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Marking Territory with London's East End: Arthur Morrison and the Imagination of Modern Borders

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***Marking Territory with London's East End:
Arthur Morrison and the Imagination of Modern Borders***

by Jillian Joan Richardson

A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of the University of Ottawa in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
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ABSTRACT

In their writings on London's East End slums at the end of the nineteenth century, contemporary urban planners, social reformers, and novelists often attributed many of the slum's social "evils" to the deeper problem of overcrowding. This thesis explores how overcrowding functions as an important narrative device in each of Arthur Morrison's own East End novels, *A Child of the Jago*, *To London Town*, and *The Hole in the Wall*. I argue that overcrowding contributes not only to violence and depravity among his characters, but also to their violation of the slum's topographical borders: the pressures of overcrowding ultimately disperse populations into outlying territories. This phenomenon is taken up paradigmatically in Morrison's later novels, yet in relation to London's larger metropolitan expansion. Attention to Morrison's progressive approaches to the city's shifting urban environment extends the critical application of his works from a distinctively "Victorian" one, to include a much broader history of representing London and the East End.

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ARTHUR MORRISON'S EAST END: LITERARY CONTEXT, CONTRIBUTION, CRITICISM

From the mid- to the late-nineteenth century, the literary representation of the working classes was made fashionable by such canonic British realist authors as Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell and George Gissing. Commentators on the vogue for social realism also, however, frequently acknowledge the contributions of the lesser-known author Arthur Morrison to the fictional evocation of working-class life. While Morrison's stark portrayals of the late-nineteenth-century London poor are often considered within this much broader tradition of working-class representation, his work engages with a distinctive socio-geographic and historical milieu: London's East End slums at the turn into the twentieth century. This thesis will attempt to locate his fiction within a very specific literary and socio-political project: the united appeal by writers and social reformers for attention to the social conditions of the London poor in the midst of greater public efforts to redevelop London's urban slums.

The social and literary context which laid the groundwork for Morrison's own writing offered a symbolic version of the East End to middle-class Londoners who had no prior experience of the actual place. Both fiction and non-fiction writers alike often employed highly graphic depictions to encourage urgent public attention to conditions of severe destitution, and hence to inspire socio-economic reform. While some of these more generally described life in many of London's slums, other accounts focused particularly on the slums of London's East End. Thus, more generic depictions of extreme filth, immorality and violence among the urban poor were circulating alongside those more specifically representing poverty in the East End. The general and the particular were linked in their expression of a common theme. This concurrent dissemination of both generalized and site-specific representations ultimately led to the habitual pairing of slum life's most brutal

imagery with the East End location, and, more specifically, to the popular association of extreme depravity with East-End life. Reinforced by the fact that London's predominantly working-class East End remained a *terra incognita* to the middle-class inhabitants of its Western counterpart, and indeed to the majority of London's literate population, this popular conflation brought about a misguidedly "symbolic" sense of the East End in the imaginations of many Londoners.

This symbolic image of depravity dominated popular notions about the East End at the time when Morrison began writing. The East End's symbolic connotations, having been largely created by these proliferating literary sources, naturally also entered into literary criticism on the subject. An inclination among Morrison's contemporaries to read his works symbolically was perhaps, therefore, inevitable. Yet, while a few of his novels do mimic some pre-established qualities of a symbolic East End — namely the area's prevailing violence, criminality and immorality — Morrison adapts the East End setting to a range of narrative contexts. Hence, beyond merely reproducing the symbolically-typecast images of his predecessors, Morrison's depictions of East-End life change over the course of his literary career. Critical investigations of Morrison's work have nonetheless continued to read it in terms of the symbolic East End qualities established by his predecessors, focusing on the ways in which Morrison's violent imagery functions within a distinctive representational "tradition." This critical tendency misrepresents the area's recurrence as the setting for all of Morrison's narratives, including more "playful" ones. While aspects of delinquency do appear in many of his works, in a range of sub-genres, Morrison's continued adaptation of that one setting to various imaginative contexts and narrative ends tacitly implies a change or evolution in the way that he himself imagined the East End.

Beginning with an introduction to Morrison's socio-literary context, this introductory chapter will provide a detailed survey of the main works that contributed to a symbolic image of the East End and situate Morrison's own representations within that existing literary climate. Then, after a consideration of the prevailing trends among critics contemporary with Morrison, I will argue that many earlier critical limitations, which arose from focusing on particular socially symbolic aspects of Morrison's East End, have been sustained by current criticism. A shift in critical focus must therefore take place in order to engage more fully with the important broader perspectives apparent in Morrison's works. In lieu of adopting the more typical social-realist context for reading Morrison, which would limit discussion to his works of social realism, I will introduce a topographical framework to accommodate the greater fictional range of his site-specific representations. The relationship between London's topographical transformations in the latter half of the nineteenth century and the social conditions of its populace, I will argue, was fundamental to the co-mingling of poverty and the environment in the imaginations of many Londoners, and, especially, of many social reformers. And, just as changes to the environment formed the basic response to managing London's escalating working- and lower-class populations in the latter half of the nineteenth century, the manipulation of topographic imagery in Morrison's novels can be read as a progressive, imaginative response to the problems of poverty: to overpopulation, urban expansion, and ultimately, to the difficulty of documenting a changing urban reality.

Literary Context

Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, the problem of increasing poverty among London's working classes had begun to emerge as a major social issue, becoming the leading target of social and literary reformers. While the general problem of poverty and the need for social reform had entered into public discourse by the early 1880s,

a particular East-End affiliation with the subject of abject poverty is commonly attributed to a combination of quite specific fictional and non-fictional sources. Walter Besant's social realist novel, *All Sorts and Conditions of Men — An Impossible Story* (1882), George Sims's investigative newspaper articles, collectively titled *How the Poor Live* (1883), and the Rev. Andrew Mearns's pamphlet, "The Bitter Cry of Outcast London: An Inquiry into the Condition of the Abject Poor," which circulated later that same year, are credited with collectively establishing the East End as the typical setting of slum narratives, or "slum fiction" (Keating, *Fact and Fiction* 589). The first of these, Besant's novel, features two upper-class protagonists, Angela Messenger and Harry Goslett, both of whom have escaped their socio-economic obligations — Angela, the inheritance of the family brewery and estate, and Harry, the wealth and distinction of his adoptive family. In the guise of working-class residents of the East End (Angela as a dressmaker and Harry as a cabinet-maker), and with their true identities unknown to one another, the two characters become friends in the common crusade to rid the East End of its unbearable monotony and lack of fulfilling leisure. Harry imagines a "Palace of Pleasure" that would promote culture among the working classes through music, theatre, and academic and artistic seminars, and, by virtue of this cultural enterprise, would inspire the working classes to seek individual betterment. The two fall in love and are engaged to be married. Meanwhile, under the guise of donated funds from the wealthy inheritress of a local brewery, Angela uses her secret wealth to construct the "Palace of Delight" of their imaginations. When their wedding day finally arrives, Angela, who has by then discovered Harry's true identity, reveals the truth of her own philanthropy, and the two are married at the Palace of Delight amidst their working-class neighbours.

Besant's novel reflects philanthropic endeavours that were already under way¹ at the time at which he was writing it. His particular vision of reforming the working classes through cultural institutions was premised on a basic union between the working and middle classes, who had thus far been estranged from one another, and were therefore almost wholly ignorant of each other's disparate conditions.² Besant imagined a continued middle-class presence in working-class situations, to remain attentive to the needs of their lower-class neighbours, and to inspire a mutual recognition of their "common humanity." At the same time, the presence of middle-class lecturers and educators at such public institutions would promote an acculturation of the working classes, alleviating them from the monotony of their cultureless lives. Besant's vision would ultimately manifest in the official opening of the People's Palace in May of 1887, shortly after that of Samuel Barnett's Toynbee Hall in 1885, both institutions in the East-London district of Whitechapel. While Toynbee Hall would come to adopt the more structured principles of a university, the People's Palace primarily sought to engage its public in respectable social assembly — without drink — through a literary club, lectures, seminars, and the publication of the *Palace Journal* (Keating, *Fact and Fiction* 593-4).

Besant's melodramatic image of life among the East End's working classes was soon taken up in non-fictional accounts of a similar theme, most notably by George Sims and

¹ An institution similar to Besant's Palace had already been devised by John Barber Beaumont some forty years earlier and was in the early stages of planning when Besant began writing his novel (Keating, *Fact and Fiction* 590). Such institutions were part of a larger University Settlement Movement that was initiated by Samuel Barnett and the historian, Arthur Toynbee, whereby University missions were established in areas of socio-economic privation, to encourage reform within those communities through new student educational initiatives and cross-class interactions. Edward Denison (1840-1870), an Oxford-educated man who lived among, educated and studied the circumstances of the poor, was also a profound influence on Besant's socio-literary ideas. His letters, which were published posthumously in 1872, were familiar to both Besant and Arthur Morrison (Keating, *Fact and Fiction* 591).

² Although many members of the working-class would have been familiar with the living conditions of the upper- or middle-classes, through their experiences as domestic servants in their homes, for example, the middle classes were much less aware of the conditions in working class neighbourhoods. Besant's particular desire, however, was that they might recognize their common humanity, their "sameness," outside of their prescribed hierarchical social roles or positions.

Andrew Mearns.³ As P.J. Keating suggests, both Sims and Mearns described extremes of filth, immorality and decrepitude⁴ that had already been apparent in a variety of literary sources throughout the Victorian period. The particular impact of their individual works, *How the Poor Live* and “The Bitter Cry of Outcast London” respectively, neither of which focuses specifically on poverty in the East End,⁵ was rather the product of happenstance. Sims’s and Mearns’s documentary approaches were as appropriate to London’s existing social climate as was Besant’s fiction, and many historians credit their non-fiction appeals to action with stimulating a public debate that directly led to the establishment of a Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes (1884-1885) (Waller 32). Yet, the timely circulation of Sims’s and Mearns’s accounts, so closely following the publication of Besant’s portrayal of similar circumstances in a fictional East End context, caused their readers to conflate Besant’s East End with Sims’s and Mearns’s descriptions of actual slums. According to Keating, until these three works entered the public domain, the notorious Ratcliffe Highway, situated in the East End’s Tower Hamlets, had been the primary basis for the East End’s negative reputation.⁶ The effect of Besant’s fictional image of East End

³ In Sims’s Preface to *How the Poor Live*, he suggests that Mearns “derived the greatest assistance” from Sims’s articles in the writing of his own pamphlet, which covers many of the same themes.

⁴ Mearns’s pamphlet is divided into several sub-sections: “Non-Attendance at Worship,” “The Condition in Which They Live,” “Immorality,” “Poverty,” “Heart-Breaking Misery,” “What is Proposed to Do,” and “Description of the Districts.” His main purpose is to highlight the inevitability of thieving and prostitution as these occupations bring in more money than honest jobs like dress-making and match-box making do. He also describes unhygienic and dilapidated housing, as well as conditions of vast overcrowding, in which the virtuous poor are often forced to share living quarters to meet high rents, and thus are often subjected to corruption by the criminal classes in their midst. Sims’s articles cover similar aspects, including poverty, overcrowding, poor hygiene resulting from an inadequate and polluted water supply, “heathenism” and depravity; both writers insist that the situation in slum areas is growing beyond control and poses a threat to respectable London and to “the Public Health” (Sims 64).

⁵ Sims’s articles explore the conditions of various London slum districts, including the Mint in Southwark and Drury Lane in Covent Garden, as well as areas of the East End, while Mearns’s pamphlet generally relates to the slums of South London, The Mint, and Collier’s Rents in Southwark (Keating, *Fact and Fiction* 589).

⁶ A stretch of public houses haunted by sailors and prostitutes, and a reputed site of violence and robberies, Ratcliffe Highway was also the scene of the infamous “Ratcliffe Highway Murders” — the 1811 murders of two families, along with their lodgers, in two Ratcliffe-Highway homes. The incidents occurred just twelve days apart and involved some ten or eleven victims. The only suspect in the highly publicized case, John

poverty, combined with Sims's and Mearns's scathing indictments of slum life, thus marks the initial stages of literature's role in solidifying the East End's symbolic status in the imaginations of many late-nineteenth-century Londoners, and of the East End's establishment as the quintessential literary site of slum culture.

Among their contemporaries, however, it soon became apparent that Sims's, Mearns's and Besant's versions collectively conveyed an essentialist and totalizing image of the East End poor. Their images, which identified cultural inferiority or "meanness"⁷ rather than economic inferiority as the essential quality of poverty, lacked a consensus on the deeper causes of and necessary solutions to poverty as a social problem. Besant had portrayed a homogeneous working class, whose main detriment was "not poverty or crime, but meanness" (Keating, *Fact and Fiction* 590), and whose ignorance meant that they were both worthy of sympathy and redeemable through philanthropy, education and cultural reform. Sims's and Mearns's images depicted a similarly ignorant class, corrupted by the amoral and criminal individuals in their midst, tempted by the higher revenues of thieving and prostitution, and from Mearns's perspective, redeemable by renewed attention from their clergy. While these representations aimed to describe the general nature of the "working-class poor," however, they each alluded to ambiguous sub-classes; that is, they each described a mean, though redeemable, working class, susceptible to the influence of a more degenerate class in their midst. These "symbolic" representations, in their attempt to capture poverty's essential character, successfully brought public attention to the problems of poverty. At the same time, though, in promoting that essential *character*, these depictions

Williams, committed suicide before he could be tried, and his body was paraded through the streets before being buried with a stake through its heart.

⁷ "Meanness" in this sense implies a cultural and moral inferiority (i.e. primitiveness or savagery and amorality), rather than mere economic inferiority, which Besant ties to the monotony of working class life. As Keating suggests, Besant attributes the problems of the East End to its being "one huge cultureless void" (*Fact and Fiction* 590).

gave way to ambiguities about the varied *qualities* of that poverty. The East End's symbolic image was both publicly affirmed and greatly exacerbated by the "Autumn of Terror" that accompanied the Jack the Ripper Murders of 1888,⁸ which merely sensationalized existing attitudes about the East End's essential degeneracy. Yet, the kinds of attention raised by such evocations of a distinctive East End character did little to illuminate the actual nature of the area, and therefore further complicated the focus of reform. The ensuing generation of "slum writers" thus aimed to re-define working class and slum districts according to their actual conditions and potential for reform.

The non-fiction and fiction writers of this second generation were loosely connected in their re-writing of previous portrayals of the working classes, with a view to illustrating subtle variations within larger economic and class structures, and therefore, to appealing for proportional and varied approaches to the problems of poverty. Charles Booth's *Life and Labour of the People in London*, which geographically plots the locations and subtle gradations among London's wealthy and working classes — in seven colours, representing seven distinct social groups⁹ — was pivotal to this documentary undertaking. His survey, which would eventually span seventeen volumes (1889-1903), contains demographic studies of the wealthy and the poor in the first three volumes, descriptions of the industries of East

⁸ Between 1888 and 1891, a series of violent murders in and around the East End district of Whitechapel was linked to a serial killer in the area. "Jack the Ripper," who was never captured, was alleged to be responsible for the murder and mutilation of five prostitutes in 1888, and connected to a dozen unsolved murders between 1888 and 1891. The lurid details of the Jack the Ripper murders circulated in articles and stories throughout greater London, both fuelling and sensationalizing existing attitudes to the perils of the East End.

