed present of the area: ‘the more deprived and edgy, the better.’⁸ When dangerous histories are used as a mark of belonging they become much as slum fictions were for Victorian readers, objects of titillation. Yet these movements back into the city have not changed the fundamental nature of such areas. Tower Hamlets, the London Borough now responsible for the Boundary Street Estate, remains the most deprived in the country, with the proportion of inhabitants living in poverty today similar to that observed by Charles Booth.⁹ The East End has lived up to and down to its literary representation as ‘the *City of Dreadful Night*’ described by James Thomson in his disturbing poem about the slums, and in the stark engravings of Gustave Doré.’¹⁰

In his fictional attempt to reach beyond such literary representations, Morrison portrayed the patterns of deviance and control with which the fin-de-siècle East End was actually experienced. What Morrison retains throughout his work is the untrustworthiness of place itself. Writing of the slum spaces undergoing destruction Morrison could never achieve their transcendence in actuality, but he did transform the memorialising process of such places, and in this performed, as he saw it, the duty he owed to the place he came from.

Eventually, Morrison chose ‘another way out’ of the East End than the fiction which launched him into the middle class. However, he will always be primarily, and rightly,

⁷ O’Neill, *My East End*, p. 29.

⁸ Zed Nelson, ‘The more deprived and edgy, the better’, 30 May 2015 <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2015/may/30/london-property-market-boom-housing-tower-hamlets> [Last accessed 30 May 2015].

⁹ In 2013, 42% of children in Tower Hamlets lived in poverty ‘London Child Poverty: Child Poverty by Ward’ <http://www.londonpovertyprofile.org.uk/indicators/topics/income-poverty/child-poverty-by-borough/> [Last accessed 13 Sept 2015]

¹⁰ O’Neill, *My East End*, p. 29.

remembered for his writing on the city space. His writing on the desperate consequences of poor housing for the urban population is especially significant today, when it is clear to Londoners that we are approaching a similar crisis.

Recently the Adam Smith Institute declared that the housing problem in the UK is in fact caused by a *lack* of slums – they asserted that without sufficient unregulated housing there is insufficient ‘choice’ for people on limited budgets.¹¹ With such vituperative thinking being supported, we can agree with Dyos, who observed in 1977 that in the case of slums, ‘what might be thought of as finally past, seldom is so.’¹² Similarly, discussing the transformations of the East End in 1888, Fishman reflects that:

In the end, it was as in the beginning. The authorities debated interminably [...] eventually issuing erudite commentaries, barely masking the anxieties felt by the overseers about the dangerous state of the “lowest” classes: to the indiscriminating a melange of the workless and the sweated poised dangerously near the residuum.¹³

The problem of the slum in the city will exist as long as cities themselves. The perpetuity of the name of the Jago shows that the turn-of-the-century problem, that every effort to improve housing in London inadvertently meant pushing the poor out of city centres, is a problem that outlasts all attempts to redeem it. Diurnally poised at the end of the world, both the Jago and the slum are codas that carry on.

¹¹ Theo Clifford, ‘Britain Needs More Slums’, 5th August 2015, <http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/planning-transport/britain-needs-more-slums/> accessed 5th August 2015.

¹² H. J. Dyos, Foreword to Wohl, *The Eternal Slum*, p. viii.

¹³ Fishman, *East End 1888*, p. 103.

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