⁹ Booth mapped London according to the following scheme: "*Black*: Lowest class. Vicious, semi-criminal. *Dark Blue*: Very Poor, casual. Chronic Want. *Light blue*: Poor. 18s. to 21s. a week for a moderate family. *Gray*: Mixed. Some comfortable, others poor. *Pink*: Fairly comfortable. Good ordinary earnings. *Red*: Middle class. Well-to-do. *Gold*: Upper-middle and Upper classes. Wealthy." (Appendix to "Descriptive Map of London Poverty 1889: North-Eastern streets, comprising parts of Hackney, Islington, and Holborn; the whole of the City, Shoreditch, Bethnal Green, Whitechapel, St. George's in the East, Stepney, Mile End, and Part of Poplar," the East London part of which was prepared in 1887 and published in volume 1). As Franco Moretti observes, large commercial districts like New Oxford Street and the Strand are coloured red, while areas around the Thames are black. Wealth is mostly concentrated in the West End, while poverty is concentrated in the East End. Areas of wealth are, however, frequently encircled by areas of poverty, even in the West End (Moretti 77-78).

London in the fourth volume, and of the relationship between London's population and employment and labour conditions in the fifth, sixth and seventh volumes. What Booth's study ultimately accomplished was the movement towards recognizing the degrees and extent of poverty, and towards defining it "as a social phenomenon (as opposed to [...] a legal category)" (Matthew 573); that is, as a consequence of the greater economic system, as opposed to the result of under-employment or physical impotence.¹⁰

The polemical *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (1890), by William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, also belongs to this second wave of slum representations and suggests that, in light of poverty's status as a social phenomenon, middle- and upper-class society has a moral and religious responsibility to the poor. Furthermore, in order to achieve the kinds of moral, cultural or religious reform to which Besant, Sims and Mearns aspired, the primary needs of the poor must first be supplied. Without basic necessities like food, clothing and hygiene, the deprived are bound, to their own detriment, to turn to thieving in order to meet those needs, or suffer filth and illness if their needs cannot be provided for. William Booth's work stipulated, for the first time, the Salvation Army's concern with supplying basic necessities for proper living — food, clothing, shelter, hygiene — as prerequisites to the organization's core tenets of religious salvation. He insisted that the poor could only be saved spiritually when their primary material needs were met.

Thus Arthur Morrison's numerous literary accounts of the East End, like Besant's novels, emanate from a contemporary climate of social reform. And, like Besant before him, Morrison's socio-literary impact derives from combining social issues, explored in

¹⁰ The British system of social security that existed prior to the creation of the welfare state in the twentieth century, "The Poor Law," held the poor to be responsible for their own poverty, as opposed to being the victims of a greater social phenomenon. Under the Poor Law, which labeled the poor as either "able bodied," "idle," or "impotent" (aged, sick or weak), the able-bodied and idle unemployed could be forced into employment at workhouses, which resulted in the separation of many families and the failure to truly alleviate the conditions of poverty. The welfare state was created in recognition of the wider society's responsibility for and to the conditions of poverty.

documentary non-fiction and in public discourse, with fiction's capacity for inspiring immediate emotional response to those issues.¹¹ Walter Besant's literary and social achievements had a particular bearing on Morrison's professional career, first during Morrison's time as secretary to the Beaumont Trust, which administered the People's Palace Trust (Bell 79), and later in 1889, when he became a sub-editor and columnist for the *Palace Journal*, of which Besant himself was the editor (Keating, *The Working Classes* 168).

Literary Contribution

Arthur Morrison adopted an insider's approach to slum representation as a means of restoring credibility to East End studies, much like the documentary approaches of his non-fiction-writing contemporaries. This approach entailed an infiltration of the lived environments of his subjects and the adoption of their lifestyle, labour and leisure activities, in order to achieve a more intimate knowledge of their social reality. His insider reportage on the social conditions of various East End locales was first displayed in a column of *The People*, entitled "Cockney Corners,"¹² which featured weekly newspaper vignettes or "sketches" of working-class life. These sketches, two of which were republished in *The*

¹¹ Keating suggests that, despite the social impact of non-fictional sources, these novels helped to inspire reform by providing simple representations of complex issues. Both Besant and Morrison provide representations of the East End that are "simple enough in outline to be grasped by the general public: stark and emotive enough to stir consciences, yet inclusive enough to contain, in essence, the central problems already troubling late-Victorian social reformers" (Keating, *Fact and Fiction* 585). In this sense, the novelist becomes an "invaluable middleman" between those who advocate reform through reason (journalists, reformers, politicians) and the masses, who are stimulated to respond by the novel's emotional appeal. Both Besant's and Morrison's works effectively inspire movement towards change through "immediate impact and lasting mythopoeic quality" (586).

¹² The weekly column was printed on the second page of each edition of *The People*. Michel Krzak identifies "Chrip Street, Poplar" as the first sketch published October 28, 1888, followed by "A Patch of Clerkenwell" on November 4, 1888 (Krzak 181, note 2). Fourteen sketches in total were printed in *The People*, two of which were republished in *The Palace Journal*: "Christmas Eve in the Street" appeared in *The People* on December 23, 1888 and in *The Palace Journal* on December 25, 1889, and "Whitechapel" appeared in *The People* on January 6, 1889 and in *The Palace Journal* on April 24, 1889. One sketch, entitled "On Blackwall Pier," was published in *The Palace Journal* alone, on May 8, 1889. The vignette to which many critics attribute Morrison's popular success as a journalist, "A Street," was written as a longer urban "sketch," originally a freelance article for *Macmillan's Magazine* in October of 1891, and republished in *Tales of Mean Streets* (1894).

Palace Journal, would be collected in Morrison's first book-length publication, *Tales of Mean Streets* (1894). This collection marks the "first examples of 'mean street' studies" (Bell 78) — that is, the first attempt to document social meanness as it *really* existed and its first use as a dominant literary theme (Bell 78). Subsequent to the success of *Tales of Mean Streets*, Morrison continued to use his insider approach to researching and documenting East End social realities in his first novel. *A Child of the Jago* (1896) is alleged to represent true incidents that occurred during his eighteen-month stay in the Old Nichol rookery of the East End's Bethnal Green district.¹³ Its publication secured the author's widespread popularity¹⁴ and inspired many writers of realist fiction to follow suit in the representation of London's working classes.¹⁵

Contemporary Criticism

In light of the studies undertaken by his contemporaries, directing attention to the greater nuances within working-class populations and to the question of a feasible reform, *A Child of the Jago* is uniquely focused on delinquency and violence among the unemployed and feckless poor — not the "working" classes. In the novel, Morrison's protagonist, Dicky Perrott, is in some degree propelled into a life of delinquency by the corrupt individuals in

¹³ The Bethnal Green district, in Tower Hamlets, lies to the east of Shoreditch High Street in the borough of Hackney. The Old Nichol rookery (the fictional "Jago") was an area of some fifteen city blocks, in the north western corner of the borough of Tower Hamlets, the present site of the Boundary Estate.

¹⁴ The popular impact of Morrison's work is particularly evident in the adoption of the term "mean streets" into colloquial usage. The term "mean streets" is most often used to describe the streets of a lower-class or other urban district characterized by violence and criminal activity. Although the term was first used in *Chambers Journal* (Oct. 5, 1861 212/2), it was only adopted into popular usage following Morrison's publication of *Tales of Mean Streets* in 1894 (OED). Morrison's popular impact spread to the coining of contemporary vernacular with the publication of *A Child of the Jago*. The term "Jago," which refers to the novel's fictionalized slum locale, came to evoke the violence of the lower classes, and the term "Jagodom" became synonymous with "hooliganism" (Keating, *The Working Classes* 171).

¹⁵ In *Fact and Fiction in the East End*, Keating suggests that both Arthur St. John Adcock and William Pett Ridge pursued the "relationship between monotony, respectability, and violence in the East End" according to Morrison's example (599). His style was also imitated by, what Keating refers to as, "camp-followers," who combined elements of Morrison's works with aspects of Besant's melodrama and "concocted bizarre travesties of Morrison's seriously intentioned work" (*Fact and Fiction in the East End* 599). Keating lists examples of some ten relevant works published between 1895 and 1899.

the Jago's midst, but mainly by his brawling, thieving father, Josh Perrott. When a new parish priest, Father Sturt, inspires him to begin working in a local shop, Dicky begins to imagine a better life for himself. This move towards working-class morality is, however, quickly hampered by the duplicitous shopkeeper, Mr. Weech, who depends on Dicky's thieving for his own living as a fencer of stolen goods and successfully plots to have Dicky fired. Dicky soon returns to his previous livelihood of thieving: he cannot escape the ways of the Jago and therefore cannot be reformed. And, just as his father's delinquency leads him to a violent end — to death on the gallows, for murder — Dicky's participation in a public brawl brings about his own violent end: he is stabbed to death in a public house.

While Morrison's contemporaries praised his realistic portrayals of a savage, undomesticated East End, the brutality of those portrayals remained taboo within the literary world and thus spurred a wealth of controversy. Because Morrison's use of violence was not consistent with the usual "moral" conventions of documentary realism,¹⁶ critics began to question the authenticity of his work, and to impugn his reputation as a realist writer. H.D. Traill's *The New Fiction* (1897) captures many of the contemporary critical reactions to Morrison's use of violence, which, Traill suggests, is not "authentic," and therefore cannot be the work of a realist writer. According to some residents of Bethnal Green, the East End district on which Morrison's Jago was modeled, Morrison's descriptions painted their neighbourhoods with an unfair essentialism: they were hardly as relentlessly or collectively delinquent as Morrison's novel had made them out to be (Traill 25). Traill suggests that Morrison's violent portrayals are a "subjective product, a way of looking at things, [and] not

¹⁶ As Marlene Tromp suggests in *The Private Rod: Marital Violence, Sensation, and the Law in Victorian Britain*, although violence, domestic violence, and other blatantly immoral acts were common in nineteenth-century novels, Victorians tended to classify portrayals like Morrison's as "sensational" in the "midst of growing concerns about codes of behavior" (3). Sensation "specifically addresses themes [such as extreme violence and moral deviance] that were often eschewed in what was considered moral, didactic, high literature [and therefore] outside of and opposed to realist fiction and truth" (5).

a quality of things seen” (22). Because Morrison’s use of realism is seemingly tainted by individual biases, Traill insists that Morrison’s novel is inauthentic, and therefore not a work of realism, but of “New Realism,” which arbitrarily combines elements of fact with fiction. This initial response to Morrison’s *A Child of the Jago* set in motion an enduring critical trajectory that inflected realism with a sense of moralism — meaning that critics accepted realist conventions according to their compliance with standards of acceptable or moral behaviour. Critics therefore valued some “realist” texts for conveying a respectable image of reality and discounted the reality of other realist texts for conveying disreputable social images. Not surprisingly, nominally realist critics who sought to uphold moral righteousness as the true nature of Victorian working people often favored depictions that were not realistic at all, but were, in fact, highly idealized fictions.

As P.J. Keating observes in his “Biographical Study” of Arthur Morrison, the contemporary critics who condemned Morrison’s violent representations can be divided according to their own literary or social biases. Relying heavily on the ambiguous degrees of “authenticity” employed in definitions of realism or New Realism to uphold their own principles regarding acceptable measures of violence in conventional realist novels, literary critics, on the one hand, censured *A Child of the Jago* for vastly *overstating* the actual measure of violence in the East End, to the extent of sheer un-reality or “sensationalism” (see note 15). Social critics, on the other hand, comprised of philanthropists and clergymen who touted the need for the area’s social reform, accused Morrison of *understating* the violence in the East End (27), in order to strengthen their case for urgent action. While modern critics are much less concerned with the authenticity question, they do continue to focus on aspects of Morrison’s “subjective way of looking at things,” which ultimately informed the ways in which he perceived and/or represented the reality of the East End.

Literary criticism of the past quarter-century has moved towards exploring the socio-economic features of Morrison's biography that may have led him to represent the East End in ways that challenged traditional literary conventions. Yet while critics contend that Morrison's individual perspective is central to interpreting how and why he portrays the East End in the way that he does, explorations of that perspective are frequently limited only to the East End portrayed in *A Child of the Jago*. This limited critical focus seems to be a direct consequence of the fact that critics continue to use Morrison's depictions of violence as entryways into discussions of his subjectivity, without recognising, or at least acknowledging, that these depictions are less applicable to his more playful literary works.

Modern Criticism

In his "Biographical Sketch" of Arthur Morrison that introduces the 1969 edition of *A Child of the Jago*, P.J. Keating revealed previously unknown details of Morrison's biography,¹⁷ which greatly influenced subsequent interpretations of his work. Keating suggests that, although he disguised his origins in an interview for the biographical publication *Who's Who* (1897) (Krzak 147), Morrison was, in fact, a native of the East End. While he claimed to have been a native of Kent (his mother's actual birthplace), the son of a "professional man" and educated in private schools (Keating, "Biographical Sketch" 11), Morrison's birth certificate suggests that he was actually the son of a working-class father (an engine fitter), and was raised in the East End district of Poplar (Keating, "Biographical Sketch" 11). Having distinguished himself from his lower-class subjects by this feigned social and economic superiority, Morrison's claim to journalistic integrity was, ironically, founded upon his intimate relationship with his East End subject matter. He insisted that

¹⁷ Keating also credits an unpublished London University Master's thesis by Dr. D.I. Nwoga, entitled "The Novels and Tales of Arthur Morrison" (1962), for bringing to light many previously unknown biographical details ("Biographical Sketch" 9).

his having taken up temporary residence in Bethnal Green, to gain experience for the fictional setting of the “Jago,” allowed him inside access to the reality of the area. Despite the fact that his familiarity with his subject undoubtedly contributed to his success as a realist writer, and was indeed exploited by Morrison himself to bolster his documentary aims, he never revealed the true intimacy of his association with the East End. And, although he continued to write about the East End throughout his career, he would come to develop a preference for rural living, eventually settling in Essex.

A common trend among modern critics has been to focus, in light of P.J. Keating’s important biographical findings, on how Morrison’s hidden relationship to the East End may have informed his literary representations. Most modern critics contend that Morrison’s closeness to his subject is essential to understanding his social and literary perspective. The connection between Morrison’s biography and his literary perspective, first made by Michel Krzak in 1979, has been of great importance to later critics, including Gill Davies (1988), Pamela Fox (1994), Roger B. Henkle and Dan Bivona (2006) and Simon Joyce (2003). Each of these critics argues that Morrison’s intimacy with the East End directly informs the violence of his East End portrayals in *A Child of the Jago*. None, however, considers the narrative implications of Morrison’s more playful novels for his East End perspectives.

As Michel Krzak observes in “Arthur Morrison’s East End of London” (1979), beginning with his original weekly newspaper sketches, “Cockney Corners,” which began publication as early as 1888, and continuing throughout the publication of his trilogy, *Tales of Mean Streets* (1894), *A Child of the Jago* (1896) and *To London Town* (1899), and the later *The Hole in the Wall* (1902), “Morrison followed a path leading from fact to fiction, from a factual account to a more elaborate description of city life, from journalism to naturalism and

realism” (Krzak 148-49). While his newspaper vignettes aimed to put forth purely “factual” accounts of East End living, these became increasingly fictionalized by the time his historical novel, *The Hole in the Wall*, was published. Yet the shift in Morrison’s literary trajectory also occurs alongside the author’s own relocation from an urban setting to a rural one.

Morrison’s biographical details are crucial to Krzak’s discussion here:

Rooted in the East End, he later developed a professional life in London and a private life in the country, chiefly in Essex. This parallel is present in the double-current of his production — his East End studies and his Essex stories, united by the same insight into place and character, and an earnest commitment to faithful treatment. (Krzak 150)

Krzak suggests that Morrison’s own location orients the settings of his novels; his literary works are seen to mirror his own transitions from city to country. Without drawing a particular connection between Morrison’s progressive generic shift from fact to fiction and the shift in his residence locations, Krzak’s ideas about the transitions apparent in Morrison’s works seem to suggest that the two go hand in hand. Morrison’s representations of the East End become progressively fictionalized over the course of his literary career and, at the same time, are increasingly filtered through an external, sub-urban or rural perspective as he himself relocates to Essex. Krzak’s observations illuminate an implied relationship between Morrison’s urban experience of the East End and documentary realism, and between his rural experience of Essex and an increased fictionality. In more general terms, however, Krzak’s essay establishes the important link between Morrison’s biographical, personal experiences, and the nature of his literary representations.

Gill Davies, in “Foreign Bodies: Images of the London Working Class at the End of the 19th Century,” picks up on aspects of Krzak’s notion of the relationship between the

author and his environment as crucial to his novels' representations of the East End. Although Morrison is just one of many writers treated — alongside Rudyard Kipling, George Gissing, Henry Nevinson, Charles F.G. Masterman and Clarence Rook, for instance — in Davies' discussion of the working-class genre, her initial claims about Morrison and his environment have been instrumental in the more detailed analyses of later critics. In a departure from the essay's overriding discussion of debased forms of orality (especially Cockney English) among female characters in working-class fiction, Davies suggests that the working class novelist's native familiarity with his novel's subject and setting fosters more violent portrayals than those of authors whose origins are socially and geographically distanced from their subject matter. In the case of both Arthur Morrison and George Gissing, their natural familiarity with working-class environments, and subsequent "escape" from these socio-geographic situations, has resulted in more violent portrayals, "exacerbated by fear and hostility":

Familiarity certainly breeds contempt, so far as Morrison is concerned. His "escape" from the class and locality into which he was born (working class Poplar) — like Gissing's expulsion from his — seem [*sic*] to have exacerbated his fear and hostility. More 'secure' middle class observers, like Besant, Nevinson and Kipling, can permit themselves greater sympathy and enthusiasm for the [working-class] culture they describe. (Davies 71-72)

According to Davies, Morrison's indigenous connection to the East End results in the tainting of his insider's perspective with an exaggerated or "sensational" image of brutality in *A Child of the Jago*. While Davies does not develop this claim, which builds upon Krzak's notion of the author's relationship to place and its novelistic implications, her attention to the relationship between Morrison's connection to place and his representations of violence

lays important groundwork for Pamela Fox's subsequent study of violence and shame in working class fiction.

In *Class Fictions: Shame and Resistance in the British Working Class Novel, 1890-1945*, Fox takes up the analytical task raised by Davies' claim:

Gill Davies is thus on the right track when he [*sic*] locates the most vicious, troubling representations of London's late nineteenth-century working class in texts by writers with working-class associations: not only Morrison, but Gissing (who could not claim working-class origins, but for a period of time lived in such districts). His [*sic*] analysis of this phenomenon, however, stops disappointingly short. (Fox 117)

According to Fox, Davies' notion of a "contempt" bred by "familiarity," pervasive throughout the violent portrayals of *A Child of the Jago*, "derives not so much from 'familiarity' — which implies a simple snobbishness — as from a more complex, desiring shame" (Fox 118). Fox locates this shame at the heart of Morrison's literary violence: Morrison ashamedly loathes the East End of his past and thus also the East End of his literary portrayals. Developing Davies' notion of a class "escape" or promotion that "exacerbated" Morrison's "fear and hostility" for that previous class (Davies 72), Fox suggests that Morrison's social and geographic dislocation from East End life prohibits his capacity for any measure of true sympathetic portrayal (Fox 112). Morrison subtly, shamefully, denies his association with both his characters and locale through an underwritten hostility, which comes through in the increased and unrealistic violence of his portrayals. Morrison's allegedly sensationalized accounts of violence, born of "fear and hostility," would ultimately link his representations with the symbolic East End of his precursors.

Roger B. Henkle and Dan Bivona, in “Morrison, Gissing, and the Stark Reality” argue similarly in their discussion of how Morrison’s unique relationship to the East End has shaped his approach to representation. Despite Fox’s suggestion that Morrison’s relentless condescension towards his subject seems to position him alongside other middle-class authors and social commentators, Henkle and Bivona highlight the complications in defining Morrison’s socio-economic and moral perspective and, by extension, the difficulties in interpreting his relationship to those he writes about. He can neither be wholly affiliated with the civilizing projects of the middle classes nor with the circumstances of living in the East End, experienced in his childhood:

Morrison underwent, as his brief biography might suggest, an *embourgeoisement* that takes him beyond his East End roots, and the dialogue that his writings create is with a middle class reading audience. But he saw himself as an authentic voice of the urban slum experience [...his] are unlike the representations of the poor that had dominated literature for half a century [...] He portrays a world of gratuitous violence and enervating degradation which offers up no meaning to the middle class reader. (104-105)

Henkle and Bivona suggest that while Morrison uses a realist approach to representing the “gratuitous violence” of the East End slum, the brutality of his realist depictions had been unmatched by previous realist representations intended for a middle-class readership.

Morrison’s use of violence, therefore, disengages his texts from the conventions to which middle-class readers were accustomed, limiting the potential for sympathy or understanding among those readers, who were predisposed to the more “sentimental” or “melodramatic” versions of lower-class life emanating from other middle-class writers (Henkle and Bivona 104). Henkle and Bivona revise Fox’s interpretation of the intensified violence of *A Child of*

the Jago, as the by-product of a newly-emerged shame which would wholly align Morrison with the middle class. Instead, they argue that his increased level of literary violence distinguishes Morrison's project from the typically bourgeois, non-violent means of representing the slums: "[Morrison's] urban slums constitute a fully fleshed out subsociety, with its own set of codes *antithetical* to bourgeois norms for the lower classes" (118, my italics). Henkle and Bivona argue that because Morrison adopted an approach to slum literature which deviated from conventional standards of realism, and because he would have nonetheless been aware of this deviation, he would also have known that his readers would find his version of the East End as "disturbing," "so alien, so intractable...to middle class representation" (119) as many of them did. Accordingly, Morrison would not have expected his first novel to be taken as an *authentic* example of documentary realism and must have therefore intended *A Child of the Jago* to be read symbolically: "the violence is so spectacular, and so emblematic of the ferocity that comes out of lives of depravity and idleness, that the pathology becomes symbolic" (111). His novel poses a resistance to the methods of middle-class representation, yet simultaneously adopts a symbolic form of narrative that would still bear meaning for his middle-class readership. That is, Morrison adopts a form of *Bildungsroman* for its symbolic conventions, yet Dicky Perrott's coming of age story is, symbolically, cut short before he comes of age (Henkle and Bivona 110).

Henkle and Bivona's essay illuminates a major difficulty that critics often encounter in attempting to define Morrison's authorial perspective according to conventional categories. Arthur Morrison's biographical definition as a "Working-Class East End author," who was eventually considered among London's bourgeoisie, who wrote about the East End's non-working-class poor in a way that resisted middle-class representations, yet in a way that still appealed to a middle-class audience, resists his classification in terms of

conventional socio-economic perspectives — middle class or otherwise. Simon Joyce picks up on some of the contradictions that inevitably arise in attempting to conduct these kinds of author-based inquiries into Morrison's literary perspective, remarking that his father's occupation as an engine fitter, along with his own status as a former clerk and journalist, "would place Morrison squarely within the 'respectable' working class targeted by the Palace rather than the 'residuum' which he wrote about, so that it is not entirely accurate to characterize his fiction as motivated by shame and self-loathing, as Pamela Fox has recently suggested" (Joyce 220). Thus, Joyce attempts to shift critical emphasis away from insoluble biography-based readings of Morrison's works, in order to consider the ways in which his narrative representations might instead provide insight into his authorial perspective. This critical reversal allows Joyce to consider Morrison's work not simply as a literary reflection of the author's socio-economic perspective, but as a representation that embodies that perspective. That is, Joyce sees Morrison's representation of the East End as an embodiment of the ways in which the author both perceives and imagines place, within the greater historical context of perceiving and imagining the East End.

Joyce's critical method builds from a recent cartographic trend in the study of "urban" literature,¹⁸ a trend that has expanded interpretations of "place" in novels beyond its use as mere setting or background, to include the ways in which an author's perceptions of a place may have informed his or her narrative plot: "[as] representations of physical space ... [that are] actively involved in shaping textual meaning" (Joyce 1). More specifically, this kind of approach aims to consider how authors' representations of their physical, urban

¹⁸ Although Joyce specifically acknowledges the influence of Franco Moretti's *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900* on his own theoretical framework, he discusses the many ways in which Moretti's work "intersects" with Frederic Jameson's idea of "cognitive mapping" (*Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (1988), Kevin Lynch's work on urban geography in *The Image of the City* (1960), and Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* (1975), all of which have contributed to this so-called cartographic trend (2-5).

environments are manifested or “imagined” in rhetorical tropes, which embody historical attitudes about that environment. Nineteenth-century literary representations of London, for example, may be seen to reflect features of London’s urban expansion, which, in turn, informed the ways that authors typically represented their metropolis. Throughout this period, features of London’s growth tended to be reflected in literary images or rhetorical tropes that incorporated emerging urban attitudes into those features. Joyce suggests that London’s urban expansion in particular, which led to the “conjoining [of] the City of London with Westminster [...] form[ing] the new boundaries of the modern metropolis” (3), held substantial implications for both the public perception and the literary representation of London during this period, especially in terms of its eastern and western divisions.

As a result of the City’s conurbation with Westminster, Joyce suggests, London’s previously more polarized West and East End borders became increasingly absorbed in the centre of Greater London. And, while the flourishing, middle-class West End might once have been able to ignore the lower-class East End because of its relative distance from the West, it became increasingly attentive to its geographic counterpart as the symbols of the lower classes — slums — began to emerge throughout its own districts. The illusion of the East End’s closer proximity to the West End, resulting from London’s expanding geographic borders and from the appearance of slums throughout the city, led to new ways of imagining spatial relations in London’s centre and to new geographic paradigms in literature. The former spatial polarity between London’s East and West ends was imagined into the context of London’s centre, “particularized in a rhetorical trope linking the slums of St. Giles with the palaces of St. James” (Joyce 3).¹⁹

¹⁹ Throughout nineteenth-century literary history, beginning with the pairing of the two in 1824 in the *Mirror of Literature*, and reappearing in popular oral ballads and newspaper cartoons, the palace of St. James and the rookeries of St. Giles have been portrayed as the distinguishing landmarks of London’s rich and poor (Joyce

Joyce considers Douglas Jerrold's novel, *The History of St. Giles and St. James* (1851), to be an early rhetorical manifestation of this spatial trope. The story illuminates a marked contrast at the city's centre: the wealthy citizens of the business districts were living in close proximity to areas of squalor. According to Joyce, the novel imagines, through an evocation of spatial opposites, the more symbolic threat of St. Giles's rookery to St. James's palace — an early "interior" synecdoche of the East End's spatial encroachment upon the West End. The novel's young protagonists, St. Giles and St. James, personify the geographic counterparts associated with their respective classes, and form a highly allusive influence on one another. St. Giles, for instance, steals a pony from St. James and St. James, initially tempted into a St-Giles-like mischief, eventually sets a moral example for him. According to Joyce, Jerrold's novel marks an early rendering of an imagined violation of socio-geographic binaries, and can be seen as attempting to solidify difference or "distance" amidst the increasing urban conglomeration of disparate socio-geographic regions. This rhetorical manifestation of geographic distance can be seen in analogous physical approaches to spatially diverting the threat of poverty, such as the partial clearance of St. Giles's rookery beginning in the late 1840s²⁰ and the London County Council's East End slum clearance projects of 1888.

41). The rookeries of St. Giles, fraught with the underworld reputations of the districts within its boundaries, such as Seven Dials, were considered a "synecdoche" of London squalor (Joyce 41), while their counterpart, St. James, symbolized the respectable, middle-class opposite. Joyce suggests that the gradual appearance of homeless persons in the West End of London, as a result of the proximity of St. Giles, signaled the threat of an encroaching "East End" — an encroaching symbolic East End, as the area became synonymous with squalor. The "adjacency" of St. James and St. Giles helped to solidify the economic opposition, and the desired distance, between the two in the public consciousness (43). Joyce cites a punning street ballad ("In St. James's the officers mess at the club/In St. Giles's they often have messes for grub;/In St. James's they feast on the highest of game/In St. Giles's they live on foul air just the same" [qtd. in Joyce 43]) and the stance of the Metropolitan Police Force ("you guard St. James by watching St. Giles" [qtd. in Joyce 43]) as examples of the ways in which the binary was internalized.

²⁰ The threatening proximity of St. Giles's slum-life to middle-class districts of the West End made "St. Giles a convenient candidate for the slum clearance programs of the late 1840s, when construction of the arterial road system of New Oxford Street required the demolition" (Joyce 42) of part of the old rookery of St. Giles.

Joyce finds the history of writing the East End in particular to be engaged in “re-directing” the threat of poverty through its tendency to uphold distance between the socio-geographic situations of London’s East and West Ends. More specifically, he finds Arthur Morrison’s own role within this tradition to be that of further symbolically segregating the East End from the rest of London. Joyce argues that Morrison’s harsh and violent depictions, of a people who “are in every way but national identity, ‘savages’” (Joyce 226), reinforce the vast distance between London’s classes, while simultaneously responding to the LCC’s attempts to divert poverty through topographical clearance projects. Though Morrison’s novel both creates and reflects socio-geographic distance, his conclusion insinuates that the vagrants of the East End “cannot be moved on far enough in order to purge their areas of residence” (Joyce 226).

Joyce’s cartographic model evades some of the inevitable difficulties faced by earlier critical attempts to interpret Morrison’s representations through his biography — namely, that his biographical details resist wholly aligning his representations with either a middle-class moralizing, or a lower-class sympathizing, perspective. At a more basic level, however, Morrison’s socio-economic transitions seem to resist reading his works in terms of any form of fixed perspective. Thus, while Joyce’s topographic approach to Morrison provides an apt response to previous biographical approaches, his sustained focus on Morrison’s violent portrayals in *A Child of the Jago* implies a singular authorial perspective, fixed to a single narrative work. This thesis will therefore attempt to engage the interpretive possibilities of Joyce’s cartographic model in a consideration of three very different literary contexts for reading Morrison’s East End, which, I will suggest, accommodate the contingency of Morrison’s authorial perspectives. The theoretical foundations for Joyce’s discussion of

geographic paradigms in literature will therefore also inform the methodological approach of this investigation.

Franco Moretti's notion of a "literary geography," in *Atlas of the European Novel, 1800-1900*, provides the most fundamental methodological contribution to Joyce's imaginative historiography of the East End. Moretti suggests that places are marked with peculiar meanings of their own, which may hold implications for how the author uses place within a text. Novels about the East End, in particular, were traditionally "predicated upon a prior criminalization of the area as a whole [...] Indeed, a range of illicit pleasures [...] appear in these texts as the natural resources of East London" (Joyce 189). In fact, novelists have typically chosen to represent an East End setting for the very reason that the geographic area symbolically connoted features of criminality, so that the fact of the author's representation of violence or criminality in the East End is perhaps much less remarkable than the ways in which the author uses that violence. For Morrison, I will argue, the East End setting supplied an encoded geography, which gave access to a wealth of narrative devices — devices which also depict the more subtle problems associated with its distinct socio-economic milieu, and indeed, with the problems of urban poverty.

Beginning with a discussion of London's geographic and topographic circumstances leading up to Morrison's representation of the East End in *A Child of the Jago*, my first chapter will aim to establish how particular locations became encoded with attitudes to poverty in the imaginations of many Londoners. As London's topographic and demographic changes brought about poverty's localization in distinct geographic areas, those locations began to be perceived and imagined in terms of their crowded, lower-class inhabitants. In an effort to curb the moral and sanitary problems which became increasingly associated with areas of vast overcrowding in the late nineteenth century, reformers sought

to re-imagine space in those areas through topographic development and through imposed limits on overcrowding — which especially describes the circumstances in Bethnal Green at the time at which Morrison was writing. Thus, while critics have acknowledged Morrison's reflection of an East End topography encoded with deviancy, he can also be seen throughout his novels to exploit these “natural resources” within the greater context of overcrowding. In *A Child of the Jago* in particular, Morrison typically situates violence or deviancy within topographic or structural boundaries that “contain” some measure of overcrowding — that is, within the limits of courtyards, houses, or public-houses, and indeed within those of the Jago itself. Thus, while Morrison's representations illuminate many of the vices associated with overcrowding, they can perhaps also be seen to comment on aspects related to the containment of such “evils.”

Building from an exploration of the novel's implications for “containment” in chapter two, I will attempt to demonstrate in the third chapter how this new theoretical framework may inform interpretations of Morrison's later works, *To London Town* and *The Hole in the Wall*. Part I will consider an important shift in perspective, from the more centralized depiction of the Jago to a more peripheral one, which occurs with the development of London's suburbs. From the sub-urban perspective of *To London Town*, the problems of containment are no longer peculiar to the overcrowded inhabitants of the East End slum, but are relevant to the burgeoning city itself. This topographic shift implies a move beyond the mere segregation of the East End from the rest of London that Joyce has suggested. Morrison's attempts to “mark” the territory of the East End can instead be read, within the broader trajectory of his urban representations, as a step towards imaginatively containing Greater London itself. Part II will explore how Morrison's later East End novel, *A Hole in the Wall*, can be seen to initiate an imaginative response to some of the problems of

containment posed by these earlier representations. These novels, I will ultimately suggest, share an attempt to grapple not only with the changing reality of the East End, but with the relentless “evils” of expansion and reinvention which characterize the modern city, and which threaten to undermine both the memory and the imagination of London as a “place” determined by its geography.

CHAPTER I. METROPOLITAN CONGESTION: ENCODING THE LONDON SLUM

Traces of London's metropolitan development abound in literature of the nineteenth century. As Simon Joyce has observed, the recurrence of certain images or rhetorical tropes throughout these literary evocations of urban life provides potential insight into contemporary perspectives on the changing metropolis. Indeed, in Arthur Morrison's own representation of urban life in *A Child of the Jago*, he can be seen to reproduce some of the language typical to descriptions of London's East End — rhetoric which epitomizes the general public perception of the area at the time when Morrison adapted it to the representational needs of his first novel. More specifically, in his introduction to *A Child of the Jago*, Morrison asserts his intention to depict a specific "place," replete with all of the "evils it engendered" (xi, my emphasis).¹ While his reference to certain "evils" may be seen to insinuate the plight of his novel's eponymous hero, Morrison's particular choice of language also recalls many other descriptions of Bethnal Green undertaken by his contemporaries. In fact, activists, public intellectuals, journalists and novelists alike frequently invoked in their writing the area's severely overcrowded conditions as an example of one of London's most pressing social issues. And it is in these writings that one finds evidence of the ways in which predominantly working-class districts, like Bethnal Green, that housed largely overcrowded working-class populations emerged as a focus of aesthetic, social and moral outrage.

In contexts as diverse as urban planning, health and sanitation, investigative journalism and literature, writers typically articulated the measure of disgrace brought about

¹The full passage in its original context reads: "It was my experience to learn the ways of this place [the Jago], to know its inhabitants, to talk with them, eat, drink, and work with them. For the existence of this place and for the evils it engendered, the community was, and is, responsible; so that every member of the community was, and is, responsible in his degree [...] I sought to do my duty by writing a tale wherein I hoped to bring the conditions of this place within the apprehension of others" (xi).

by “the evils of overcrowding” — a trope that emerged as a kind of figurative cliché for what was declared, just one year prior to the publication of *A Child of the Jago*, a “public scandal.” By 1885, “the evils of overcrowding . . . were becoming in certain localities more serious than they ever were” (qtd. in Hall 20).² The geographic and historical relevance of this trope — that is, the prevalence of the “evils of overcrowding” in descriptions of Bethnal Green, and in public discourse more generally towards the end of the nineteenth century — holds significant import for Morrison’s own use of language. This first chapter aims to identify a pattern of rhetoric used to describe the overcrowded classes and the particular social conditions of Bethnal Green, and thereby to consider the implications of Morrison’s own novel for understanding of the contemporary problem of overcrowding.

Beginning with a brief discussion of the major demographic changes that occurred with London’s metropolitan development, this chapter’s first section will aim to provide a loose historical basis for the emergence of an awareness of urban overcrowding. The increasingly congested interior of the City, which posed an impediment to mobility and to connectivity with other parts of London, triggered significant changes in contemporary approaches to urban planning, and, more importantly, in the ways in which architects and writers imagined their modern city. In the second section, I will specifically address the renewed, pragmatic approach to “space” that the problem of metropolitan congestion necessitated. While the move to embrace space certainly emerged out of necessity, this more practical motivation would eventually translate into a new aesthetics of space, mobility and “openness” in the fields of architecture and urban planning, which resonated in other forums for the imagination of a modern London. This new emphasis on the modern and

²From the British Royal Commission on housing, 1885 (I, 4), quoted in Hall’s *Cities of Tomorrow: An Intellectual History of Urban Planning and Design in the Twentieth Century* (2002).

progressive qualities of space would, however, occur at the expense of dramatically stigmatizing overpopulated, overcrowded conditions as “degenerative” and therefore “evil.”

While the first and second sections consider the problem of overcrowding in the public milieu — in the narrow, winding streets, lined with closely-clustered, small buildings, and teeming with masses of pedestrians, carts and stalls — where congestion was most immediately apparent, the third section addresses a similar problem in the private sphere. By the middle of the nineteenth century, domestic overcrowding was identified as a key factor in the spread of infectious disease, and in the propagation of immoral behaviour among residents living in close, undivided quarters. Thus, just as overcrowding had reflected adversely on London’s image as a modern metropolis, its associations with both illness and iniquity threatened the city’s medical and moral progress. It is not surprising, then, that the “evils of overcrowding” is a trope that also proliferates in medical and moral contexts, and throughout the images of degeneracy sustained by literary portrayals. More importantly, one finds this trope particularized in the geographic sketches appearing in newspapers, in works of investigative journalism, and in works of fiction, wherein depictions of working class locations are infused with the “evils” that typify their overcrowded environments. Descriptions of Bethnal Green in particular typically portrayed the area as the filthy breeding-ground of both physical and moral degeneration. Indeed, Bethnal Green became a popular geographic theme for many writers for the very reason of its applicability to the subject of overcrowding.

The fourth section will focus on Bethnal Green in the second half of the nineteenth century, to consider descriptions which invoke the district as a synecdoche of “the evils of overcrowding.” These representations collectively suggest that the area was so entrenched in its associations with overcrowding, and indeed in the medical and moral consequences

ascribed to its conditions, that, as Moretti has suggested, writers' portrayals seem to have been predicated on these encoded features of its environment. Bethnal Green was, in many ways, an ideal location for journalists and writers to situate discussions of illness and criminal activity, so that "the evils of overcrowding" can be found to appear in these texts as the so-called "natural resources" of the area. The district's notoriety as one of London's worst slums rendered it, by the last decade of the nineteenth century, the site of various modern redevelopment projects.³ And, the replacement of its infamous Friar's Mount slum (or "The Old Nichol") on the Shoreditch boundary of Bethnal Green, with a series of tenement blocks known as the "Boundary Estate," would become the London County Council's most important and most widely publicized renewal scheme.

Alongside the lingering socio-literary reputation of Bethnal Green more generally, the very public status of this particular redevelopment scheme suggests that Morrison would have undoubtedly been immersed in the symbols of Bethnal Green's (and the Old Nichol's) degeneracy prior to its realistic adaptation in his first novel. Thus, while the broader association of the East End with violence and delinquency may explain the brutality of Morrison's depictions, the unique environmental implications of the area for these features of degeneracy may illuminate the novel's deeper context. The second chapter will set out to interpret Morrison's *Jago* as a place encoded with the "evils of overcrowding" — a place of crowded, airless streets, courtyards, and rooms wherein the novel's most virulent consequences unfold. Thus, while many of his critics focus on his use of violence as a touchstone of moral degeneracy, I will argue that this violence is instead a product, a symbolic example, of a problem more deeply rooted in environment.

³ While this chapter will focus on the Boundary Estate project, the Bethnal Green Road Improvement Scheme had been undertaken a few years earlier, in 1872, and was completed in 1879.

Metropolitan Growth and the Overcrowded Classes

London's metropolitan development featured an exponential increase in urban population throughout the nineteenth century. This significant shift in demographics was largely produced by the quantity of manual labourers engaged in building the City's infrastructure, and was exacerbated by the constant influx of both provincial and international migrants, many of whom were stimulated by an unrelenting agricultural depression in outlying rural areas to seek new financial opportunities in London's large metropolitan centre (Wohl, *The Eternal Slum* 2). From the pressure of its central expansion, the City's borders were eventually extended, absorbing the populations of neighbouring communities. This process of conurbation led to a dramatic, incremental growth in London's population, which more than doubled between 1801 and 1851, and continued to increase over the following decades.⁴ Neither the labour force nor the housing industry, however, could keep up with the rapidity of this growth, and residents were faced with the inevitability of economic and residential shortages. In particular, an over-saturated labour market brought about lower wages among the working classes, and the housing market, which could not sustain the increase in demand for new housing, experienced elevated rental costs.⁵ Because the low wages received by casual workers did not come close to meeting

⁴ According to Wohl, London's population in 1801 was less than one million inhabitants, yet by 1851, it had increased to about two and a quarter million inhabitants, less than half of whom were native-born Londoners (1-2). This rapid increase in size, Wohl suggests, was comparable to the creation of a large town, every ten years: "[b]etween 1841 and 1851, for example, there was an addition of over 414,000 people. By way of comparison, the total population of Liverpool in 1851 was 375,955, and that of Manchester, Birmingham, and Leeds, 250,409, 232,841, and 172,270 respectively" (1).

⁵ This is an oversimplified explanation of a phenomenon produced by the combined interactions between rapid immigration, geographic organization, and the market's laws of supply and demand — which I do not claim to elucidate in their full complexity, but merely to describe as some of the basic features that contributed to overcrowding.

these inflated rents,⁶ many labourers and their families adapted to residing in a single room, in a house that was often shared with one or two other families (Wohl, *The Eternal Slum* 2).⁷

Just as metropolitan growth was not limited to London alone but evident in the increased populations of many developing urban centres, other cities were similarly prone to residential shortages, and to consequent “overcrowding.”⁸ Yet, in London in particular, where large numbers of casual, unskilled labourers were employed in the construction of the modern capital — in the expansion of the railway system, the construction of new roads and buildings, and the implementation of a proper sanitation system — the sheer size of its working class meant that Londoners were the most overcrowded population in all of Great Britain, with one family in every ten subjected to some degree of overcrowding (Wohl, *The Eternal Slum* 2).⁹ While the fact of London’s overcrowding may appear, in retrospect, to have been a predictable outcome of the un-sustainability of its population, the problem of overcrowding initially received little attention, and failed to emerge as a clearly-defined social issue in the first half of the nineteenth century (Wohl, *The Eternal Slum* 5). An overriding concern for the limitations of London’s crowded topography, however, had already begun to

⁶ The wages in working class districts (which tended to be situated in locations that employed high numbers of casual, unskilled labourers—the areas surrounding the docks or the railways, for example) were, on average, about 12s per week, and the rental rate for two rooms to house one’s family was about 3s. 6d. for the first and 4s for the second room or 75% of the worker’s weekly wages (Wohl, *The Eternal Slum* 4). It was thus much more economical to occupy a single room in a shared house, and thereby to reserve any remaining income for food.

⁷ Most working-class families occupied a single room in a house and, in some cases, as many as eight or more family members might inhabit the space of a 10’ by 6’ room (Wohl, *The Eternal Slum* 4).

⁸ It is important to note that, throughout the nineteenth century, there lacked an official consensus on what exactly constituted overcrowding. By 1866, however, under the Nuisances Removal Act (see note 42) some districts began to enforce bylaws requiring a minimum of 400 cubic feet for each adult, and 300 cubic feet for each adult in sleeping quarters. These requirements were halved for children under the age of ten and thus, “under this definition, overcrowding existed if a man, his wife, and child occupied a single room 8’ high, 10’ long and 10’ wide” (Wohl, *The Eternal Slum* xv). Other definitions of overcrowding specifically emphasized the amount of fresh air per person, while the London County Council, in the construction of its municipal housing projects, simply acknowledged the presence of overcrowding when there were two or more inhabitants per room, regardless of the size of those rooms. The statistics cited by Wohl pertain to this definition.

⁹ London’s overcrowding was also magnified by the sheer size of the city, which discouraged workers from suburban commuting — a prospect that was much more “readily available elsewhere, in Birmingham for example, or in Coventry [...] in smaller towns” (Wohl, *The Eternal Slum* xii).

surface in the area of urban planning, and remains apparent in the topographical and architectural redevelopments of the Victorian period.

Urban Planning and the Aesthetics of Space

As Lynda Nead has suggested in *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets and Images in Nineteenth-Century London* (2000), because successful business transactions were largely dependent on the connectivity between London's thriving commercial hub and the markets of surrounding districts or neighboring urban centres, fluid circulation throughout the city was essential. And, as urban crowding and congestion therefore posed a potential threat to London's economic development, measures were taken to alleviate crowded streets, to create more direct routes between markets and business districts, and ultimately, to encourage economic progress. As a result, throughout the latter half of the century London's railway system was dramatically extended, new roadways were constructed, and entire districts were purged and redeveloped according to the flows of economic activity.¹⁰ In 1855, the Metropolitan Board of Works (MBW), London's first municipal governing council, was created to administer these major civil engineering projects and to undertake the more minor needs for paving, lighting, and naming of new streets (Nead 19). Among the most important of the MBW's redevelopment schemes was the construction of the Holborn Viaduct, an

¹⁰The railway expansion required a vast restructuring of London's urban topography; in 1863 alone, 174 miles of track had been proposed for the city of London (Wohl, *The Eternal Slum* 37). This expansion continued throughout the latter half of the century and resulted in extensive housing demolition to make way for new railway lines. The construction of the tube system, begun in the winter of 1860, demanded similar housing demolitions to accommodate ventilating shafts and to discharge fumes and smoke (Simmons 283). According to H.J. Dyos in "Railways and Housing in Victorian London-I," "the figure of twenty-thousand persons displaced by 'metropolitan engineering works,' including railways, before 1864, or even that of 50,000 by 1867, are both too low" (13). Of the sixty-nine improvement schemes that took place between 1853 and 1901 (including railway, street, and architectural developments), which displaced some 76,000 people overall, nearly half of these are attributable to the construction of the metropolitan railway between 1859 and 1867 (Simmons 297).

architectural icon which illustrates the dramatic measures undertaken to improve mobility, and thereby to encourage commerce.

Up until the mid-nineteenth century, the district of Holborn was a notoriously crowded area of London occupied by many local businesses, and accessible by a “road [that] followed the gradient of a steep hill rising from west to east” (Nead 49). The MBW, from the winter of 1866 to the fall of 1869, undertook to alleviate the hill’s impediment to Holborn’s retail industry through the construction of a long, iron bridge, which would connect the businesses of Holborn with the City’s banking district. The “raised roadway, with pedestrian routes, subways for sewers, gas-pipes and ventilation and ground-level areas for housing” (Nead 51) is over 1,400 feet long, with “a wide, level street, which obviated the inconvenience of the steep ascents along Holborn Hill” (Nead 51). Many of Holborn’s dilapidated, crowded houses were cleared from the entrance to the viaduct, to further enable ease of movement. The Holborn Viaduct’s aggrandized expression of mobility also delivers the quintessential image of London’s modernity; it is, as Nead suggests, a “great Victorian way”: “[the] ornamental bridge across Farringdon Street, with its marble piers, pierced Gothic ironwork, decorative gaslights and statuary [...] ground-level accommodation, stairways to the Viaduct and new buildings [...] orderly, elegant and modern” (Nead 53). Thus, urban development projects like the Holborn Viaduct helped to usher London’s economy into modernity, to develop London’s image as a grand and broadly connected city — and more importantly, as a city that reflected those features of modernity common to other powerful metropolises.

According to Jonathan Schneer’s *London 1900: The Imperial Metropolis* (1999), the dominant principles of London’s urban redevelopment were as much the product of a desire to mimic the aesthetic features of other great, modern European cities as they were of a need

to alleviate overcrowding. Hence, while renewed approaches to space occurred as a necessary corollary to the problem of congestion, the advancement of London's modern image as a fluid and spacious metropolis also occurs within a broader aesthetic conceptualization. Schneer suggests that proponents of a "modern" image for London recognized that, unlike Haussmann's Paris, or Vienna, or Berlin, for example, the English capital had

few broad, sweeping avenues and boulevards [...] where architects had consciously celebrated the Third Empire and the establishment of the second German Reich, a dearth of structures to compare with the grand buildings facing the Ringstrasse of Vienna, which had been erected to reflect "the greatness of empire," few constellations of linked squares as in St. Petersburg. (Schneer 19)

The MBW endeavoured to mimic these wide, sweeping boulevards, lined by Neo-Baroque buildings, and culminating in open courtyards or circuses to appeal to a very modern urban aesthetic. While the imagination of a modern London entailed the idealization of wide, open streets and courtyards, however, it simultaneously stigmatized crowded or congested spaces as degenerative blights upon the spaces of modernity.

This defining spatial aesthetic of the modern European city began to be articulated in the theories and criticism of urban planning throughout the mid- and late-nineteenth century. And, more specifically, the veneration for open space was articulated alongside a more intense vilification of overcrowding. In fact, in a contemporary treatment of the subject of London's topography, *Suggestions for the Improvement of Our Towns and Houses* (1843), T.J. Maslen considers the beauties of open areas, while venturing as far as to characterize crowded streets as "evil." While the "most handsome" and "more comfortable" streets are "airy," Maslen describes "too narrow streets and lanes" as a preventable "evil":

Numerous small plots of open ground around every town are already marked out for building upon, and the plans of the streets already traced, with the utmost ingenuity, so as to crowd as many little streets, and build as many little houses, without an inch of garden, as it is possible to huddle together; the streets so narrow and devoid of plan [...] The authorities of a town should be diligent in the prevention of *such evils as too narrow streets and lanes* [...] The endeavour should be, not to try how many pitiful, narrow, small streets can be crowded on a certain small space of ground, but how many small streets can be well sewered and drained, and made of a good width and length, so as to be *most handsome, more comfortable, airy*. (Maslen iii-iv, my emphasis)

Maslen's assessment, while alluding to the emergence of sanitation problems as a result of small, crowded streets, also uses a rhetoric that resonates throughout later literary descriptions that would encode these spaces as "evil." Maslen's "evil" image of the congested, labyrinthine landscapes typical to working class areas would later be solidified as a convention of "slum" representations.¹¹ And, by 1850, the term "slum" itself was used to denote areas of dense concentration.¹² Maslen's aesthetic notion of urban crowding as "evil"

¹¹Writers throughout the period took up descriptions of "slum" locales — that is, generally, areas stricken by poverty — and many Victorians fashionably embarked on tours of these areas (an activity known as "slumming"). Throughout the nineteenth century, however, the term "slum" itself assumed a wide range of meanings; it "ha[d] 'no fixity' and 'was being used in effect for a whole range of social and political purposes'" (Koven 9). Koven is paraphrasing Dyos here, who, in "The Slums of Victorian London," suggests that the proper study of the history of the [Victorian] slum would require "a sociology of language, for it was being applied with varying force over the period and with different emphasis at any one time by different social classes [...] it is not possible now to invent a satisfactory definition of a slum, even a London one, in the nineteenth century" (132). The variety of definitions supplied by the *OED* reflects the term's lack of fixity, yet it does define the slum somewhat generally as: "A street, alley, court, etc., situated in a crowded district of a town or city and inhabited by people of a low class or by the very poor; a number of these streets or courts forming a thickly populated neighbourhood or district where the houses and the conditions of life are of a squalid and wretched character." The use of the term "slum" throughout this thesis is intended to reflect this more generic meaning.

¹²While the term "slum" had acquired slang status in the early 1800s (deriving from "slumber," and connoting a "sleepy back alley" or room), by 1850 it had taken on the etymological connotations of a dense concentration. An early example of this semantic shift can be seen in Cardinal Wiseman's thirty-page religious tract, *An Appeal to the Reason and Good Feeling of the English People on the Subject of the Catholic Hierarchy* (1850), which describes the slums around Westminster Abbey as "*congealed labyrinths of lanes and courts, and alleys and slums*" (p. 30, qtd. in Wohl, *The Eternal Slum* 5, my emphasis).

also, however, seems to anticipate a more particular rhetorical convention: “the evils of overcrowding.”¹³ This trope would come to embody what were perceived as the inherently regressive qualities of overcrowding, ranging from its more superficial impositions on the exterior landscape to its more profound implications for interior, domestic comportment. For, among those detriments to London’s image of modern progress, the medical and moral degeneracy among the overcrowded poor was perhaps the most severe. The degenerative “evils of overcrowding” were exploited by diverse advocates of urban progress, but perhaps never more crucially than by the lobbyists for sanitary reform, who adopted the trope as their mantra.

In Pursuit of Sanitary Space

By the middle of the nineteenth century the desire for a beautiful, modern city was upstaged by the more urgent plea for a healthy and safe city, which would begin with the proper sanitation of its residences. Just as space had become an important principle in the aesthetic conception of the modern city, it was also considered fundamental to the image of a healthy and moral modern city. While the opening-up of public spaces enhanced both mobility and beauty in certain areas, however, it also made visible some of the more unseemly features of urban life. As Stallybrass and White remark in “The City: the Sewer, the Gaze and the Contaminating Touch,” images of the overcrowded poor, who were previously isolated from the “observation and influence of better educated neighbours” (from the Select Committee of 1838, qtd. on 135) were newly accessible via the improved

¹³Just as Douglas Jerrold’s *The History of Saint Giles and Saint James* can be seen as a rhetorical reflection of the emerging spatial polarity between London’s East and West ends, the increasingly negative comparison of congested space to open space can be seen in literary examples of the time. Maslen’s “evil” reappears in John Hollingshead’s *Ragged London in 1861* (1861), for example, in which he describes the “evils of overcrowding in courts and alleys” (113). The trope also recurs as a chapter title, “Evils of Overcrowding Among the Poor,” in Rev. J.B. Dickson’s *Pictures and Pleadings* (1871).

thoroughfares and transportation: London had become free of “those architectural barriers which kept the amoral ‘secluded from superior inspection and from common observation’” (126).¹⁴ These newly accessible pockets of poverty were recognizable by their crowded tenements, and by the smells that emanated from their over-full cesspools and untended refuse. These sensory markers were a reminder of the looming closeness of the rampant deviance and disease that characterized many poor districts, and of the still-fresh wounds of the cholera epidemic of 1831- 1832.¹⁵ The newly exposed sites of poverty threatened to counteract the projected image of a spacious and airy modern London and “were increasingly thematized as both diseased and antimodern. In turn, health and modernity came to be identified with a careful mapping of the city’s (and city dwellers’) [filth]” (Gilbert 79). Out of a fear of contamination by the unshielded poor, there emerged among the middle classes, as Stallybrass and White suggest, a desire to observe, investigate, and therefore regulate the filth and diseases of the poor. That space had the ability to “remedy” and to “modernize” London remained fundamental to other regulatory approaches to degeneracy, so that the high rates of illness, death, and criminal activity in slum districts were equally treated with spatial solutions.

The Pathological Poor

The localization of high levels of disease and illness among the labouring poor became the focus of so-called middle-class “observation” and prompted new inquiries into the relationship between one’s socio-economic environment and epidemiology. An official

¹⁴Stallybrass and White quote Edwin Chadwick here (*Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* 243), whom they describe as having “insisted that satisfactory regulation [of criminals and delinquents] depended upon breaking down those architectural barriers [. . . to] penetrate and subjugate the recalcitrant body” (126).

¹⁵This was the first cholera outbreak to hit London, claiming the lives of 32,000 people. The close proximity of slums to middle-class districts promoted a fear of contagion by the feverish poor.

of the Poor Law Board, Edwin Chadwick, who is typically credited for his independent research into issues of public health, inspired the formation of the Health of Towns Association (1844-1849),¹⁶ whose separate branches undertook to investigate health and sanitation among the labouring populations of the country's fifty largest towns. The major publication that ensued from this research, Chadwick's *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain*, illustrated the connections between the overcrowded conditions of the poor, extreme filth, and the spread of disease. It asserted

the inadequacy of existing systems of sewerage, water supply, and drainage, and stressed the connection between these and overcrowding on the one hand, and epidemic diseases on the other. Chadwick argued "that the various forms of epidemic, endemic, and other diseases caused, or aggravated, or propagated chiefly amongst the labouring classes [were the result of] atmospheric impurities produced by decomposing animal and vegetable substances, by damp and filth, and close and overcrowded dwelling...". (Wohl, *Endangered Lives* 147)

Chadwick's report outlined, for the first time, a distinct correlation between poor sanitation — the presence of stagnant, over-full cesspools, which were kept too close to both living quarters and water supplies, the general lack of hygiene and of proper ventilation — and the spread of infectious diseases. Furthermore, he stressed that overcrowded living conditions exacerbated the spread of so-called "filth diseases," such as cholera and typhoid, not simply in circumstances of close physical contact, but also in houses with an inadequate supply or circulation of fresh air.¹⁷ Much like the double current present in the movement towards

¹⁶Other similar associations were also formed, including the *Association for Promoting Cleanliness Among the Poor*, and *The Society for the Improvement of the Conditions of the Labouring Classes* (both in 1844).

¹⁷Overcrowded houses typically lacked adequate ventilation, and were frequently characterized by burgeoning cesspools and unmanaged household refuse, and in many overcrowded homes, the occupation of cellars meant that some family members dwelt dangerously close to underground cesspools. Up until the 1850s, "some 40

topographic reform, Chadwick's medical appeal for sanitary reform was laced with the underlying concerns of modernity.

As Harold Perkin has suggested in *The Rise of Professional Society: England Since 1880*, the image of British modernity was not simply entwined with the image of a healthy populace, but with that of a moral populace, so that the overcrowded poor were equally targeted as "a covert and insidious threat [...] to the physical, intellectual and moral fitness of the nation" (Harold Perkin, 53, qtd. in Kijinski 490). And in fact, though the medical officers of the Health of Towns Association were commissioned to investigate the medical repercussions of poverty, many of them used their privileged positions to "stress[ed] the connection between overcrowding and crime" (Wohl, *The Eternal Slum* 64). Accordingly, Chadwick's report highlighted the threat the overcrowded poor posed to Great Britain's medical progress, while underscoring the implications of this socio-economic group for the country's moral progress. Alongside the medical evils endemic to living in close quarters, he describes a pathology of "moral evils"¹⁸ which were equally threatening to the idea of modern London.

In his report, Chadwick suggests that under conditions of overcrowding, both proper health and moral behaviour are unmaintainable: "the accumulation of human beings in winding streets, (some of which are not more than eight or nine feet wide,) [...] render decency, morality, health, or contentment impossible" (Chadwick 120). And just as overcrowded quarters are the

per cent of London dwellings stood over cesspits and cesspools with undeniable access to the ordinary water supply" (Wohl's note to plate 12, *The Eternal Slum*). It was also nearly impossible to attempt to quarantine individuals under such overcrowded conditions (Wohl, *Endangered Lives* 13).

¹⁸In his *Report to Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department, from the Poor Law Commissioners: On an Inquiry Into the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain: with Appendices* (co-authored with Great Britain Poor Law Commissioners, 1842), for example, he insists that "[s]ome offend by overcrowding [...] by the absence of all ventilation, and even by the total want of air" (427). In the same report, he describes "[o]vercrowding [a]s an evil which prevails in all the lodgings of the lowest class, and which aggravates the mischief resulting from the other inconveniences to which they are subject" (242).

“fever nests and seats of physical depravity [they] are also the seats of moral depravity, disorder, and crime with which the police have most to do” [...]

Chadwick connects slums to sewage, sewage to disease, and disease to moral degradation: “adverse circumstances” lead to a population which is “short lived, improvident, reckless, and intemperate, and with an habitual avidity for sensual gratifications.” (Stallybrass and White 131)

Evidence of the perpetuation of a common theme — of an overcrowded underclass bound to both medical and moral regression — can be found in the titles of lectures given by Chadwick’s fellow officers, Dr. John Liddle and Dr. Southwood Smith respectively, “On the Moral and Physical Evils Resulting From the Neglect of Sanitary Measures” (1847),¹⁹ and “On some of the physical causes of sickness and morality to which the poor are particularly exposed and which are capable of removal by sanitary regulations, exemplified in the present condition of Bethnal Green and White Chapel districts, as ascertained on a personal inspection” (c. 1848).

Not only was overcrowding linked to violence and criminal activity, but it was also associated with other forms of “intemperance” like alcoholism and sexual promiscuity. As Michelle Allen observes in “From Cesspool to Sewer: Sanitary Reform and the Rhetoric of Resistance, 1848-1880,” the overcrowded circumstances of the poor were deemed “a predisposing factor for the promiscuous behavior — illicit sexual relations, immoderate drinking, improvidence — associated with the poor” (391). A lack of space in overcrowded dwellings meant a crucial lack of personal privacy, and thus also, a lack of moral respectability, so that, as Chadwick claimed, families were indecently exposed to one another in the “promiscuous intimacy of cattle [...] every instinct of personal and sexual decency is

¹⁹Liddle’s report suggests that overcrowded, “dirty houses and filthy places have a much closer connection with crime than is at first sight imagined” (cited in Allen 391).

stifled [...] every nakedness of life is uncovered there” (qtd. in Wohl, *The Eternal Slum* 54). In some stretches of the imagination, these forms of “moral malaria” were not merely threatening to the idea or image of the nation’s “moral fitness,” but, like the “fever nests,” were transmittable beyond the boundaries of the urban slum. Allen quotes the architect Henry Robinson (1852) as a contemporary example of the feared airborne communicability of immorality itself: “physical and moral malaria are [...] wafted abroad by the winds of heaven to pollute and to poison whatever falls within their reach” (Allen 391).

This misplaced notion of the threat of overcrowding distracted from full recognition of the socio-economic reasons for the high rates of illness and death among the poor — namely, that the poor could not afford to install proper sewerage or properly maintain unhygienic, dilapidated housing, let alone afford the ample space required for a more respectable degree of privacy. That they could not afford proper housing or nutrition remained fundamental to the illness that prevented many from earning a living, and that further entrenched them in poverty. And the legislative, spatial approaches to the problem of overcrowding among the poor, exemplified by the Nuisances Removal and the City Sewers Act, overshadowed the growing housing crisis that would not be seriously broached until the 1880s. Like the reports of the medical officers, however, the move towards housing reform, too, was underscored by “the vital subject of character reformation of the urban masses [...] an amalgam of moral impulses and political calculation” (Wohl, *The Eternal Slum* xiii).

The Evils of Overcrowding in the “Hiding-Places” of Bethnal Green

Both the medical and moral evils of overcrowding targeted by the sanitary reform movement held particular relevance for the working class district of Bethnal Green. The

area was considered to be one of London's most notoriously overcrowded districts,²⁰ and fell prey to high rates of disease and death, as well as having one of the worst criminal reputations in East London. It was allegedly so infested with criminal activity that even police feared to enter its boundaries. Its buildings were irreparably dilapidated, its streets were narrow (28 feet at the widest), and its dwellings vastly overcrowded. In fact, Bethnal Green was seemingly so entrenched in its associations with the "evils of overcrowding" that the phrase was somewhat of a cliché in descriptions of the area. Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, literary sources made reference to the area's densely-concentrated population, and at least one newspaper, the *East London Observer*, refers to cholera — by then accepted as the definitional disease of the overcrowded working classes — as the "Bethnal-green fever." In describing a victim of cholera, the paper suggests that

her said death was accelerated by overcrowding, want of sufficient water supply, defective drainage, the dirty and unhealthy condition of the premises, and general neglect of sanatory [*sic*] arrangements; and the said jurors do say that the intimation made by the medical officer of the district of the condition of the premises ought to have received immediate attention. ("Bethnal-green fever haunts again." *East London Observer*, Saturday Feb. 17, 1866, p. 2)

Bethnal Green had indeed become something of an epicentre for observing the evils of poverty and of overcrowding throughout the latter half of the century, and was the frequent subject of newspaper sketches and features.²¹ The use of Bethnal Green to typify the perils

²⁰In a later census, conducted in 1901, of London's 18.6% overcrowded population, 26.9% of Bethnal Green's population (approximately 100,000 people, inhabiting an area of "one square mile and four-ninths" (Gavin 5) were overcrowded (Wohl, *Endangered Lives* 306). Bethnal Green, Holborn, and Southwark were considered to be the most overcrowded boroughs of London (Wohl, *Endangered Lives* 281).

²¹Some examples from the same period include "More Revelations of Bethnal Green" (my emphasis — evidence of a series featured in the newspaper) from *The Builder* (vol. XXI, no. 1082, Oct. 31, 1863); "Dwellings of the Poor in Bethnal Green" from the *Illustrated London News* (October 24, 1863); "A fresh visit to Bethnal-Green" from *The Builder* (Jan 28th, 1871).

of overcrowding occurs throughout newspapers and literary works alike, including John Hollingshead's book-length work of investigative journalism entitled *Ragged London in 1861*, in which he identifies the district as a so-called "hiding-place" of the overcrowded: "The evils of overcrowding in courts and alleys are, unhappily, not confined to the eastern end of the metropolis. There are almost as many dark holes and corners within a few yards of Charing Cross, which shelter almost as much sickness, crime, and poverty, as any back hiding-places in Whitechapel or Bethnal Green" (Hollingshead 113). Throughout literature of the mid- to late-nineteenth century, these abysmal dark holes recall the "black" districts of Charles Booth's colour-coded social maps, which signified the "Lowest class. Vicious, semi-criminal" (see p.9, n.9) — that is, the "residuum," left behind by the mid-Victorian march of moral and material progress" (Jennifer Davis 11).

These kinds of symbolic representations of Bethnal Green, which essentialize the area as a site of the aesthetic, medical and moral evils of overcrowding, are eventually met with attempts to document the area's more nuanced population and economic range. Just as the totalizing images of the London poor supplied by Besant, Mearns, and Sims were reconsidered in more refined surveys of distinct socio-geographic areas, Bethnal Green's more generalized portrayals were met with increasingly localized descriptions of the evils of overcrowding, with particular attention paid to the evils of the Old Nichol rookery. John Davis's "The Enfranchisement of the Urban Poor in Late Victorian Britain" considers the Old Nichol's particular reputation in relation to the greater district of Bethnal Green, and is worth quoting at some length:

The Bethnal Green medical officer found in 1890 that only 9 per cent of houses [in the Old Nichol] were structurally sound, while 45 per cent were completely beyond repair [...] the area's density of 373 persons per acre was more than double the

overall level of Bethnal Green [...] From the early Victorian period the area became something of a sump for the East End, gaining notoriety as a result. John Hollingshead highlighted “Old Nichols [*sic*] Street ... a specimen of an east end thieves’ street” [in *Ragged London in 1861*]. (Davis 109)

While the area’s particular evils had gained notoriety much earlier in the century as a synecdoche or “specimen” of the evils of the East End, the area was brought into particular focus in the late 1880s. The death rate in the Old Nichol was almost twice that of Bethnal Green, and more than twice that of London (Steffel 162).²² In the Old Nichol, a fifteen-acre plot which was home to approximately 5700 people, and in which 2118 persons dwelt in single rooms, there were some 2000 people dwelling in 506 two-room apartments, while other rooms had more than five inhabitants. According to the new sanitation standards initiated by the Health of Towns Association, the Old Nichol rookery in particular — and not Bethnal Green in general — was officially declared to be an unsalvageable “slum.”

Following the numerous social, political, and literary appeals for reform advanced by individuals like Chadwick, Booth, and Hollingshead, parliament had founded a Royal Commission in 1884 to research working-class housing. It resolved that “poverty was so deeply-rooted” (Steffel 163) that the poor could neither help nor house themselves. The Royal Commission determined that although, throughout its period of governance, the Metropolitan Board of Works had successfully cleared over forty acres in slum districts, an *indirect* consequence of its urban redevelopment schemes (Wohl, *The Eternal Slum* 27), it had also contributed to the displacement of large numbers of the labouring population — some

²²According to Steffel’s reference from the minutes of an LCC meeting, the death rate of the Boundary Street area was 40 per 1000, of Bethnal Green, 22 per 1000, and London, 19.3 per 1000 (Steffel 172, note #8).

17, 500 people over two years (Wohl, *The Eternal Slum* 133-35).²³ Thus, in 1888, a new civic governing board, the London County Council (LCC), was founded to replace the MBW.²⁴ Taking up many of the projects already begun by the MBW, the LCC eradicated and redeveloped many slum streets and houses. Under the existing sanitary regulations, the owners of unsanitary dwellings were responsible for the demolition of their properties at their own expense, while the owners of structurally unsound houses were also commissioned to demolish them (Steffel 172-73, n.11). The Housing of the Working Classes Act was passed in 1890 and the Public Health Act in 1891, both of which resolved to better enforce previous acts and regulations (Steffel 163). Just a few months later, the Housing Committee of the LCC made public their plans to clear completely the unsanitary and dilapidated Old Nichol rookery, and to replace it with London's first social housing project, the Boundary Street Estate. The Boundary Estate would replace some fifteen acres of what was considered to be the worst slum in London and was

justifiably, [the] most widely publicized improvement scheme the council undertook before 1914 [...] the whole scheme, radiating from a central bandstand [Arnold's Circus] raised on the rubble of the Old [Nichol], housed 5,500 people of a somewhat

²³ As Wohl details in *The Eternal Slum*, between 1830 and 1856, the MBW's metropolitan improvement schemes had led to the development of New Oxford Street, Victoria Street, Cannon Street, Commercial Street, and Farringdon Road, and between 1861 and 1887, to the restructuring of some ten additional thoroughfares. Many of these roadways, however, passed through working-class neighborhoods, including "Garrick Street from St. Martin's Lane to Covent Garden (finished in 1861), Burdett Road from Limehouse to Victoria Park (1862), Holborn (1867), the widened Kensington High Street (1869)" (26). Although by 1851 the Metropolitan Board of Works was held accountable for the erection of twenty-two housing improvement schemes to re-house persons displaced by its civil engineering projects, it had failed to adequately sustain the large number of inhabitants rendered homeless. While the Board built six thousand flats and re-housed some thirty-thousand displaced persons over four decades, it "had accommodated fewer than one thousand people each year, or, to put it more graphically, in over forty years of endeavour it had housed less than one half of one year's increase in London's population" (151).

²⁴ The main difference between the MBW and the LCC was that the LCC was composed of elected officials, while the MBW officials had been appointed. This new strategy was intended to limit individual interests in the projects, and to ensure better accountability for issues like rehousing.

better class. The superior amenities included hot-water laundries for common use.

(Wohl, *The Eternal Slum* plates 26, 27)

The first buildings were completed in 1895, just one year prior to the publication of Morrison's *A Child of the Jago*. By this time, however, Bethnal Green and its Old Nichol rookery were so entrenched in their environmental associations that Morrison would have undoubtedly been immersed in these encoded symbols of his overcrowded landscape.

The Jago and the Evils it Engendered

As both Dyos and Koven have remarked, to conduct a social history of the nineteenth-century slum would entail research into the extensive etymological uses of the very word itself. Similarly, to fully grasp the range of aesthetic, medical, and moral connotations ascribed to the “evils of overcrowding” would require a much more detailed study of the concept of evil itself throughout the nineteenth century. While I cannot claim to have broached the intricate complexities of this kind of study, I have tried to demonstrate the extent to which the various “evils of overcrowding” were on the minds of many late-Victorians, and were accordingly articulated in the trope that pervades many of their writings. In light of the social, historical and geographic context for many of these writings that focused on the issue of poverty from the middle to the end of the nineteenth century, and which often adopted Bethnal Green or the Old Nichol as paradigmatic of the evils of overcrowding, Morrison's own use of the term “evil” in *A Child of the Jago* resonates with these prior associations. And thus, his introductory description of a crowded “square of two hundred and fifty yards or less” (1) where “the human population swarmed in thousands” (1), where there loomed “a close, mingled stink” (1), and where “on every moving creature [...] the third plague of Egypt, and more, lay unceasing” (2) is significant not just as mere setting for the novel, but as an environment which “engenders” the “evils” that take place

throughout it. Some of the most poignant scenes of so-called “evil” in this novel are plotted in overcrowded situations, if not actually produced by them. While inciting their own commentary on the consequences of inadequate living conditions, these overcrowded scenes of “evil” contribute to another sort of plotting — one which charts a most striking image of containment. The spatial barriers delineated by these scenes appear to form a tight lid over the Jago, which, as I shall suggest in chapter three, stands in stark contrast to the itinerant crowds of East End indigents portrayed in Morrison’s subsequent novel, *To London Town*.

CHAPTER II. “BREAKIN’ UP THE ‘OUSE”: OVERCROWDING AND HOME-WRECKING IN THE JAGO

In his 1994 article, “Native Customs and Colonial Solutions,” John L. Kijinski argues that Morrison adopts an ethnographic approach in the writing of *A Child of the Jago* and objectifies the Jagos as a savage, primitive “other” race much in the same way that nineteenth-century British ethnographers objectified their African colonial subjects. Although Kijinski’s critical perspective is informed exclusively by this colonial context, his observations on the more general features of degeneracy that Morrison ascribes to the Jagos help to situate them within a discourse of modern progress. Kijinski identifies the “[d]wellers in the Jago” as the “regressive, devolving ‘other,’ living within a progressive, evolving culture, and thereby placing it in jeopardy” (492). More specifically, he suggests that, in accordance with the contemporary ethnographic terms which determined a culture to be degenerative or regressive, what “marked these people [the Jagos] as degraded was the acceptance of ‘criminal’ or deviant behavior as normal” (495). That is, the group was not degraded by the mere presence of violence within its community — that, he insists, was common among many social classes — but, rather, by the acceptance of that violence as customary. They were utterly devoid of moral standards, and therefore “amoral” as opposed to “immoral.” This chapter will build from Kijinski’s notion of the Jagos’ degeneracy as premised on their communal normalization of violence or criminality. Yet, I will proceed to demonstrate how Kijinski’s incidental reference to the devolving “dwellers” of the Jago may provide a key to interpreting their “regressive” violence. In particular, I will argue that the conditions under which the residents of the Jago “dwell” there — namely, conditions of severe overcrowding — are dominant factors in the normalization, the escalation, and the perpetuation of the violence that “degrades” them. In the Jago degenerative, overcrowded

dwellings *engender* “evil” behaviour, which, in turn, may place the households of non-Jagos in “jeopardy.”

This chapter’s first section, “Overcrowding in Public Spaces,” will aim to establish the collective normalization of violence as a feature of the Jago’s public spaces, the source of Jago degeneracy according to Kijinski’s notion. The particular role of public crowds and crowding in the escalation of that violence will illuminate the greater implications of overcrowding for the Jagos’ degenerative behaviour. The second section will focus-in on the overcrowded quarters of the Perrott household to consider how their own crowded circumstances lead to the hereditary perpetuation of violence and theft from one generation to another. While overcrowding can be seen to shape the criminal instincts of both the community and the Perrott family, however, their acts of delinquency are of little consequence within the Jago. On the other hand, crimes executed outside of the Jago are met with severe repercussions, especially when they entail a violation of the homes of non-Jagos. As I will argue in section three, Josh and Dicky Perrott’s downfalls are both instigated by the crimes they commit against non-Jagos, and more importantly, by their criminal incursions upon the “respectable” homes of non-Jagos. Josh is imprisoned for invading the “respectable” home of the High Mobsman, and is hanged for murdering Aaron Weech, also in his home.¹ Dicky’s own violent end ensues from a rivalry with Bobby Roper, which began with an assault on the Ropers’ “respectable” home. The indignities the Perrotts commit within the homes of non-Jagos resonate with the source of their own degeneracy: the conditions of their family home.

¹ I use the term “respectable” ironically when describing the homes of two people whose livelihood depends on their criminal activities. While not necessarily “respectable” figures themselves, both the Mobsman and Weech nonetheless occupy homes which conform to an image of respectability.

The role of overcrowding in acts of violence and larceny throughout the novel suggests that Morrison's representations are not reducible to simple images of depravity. Instead, his depiction of the Old Nichol's "natural resources" — its characteristic overcrowding along with its violence — offers a more complex evocation of the relationship between "regressive" households and moral degeneracy, which threatens more "progressive" images of the respectable late-Victorian home. In light of this relationship, I will suggest in section four that Morrison's interwoven references to the Boundary Estate project do not merely function as reminders of the novel's geo-historical context, a purpose that critics have typically taken for granted. Images of the Old Nichol's transformation also symbolically mirror the degeneration of a culture in the dereliction of its topography — a culture socially degenerated by its transgressive home-life, situated amidst the physical wreckage of its former home.

Overcrowding in Public Spaces

Overcrowding appears as a "natural resource" of the Jago that pervades exterior as well as interior spaces. Morrison introduces his readers to the Jago with a street map² that delineates a "square of two hundred and fifty yards or less" (1) that reflects an actual geographic region in which, he claims, "the human population swarmed in thousands" (1). The novel begins at the centre of this map, at nighttime, in a crowded and airless central courtyard wherein the Jago's inhabitants are seemingly most concentrated. Morrison describes the atmosphere of Jago Court as "stifling" and "oppressive" (2) due to the dense

² Morrison's map of the Old Jago mirrors that of the Old Nichol: he substitutes "Edge Lane" for Boundary Street, "Luck Row," for Chance Street, and "Honey Lane" for Mead Street.

concentration of “dossers”³ sleeping outside. While the humidity may prove to be a source of disturbance to sleepers both inside and outside houses, Morrison specifies that restfulness in the Jago was particularly hindered by the number of people in such close quarters: sleep “was at best a thing of intermission from reasons [...] of multitude” (19).

Just as the mass of nighttime sleepers converges at this central hub and thins towards the Jago’s bordering streets (3), daytime crowds seem to radiate centrifugally from this core. Both overcrowding and violence are normal features of this central court just as they are normalized, central features of all life in the Jago. Jago Court is considered to be a “local arena” (14) for robberies and fights and large numbers of Jagos seem to congregate there at all times. Its entrance is found guarded by a “hulking group at the corner of Old Jago Street” (14), and the concentrated numbers within and surrounding the court often fuel mass robberies and violence. Conversely, comparatively “small parties” within Jago Court, “profited nothing” (20). The crowded courtyard is a hotbed for theft and violence, wherein “loafers from the corners” could combine with casual thieves. In one episode, they “joined forces to the array of twenty or thirty. Confident in their numbers, they swept the street, stopping every passenger [...] and emptying all pockets” (75). The mob of thieves and pickpockets easily forms a gauntlet across Jago Court, so that everyone who passed through would fall prey to the crowd. Jago Court produces a “raid in force” (76) and, when a wagon of tobacco passes through Old Jago Street, the mass effectively swarms the car-man, stripping him of pocket change and boots, and looting his tobacco and even the horse and van. The unappeasable force of the crowd in this public swarming is confirmed when “the whole thing [is lost] in the busy streets” (77), unacknowledged and without reprimand.

³ The *OED* defines a “dosser” as one who sleeps in a common lodging house, outside, or “where he can,” homeless or otherwise. The Ranns and Learys are noted as regularly sleeping outside (5); whether by reason of their own overcrowded homes or homelessness Morrison does not clarify.

No-one passing through Jago Court can avoid being ensnared in its web of violence. Even the Jagos themselves cannot maintain neutrality, and are automatically subsumed within the normalized behaviour of the masses. When Hannah Perrott crosses Jago Court with Baby Looney on an errand (and indeed, she could scarce avoid crossing it, as the Perrotts' home is situated at its entrance⁴), she is attacked by Sally Green amidst a fight between the Ranns and the Learys. She herself "was not a Rann, but she was not a Leary, so it came to the same thing" (24); for, within the crowd, anyone that was not on one side, was, by default, on the other: "the Ranns drubbed all them that were not of their faction [...] and the Learys held by the same practice; so that neutrality meant double drubbing" (17). Violence is a custom so entrenched within the Jago that one cannot resist being caught up in it; Mrs. Perrott neither opposes nor resists her attacker, but accepts the inevitability of violence, of "double drubbing," regardless of her disinterested position. In the Jago, violence and robbery are accepted as normal, "reasonable and legitimate [...] [y]ou might rob a man, bash a man, even kill a man [...] while to assail the pure fame of the place [...] was to bring the Jago howling and bashing about your ears" (49). These illicit acts are the "pure fame of the place," the "natural resources" for which it has gained its reputation.

Although the battles fought between the Ranns and the Learys are dispersed throughout the Jago, they tend to begin within the crowded courtyard. When Josh seeks to avenge Hannah and Looney's injuries by fighting Sally's brother, Billy Leary, the fight takes place in the usual "arena," where "there was an irregular space of bare cobble stones and house refuse, five or six yards across, in the middle of Jago Court, and all round it the shouting crowd was packed tight" (59). And, though these battles do eventually spill beyond the boundaries of Jago Court, they rarely exceed the exterior boundaries of the Jago itself;

⁴The Perrotts' house borders Jago Court, "to the right of the narrow archway leading to Old Jago Street" (37), and Dicky can see the crowded courtyard from their tiny window (58).

“a crowd of eighty or a hundred [may] sweep[ing] the Jago from Honey Lane to Meakin Street” (20), but in the end, the fighting Jagos cut “back through Edge Lane to Old Jago Street” (20). This violence is largely a feature of the Jago’s crowds, and fighters are typically forced back into the Jago’s crowded centre from its physical borders. The violence is physically confined within the Jago’s interior geographic borders, but is also contained within the figurative boundaries of the Jago. That is, their feuding is never externally regulated, disciplined, or for that matter, resolved, but is a cycle of “eternal” (101) revenge. The Jagos’ violence exists within a vacuum, and is perpetually compelled back into the crowded centre of the Jago.

When the feud does occasionally exceed the physical boundaries of the Jago, however, the fight is ended, and the police intervene. During a battle between the Ranns and the Learys, for instance, when “a party of Ranns was driven between the posts and through the gut into Shoreditch High Street” (24), “the fight ended. For a faction fight in the Jago with a few broken heads and ribs and an odd knife wound here and there — even with a death in the hospital from kicks or what not — was all very well; but when it came to homicide in the open High Street, the police drew the line, and entered the Jago in force” (24). As Martin J. Weiner has suggested in *Reconstructing the Criminal: Culture, Law, and Policy in England, 1830-1914*, the sheer lack of moral standards which characterizes the normalized practice of robbery and violence in the Jago suggests that moral censure would have little effect there. When this behaviour jeopardizes the respectable world outside the Jago, however, the Jagos are repelled back into, and contained within, its borders: “the police, make little impact on the amoral (not immoral) world of the Jago. The police do succeed, at least, in confining it physically, and turning it inward on itself [...] For all its amorality, the

Jago poses no threat to the respectable world [...] it is now contained, a ghetto [...] with no effect outside its borders” (Weiner 242).

The Overcrowded Perrott House

The Perrott family home, which is situated at the entrance to the Jago’s most densely concentrated centre, Jago Court, is a microcosm of the rookery’s extreme overcrowding. Along the passage to the Perrotts’ exterior staircase, there might have been “dozens” of sleepers (4) some nights, and their open door, like those of many other Jago flats, implicitly marks a site of overcrowding. According to a contemporary article in *The Nineteenth Century* (May 1884), the presence of open doors at night was peculiar to sites of overcrowding, and gave way to a wealth of associated evils:

Another evil in connection with overcrowding which has been generally overlooked, is the case of open street doors at night. Numbers of these tenement houses are without lock or key and, in the worst districts, the staircases are made the resort at night of the lowest characters, who seek refuge there when the publichouses are closed, and refuse to go away. The foul language and indecent behaviour of these people constitute an unbearable nuisance to the more respectable occupiers [...] The evil consequences are patent. A permanent hotbed of vice is constituted for the younger generation, who hear every sound through the thin partition walls, even where boys are not, as frequently happens from the overcrowded state of things, allowed to sleep on the stairs in their very company. (Marryat 846)

The door to the Perrotts’ “first floor back” (4) is always open and Dicky is indeed subjected to the influence of vagrants who loiter about their entrance. Old Beveridge, a vagrant who lurks about in Jago Court (4), convinces Dicky to aspire to be a High Mobsman, and to “[s]pare nobody, stop at nothing, do his devilmost” (96). In addition to this “patent” evil of

overcrowding.” Dicky was obliged to enter “his hole with caution, for anywhere, in the passage and on the stairs, somebody might be lying drunk, against whom it would be unsafe to stumble” (4). While Hannah Perrott is opposed to young Dicky sleeping outside with the “low” Ranns and Learys (5), their own overcrowded house — a single room without partitions — nonetheless exposes Dicky to a “hotbed of vice.”

The family of four, comprised of two adults and two children, share a single room.⁵ They also appear to share a single iron bedstead⁶: Hanna lays baby Looey “in a place on the bed” (6), while Dicky takes his own “accustomed place crosswise at the extreme end” (6), from which he asks his mother when she, too, will come to bed (6). In the morning, Josh is found fast asleep on the floor next to them, whether because of his drunkenness or because there is no room for him to sleep elsewhere. Their small, overcrowded flat has negative physical and moral implications for the Perrott children. In fact, Baby Looey’s death, which occurs under conditions of poverty, malnourishment and neglect, appears partially to result from the family’s overcrowded conditions. Subsequent to the death of Baby Looey, Hannah Perrott gives birth to another daughter, Little Em. Em’s fate, however, is not that of her sister; she is still alive at the end of the novel, at the age of two. It is perhaps worth noting that this second daughter is born while Josh is still in prison, and the family living quarters are reduced by one member; under the circumstance of a smaller family, Little Em outlives Baby Looey.⁷

In addition to these physical implications of overcrowding, the Perrotts’ living conditions enable the transmission of vice from father to son. The lack of partitions in their

⁵ This apartment, which they inhabit for four or five years (82), is ostensibly quite small, compared with the room they later occupy during the clearance: “a fair one [at] ten feet square or so” (82).

⁶ Having no distinct kitchen, the Perrotts also eat on the bed (14).

⁷ Dicky’s own death can be seen as enabling little Josh’s survival; when Dicky dies, the family is once again reduced to three members, a mother and two children.

one-room flat means that Dicky hears every sound in their close quarters. He overhears his father concealing a “click” (a stolen good) beneath the floor boards next to the hearth, just as he has at least once before: “he had shammed sleep when it had been lifted once before” (7). The role of overcrowding in “engendering” evil is affirmed when, the next morning, Dicky mimics his father’s example and commits a “click” of his own, pilfering a Bishop’s watch at the East End Elevation Mission (13). Thus overcrowding, in exposing Dicky to his father’s crimes, leads him to accept theft as a normal way of life, and thus to follow in his father’s footsteps. Like the Ranns’ and Learys’ eternal cycle of violence, perpetuated by the Jago’s crowds, the Perrotts’ own crowded house perpetuates a cycle of theft, which confines them to the Jago. And, just as the Ranns’ and Learys’ violence outside of the Jago is deflected and contained by the police, it is only when the Perrotts’ domestic deviance infringes upon the homes of outsiders that external mediation ensues.

The Overcrowded Public-House

Although Morrison provides few details regarding the Jago’s interior spaces, apart from describing the Perrotts’ and the Fishers’⁸ single-roomed flats, homelessness and overcrowding appear to be the norm in the Jago, as seen in the fact that Kiddo Cook’s having “taken *two* rooms, in the new County Council dwellings” (156, emphasis in original) was to “indulge in a stroke of magnificence that no other Jago would have thought of” (156). In addition to emphasizing the overcrowding in private dwellings, Morrison illustrates overcrowding in another form of “house”: the public-house. While the Jagos are known to frequent the Bag of Nails in Edge Lane from time to time, Morrison’s descriptions of this borderland public-house are rather limited. References to Mother Gapp’s more centralized

⁸The Fishers occupy the top-floor back flat above the Perrotts. In their single room dwell Fisher, his “son Bob, Bob’s wife and two sisters, and five children: an apartment in no way so clean as the united efforts of ten people might be expected to have made it” (35).

Jago public-house, however, recur throughout the text. Known as *The Feathers*,⁹ it reappears as a site of physical “ruin” throughout the novel, owing to the hordes of drunken, brawling Jagos teeming within its walls. It also functions as a site of symbolic ruin, mirroring the “evils of overcrowding” occurring within the Jagos’ own houses.

The *Feathers* public-house first appears as the location where a fight between the Ranns and the Learys culminates. A crowd of Ranns floods into *The Feathers* in pursuit of “some dozen Learys” who have disappeared inside. The size and fury of the mob bring down its only partition, leaving it in “ruin.” In a later episode, when the Jagos host the Dove-Laners at the pub, it becomes so overrun that “the very walls were like to burst” (102) and the lingering numbers were forced to “h[a]ng about the doors” (102). The dilapidated house soon does collapse under the pressure of overcrowding, and both Jagos and Dove-Laners fall through the floor. Like the overcrowded arena of Jago Court, the cellar gives way to a “pit of writhing forms” (104), which stimulates the outbreak of another fight. Mother Gapp’s public-house is left, following a scene of brutality bred by severe overcrowding, a dilapidated, un-partitioned structure, utterly in “ruins.” Far worse than the damage committed by the Ranns and Learys four years before, this time the “ground floor of the *Feathers* stood a battered shell” (105).

The fate of Mother Gapp’s house is not so unlike that of the Jagos’ own houses — “ruined” by the “evils of overcrowding.” Like the Jagos’ houses, *The Feathers* is rendered as a single, un-partitioned, overcrowded room and a site of domestic debauchery: of drink, of violence, and of stolen goods. And, like the Jagos’ houses that are symbolically “ruined” as a result of overcrowded courtyards and houses, Mother Gapp’s house is subjected to physical ruin. In many ways, “the Mother’s house” emblemizes the quintessential Jago house; it is

⁹ *The Feathers* lies “in Old Jago Street, half way between Jago Court and Edge Lane” (19).

“the grimmest and vilest of the four public-houses in the Jago” (19), yet is nonetheless the place where the Jagos feel most “at home.”¹⁰ Beyond merely evoking, through physical ruin, the moral “wreckage” associated with overcrowding in the Jagos’ houses, the Mother’s house can be seen to illustrate a greater trajectory in the normalization of degeneracy. The Jagos continue to crowd into the public-house even though “the very walls were like to burst;” they don’t recognize the repercussions of their teeming violence because it is a typical feature of their everyday lives. The fact that the Jagos feel “at home” at Mother Gapp’s illustrates the extent of their habituation to conditions of overcrowding, replete with the violence and larceny that such conditions engender. More importantly, however, the Jagos’ reproduction within the public-house of a degeneracy that has been normalized by their living conditions, implicates a pattern of home-wrecking that originates at home. That is, the ruin the Jagos inflict upon the Mother’s house extends from the normalization of ruin as a feature of their own overcrowded conditions. The degenerate qualities of that overcrowding are rendered invisible within their own amoral world, but are manifested in the violence they enact upon the borders and partitions of respectable, non-Jago homes, which brings about the severest of consequences.

Home Invasions

According to the pattern of ruin insinuated by the Jagos’ destruction of Mother Gapp’s, the effects of the Perrotts’ own degraded home also extend to the offences that Josh Perrott commits in the homes of others. Though Josh has a reputation for theft and violence, he seems to have successfully evaded retribution for these crimes. When he deviates from this “usual line of work” (108), however, and decides to break into the home of an outsider, Josh’s habitual way of life is met with unprecedented consequences. He

¹⁰The Jagos chose to host the Dove-Laners there (102) because “it *was* Mother Gapp’s” (101).

breaks into a house on the city's north side, a place "far from the Jago" (51), and pilfers the resident's watch. Unlike the Jagos, this outsider is "characterized by every indulgence consistent with a proper suburban respectability" (110). Though he is himself a criminal and the "King of High Mobsmen" (110) known as "The 'Mogul,'" his *image* of "suburban respectability" is rooted in the "respectability" of his home. Unlike the overcrowded, single-roomed, windowless flats of the Jagos, his is a "quiet" (108) house on two floors, with multiple windows, and is seemingly inhabited by just one occupant. Not only are the domestic conditions of this "indulgent," "overfed householder" (109) respectable, he himself exhibits a regard for his home that is utterly unheard of in the Jago. While the Jagos that do dwell in houses do not even close their doors to restrict the entry of strangers, let alone disparage burglary, the Mogul is particularly offended by the fact of Josh's intrusion. And, though he himself leads a life of crime, the Mogul is outraged not simply at having been robbed, but rather at the disrespect of having been robbed in "his own house": "to be robbed *in his own house* and knocked downstairs by a casual buster was an outrage that afflicted the Mogul with wrath infuriate" (110, my italics).

When Josh attempts to sell the Mogul's stolen watch at Mother Gapp's, the landlady's rejoinder reflects the deeper offence that Josh has committed. "Ain't satisfied with breakin' up the 'ouse [?]" (112), she retorts, recalling not only the physical ruin of her own public-house, but also the symbolic damage Josh has inflicted upon the mobster's house. Mother Gapp's response suggests that it was enough to have "broken-up" the house of this outsider, without having stolen his watch. That Josh had robbed him "in his own house," and not merely that he had robbed him at all, incites the Mobster's wrathful pursuit, which eventually leads to Josh's imprisonment — the punishment extracted for a Jago who

violates his borders and who, as Weiner suggests, “poses [a] threat to the respectable world” (242).

This pattern of home-wrecking culminates in Josh’s final house-break, at the home of Aaron Weech. Though, like the Mogul, Weech is a criminal, he, too, upholds the *image* of a respectable home. Weech, though residing on Meakin Street, is an outsider to the Jago. Unlike the Jagos, he lives alone in a house with more than one room; when Josh and Bill Rann enter Weech’s house at night, they discover that “the wretched old woman, who swept the floors and cooked bloaters, was sent away at night; so that *every* room must be unoccupied but one” (139, my emphasis). The respectable image of his coffee-shop, “with its Sunday-school festival bills” (132), also permeates his home with what Josh construes to be an “odour of respectability and stale pickles” (132). Weech’s house is further “partitioned” from the world of the Jagos by a fence that encloses the back entrance to his house (20-21). And, while the Jagos may toss their stolen goods over it, the fence prohibits them from entering his private, “respectable” territory. Like the mobsman’s own criminal activities, Weech’s exchanges with the Jagos never occur within his private quarters, but in the liminal space of his yard and his coffee shop. Though Josh anticipates his fate with the realization that “to be caught in a robbery with violence might easily mean something more than mere imprisonment” (108), the particular severity of his criminal incursion within a “respectable” domestic space reverberates in the imagery leading up to Josh’s capture.

The scene that follows Josh’s house-break recalls the symbolism of Mother Gapp’s fallen house, wherein, under the crowds of the degenerate multitude, the floor gave way, sending the “writhing forms” into the cellar. Upon stabbing Weech inside his house, Josh flees into the ruins of the Old Jago, amid the “half dismantled houses” (146) of the new Boundary Estate Project. He stops at the foundations of one fallen house and struggles to

find his way into the cellar, but loses his footing on some loose bricks. This stumble triggers a memory of the still-fresh sprain he received in the cellar of Mother Gapp's public-house on the night of its collapse (146). Josh is ultimately captured in the cellar of the "ruined house" (147), an image which haunts him in his final days.

Josh's final thoughts before facing the gallows are tormented by Weech's "screams in that bedroom" (147), and by visions of the fallen house — the site of his final arrest, and the image that recalls the collapse of Mother Gapp's. He envisions "the crowd in Old Jago Street, pushing into his room" (147) and his thoughts race as he remembers the night when the floor of Mother Gapp's house collapsed and everyone "fell through the floor" (153). These overlapping fundamental features of the Jagos' degeneracy — their overcrowding, which emanates from the centre of the Old Jago and impresses upon the borders of Jago houses, and the destruction overcrowding causes to houses, like Mother Gapp's public-house — resound in Josh's psychological response to Weech's murder. These images of overcrowding and domestic destruction disturb his final recollections of the murder in Weech's bedroom, the culmination of a greater pattern of home-wrecking.

Like most of his father's criminal activities, Dicky's early clicks are of little consequence within the Jago. When he steals a clock from the Ropers' flat, however, a series of conflicts ensues, which ultimately leads to Dicky's violent downfall. Much like the Mogul and Aaron Weech, the Ropers keep a "respectable" home that distinguishes them from the Jagos. And, in many ways, Dicky's incursion upon their home bears uncanny resemblances to his father's domestic trespasses, both in the symbolism that surrounds his invasion, and in the consequences that follow. The Ropers, like the Mogul and Weech, are outsiders, "strangers, late arrivals, and interlopers" (32). They are not from the Jago, but have merely "fallen on evil times" (32). The Ropers' door, unlike the Perrotts', is never left open; Mrs.

Roper wore “neatly kept clothes [...] Roper did not drink, nor brawl, nor beat his wife, nor do anything all day but look for work [...] impudently subversive of Jago custom” (32-33). The Ropers’ house is quiet because their son is often left home “alone” (33). Their uncrowded, tidy room lives up to an image of respectability that is not unlike those encountered by Josh Perrott: “Dicky had never before seen quite a room as this. Everything was so clean [...] There were two perfectly sound chairs [...] Nobody was in the room” (33). When Bobby Roper discovers Dicky on the staircase, he does not initially accuse him of pilfering their things, but, like the Mogul, is outraged at his having “[b]in in [their] room” (33).

While crowds of Ranns and Learys chase one another through the homes of Jagos, “br[eaking] windows and ravag[ing] the rooms” (20) without consequence, when they infiltrate the Ropers’ home (37-39), the Jagos are met with outside retribution: Father Sturt appears and sends them away “to [their] own homes” (38). Though Father Sturt seizes upon the Jagos’ robbing of the Ropers, they are not reprimanded for their robbery, per se, but are described as “invaders” (39). And, just as Jago crowds are contained when they jeopardize the respectable, outside world, Father Sturt aims to drive the Jagos back from the Ropers’ endangered home. He takes on the role of the police and his “appearance just as the police had left could but convince [the Jagos] that he must have some mysterious and potent connection with the force” (47). When he evacuates the Ropers from the Jago, the Father’s police-like role echoes in his piercing stare towards Cocko Harnwell, who has hurled a brickbat towards the outsiders’ truck. The parson’s stick, like the policeman’s baton, “r[ose] to point at him” and Cocko “ingloriously turned tail and scuttled into Jago Court” (50), repelled back into the Jago. This police-like protection of the Ropers reinforces the respectable status of their home, and the threat of having “their exasperating respectability

knocked off" (37) by the degenerate Jagos. Dicky's part in jeopardizing the Ropers' respectable home resonates in his ensuing encounters with "the little hunchback," in his dismissal from Mr. Grinder's shop and, ultimately, in his violent downfall — the final reprisal for that initial home invasion.

Dicky's trespass into the Ropers' respectable home fuels a series of confrontations with Bobby Roper. Bobby tattles on Dicky for stealing at school and from local fruit stands (73-74); he spreads rumours among bigger boys, who beat Dicky up. These, Morrison suggests, are Bobby's "instrument[s] of vengeance" (74). That Dicky's infringement upon the Ropers' "respectable" home is the source of that vengeance is echoed in the confrontations between the two boys, and in the nature of the castigation Dicky receives from other "outsiders." When Bobby spots Dicky hurling a stone through the window of their new home (77), and later, guarding the door of Mr. Grinder's in "ostentatious vigilance" (88), he begins to "bare his teeth in a snigger of malice" (88). His reaction to Dicky's unreserved presence before these two respectable homes — the Ropers' and Mr. Grinder's — suggests that, to him, these scenes provide a mocking reminder of the original house-break, and incite the "malice" behind his revenge.

Dicky's established "Jago" threat to the respectable home-life of non-Jagos brings about his dismissal from Mr. Grinder's oil-shop after he has been framed by Weech for conspiring to steal wares from Mr. Grinder — for placing his "house" in jeopardy. Weech claims to be protecting Grinder from "them in the Jago" (90), from the inherent threat Dicky poses as a member of the Jago. Grinder aims to deflect this threat by indicting Dicky for his alleged designs to steal "brass roastin'-jacks," "jars o' jam an' pickles" and doormats (89) to sell to customers after hours. This contrivance ultimately ends Dicky's "dealings with the *house* of Grinder" (99, my emphasis).

Dicky later wonders at some “incomprehensible defect of nature” which causes his “offense” (95) to others, but which he cannot understand. This “defect of nature,” the source of his offence against the “house” of Mr. Grinder, is perhaps also that which offends the Ropers’ house: the naturalized degeneracy of Dicky’s own household that leads him to unknowingly offend against more “respectable” houses. His threat to the “house of Grinder” materializes when he actually does steal Grinder’s mats, out of contempt for his boss’s distrust. Yet, the greater significance of this petty theft is subtly revealed in its transference to Aaron Weech. When Weech purchases the stolen mats, he piles them into his storeroom, a room containing all of the Jago’s stolen goods, their “unused stock” (99) from which he profits. The doormats, which conjure images of hospitable, respectable households, are allusively piled with the rest of the Jago’s “unused stock” — those objects which are of no use or significance to them. Dicky is ignorant of their significance, and indeed of the very idea of domestic respectability, so that when he pilfers them from Grinder’s respectable “house,” he does so without full awareness of the home-wrecking implicated in his offence.

Dicky’s original house-break continues to resonate in his final encounters with Bobby Roper, the first of which occurs when the Jagos and Dove-Laners destroy Mother Gapp’s public house under the pressure of their numbers. While the closed door of the Ropers’ flat, like Weech’s fence, previously protected them from the Jagos, the public-house is without partitions, exposed and unguarded: “the ‘club room’ [...] had long ago been made of two rooms and a big cupboard, by the cutting away of crazy partitions from the crazy walls” (101). Dicky, unimpeded, grabs Bobby Roper from where he clings to a door-less doorpost, and flings him down. Bobby trips over a broken partition, a broken floorboard, that symbolic broken division between the two boys’ worlds, and is hurled into the cellar

(104). Once again, Father Sturt steps in to mediate the invasion across partitions, and Dicky's violent incursion upon an outsider.

Dicky's confrontations with the "little hunchback" at the Ropers' house, and at Mother Gapps' public-house, can be seen to culminate in their final encounter in Dove Lane. Dicky's original infringement upon the Ropers' domestic boundaries is recreated in this confrontation, at the fringes of "the ruined houses" where the Dove-Laners "stream[ed] across the open waste (157). The scene recalls the forbidden domain of the Ropers' house; Dicky is outside of the Jago, in the unfamiliar streets of "Dove Lane territory" (158). Amidst the brawling crowd, he is stabbed in the back by the "leather-aproned, furtive hunchback" (158) in a final act of vengeance. Though he cries out to be taken "ome" to the Jago, the other Jagos carry him to the hospital on an old door (158) — another symbol of respectable homes that is "unused stock" in the Jago. Dicky dies upon that "shutter" (158), with a crowd of Jagos watching from the doorway.

This final scene embodies the complex relationship between naturalized overcrowding and violence that associates the Jago with degeneracy. Dicky's fate is not simply the result of crossed boundaries, of crowds, or of violence, but can be read as a metaphor for the violence the overcrowded Jagos inflict upon borders. The teeming Jagos with their overcrowded houses engender and naturalize violence and larceny within their inescapable close quarters. And, though both police officers and Father Sturt attempt to contain the degeneracy of the Jago from jeopardizing the more respectable households of outsiders, when they do violate outside borders they are met with severe retribution. While Morrison explores the Jagos' threat to respectable outsiders through a pattern of violence, overcrowding poses another, more subtle violation to outside borders, which pervades the novel in the imagery of the Boundary Estate.

Fallen Houses

While the Jagos accept degeneracy as a way of life within the Jago, their degeneracy threatens to degrade the more respectable homes of the outside world. The brutally overcrowded Jagos aggravate ruin in both their homes and Mother Gapp's public-house, devastated under the pressure of the Jago mob. The Jagos' overcrowded, single-roomed flats also pose an affront to "respectable" partitions that is manifested in Josh and Dicky Perrotts' violation of domestic borders, meant to safeguard respectable homes from the degenerate Jagos. Yet, in addition to these allusions to the Jagos' participation in both physical and symbolic home-wrecking, images of their own subjection to broken homes recur throughout the novel.

Morrison's realistic portrayal of slum life is set amidst the demolition of the Old Nichol rookery, and its replacement by the Boundary Estate. Although Morrison's deployment of this context attests to the "reality" of his representation, images of the slum clearance also reflect the Jagos' gradually becoming "outsiders," evicted from their own home. Towards the end of the novel, new tenements "beg[*i*]n to creep along Jago Row and into Half Jago Street; and after long delay the crude yellow brick of the barrack dwellings rose above the oft-stolen hoardings, and grew, storey by storey" (129). The new buildings displace the former decrepit reality of the Jago and emerge as alien pillars of a modern metropolis: "large and healthy, amid the dens about them" (135). The buildings defamiliarize the Jagos from their native surroundings, so much so that they cannot survive in this new, policed "outside" world. The emergence of the Boundary Estate importantly coincides with both Josh and Dicky Perrotts' violent downfall: they can neither evade punishment for their violent incursions upon the respectable world outside the Jago, nor hope to survive in it. In the new, "outside" world of the Jago, Josh is met with a row of

police that obstructs the street (145) and the modified grid of straight streets and “open waste of eighty yards square” expose him to their view. Because he was accustomed to “the Jago the way it had been” (146) before the demolition, there was no longer any place for Josh to hide. Dicky’s death also occurs amidst the “open waste” (157) in the unfamiliar territory outside the Jago, in Dove Lane. Just as the Jago could not exist without Jago Court (80), the Jagos cannot exist without the Jago. Hence, Morrison’s naming of the Jagos for the environment they inhabit, the environment that they are defined and survive by.

The Jago is very much a contained world within London, and while the Jagos are contained in that world, they pose “no threat to the respectable world” (Weiner 242). When the new barracks buildings emerge, however, the Jagos are gradually repelled from the Old Jago itself, so that they cannot but “prey on the outer world” (96). While the police had once contained the teeming Jagos within their community, this containment is subtly inverted towards the end of the novel, and they begin to police the Jago itself. On “eviction day [...] the police held the Jago in force, escorting gangs of men with tumbrils” (82) and, as the new barracks emerge, the Jago comes increasingly under police surveillance (145). The former Jago, replaced by the new Boundary Estate, comes to embody the very features of domestic respectability to which the Jagos were themselves an inherent threat.

The new buildings of the Old Nichol were constructed according to the domestic values of spaciousness and cleanliness, which city planners believed would instill respectability among those who dwelt within them. They were erected in compliance with new spatial regulations enforced under The Housing of the Working Classes Act (1890) and the Public Health Act (1891),¹¹ which required families to take at least three rooms, at a rent of about 9s per week (Wohl 261), where once families of six had lived in a single room at 3s

¹¹ These acts sought to better enforce previous spatial and structural requirements, as under the Nuisances Removal Act, for example, which required one room for every two persons (see pp. 35 and 51).

per week. Thus, in addition to their rejection from these quarters by the police and by a way of life which depended on an overcrowded community, the Jagos were repelled from the Jago by inflated rents. The enforcement of the new housing regulations imposed impossible standards on the residents of the Old Nichol, and merely raised the living conditions of the “better class” of labourers, like Kiddo Cook, instead of the lowest class of them (Wohl 262).¹² As a result, many residents were forced to relocate, inhabiting other working-class areas which were already overcrowded: “[t]he dispossessed Jagos had gone to infect other neighbourhoods across the border, and to crowd the people a little closer. They did not return to live in the barrack-buildings [...] And so another Jago, teeming and villainous as the one displaced, was slowly growing, in the form of a ring, round about the great yellow houses” (135).

Even before the Boundary Estate was complete, however, the London County Council had already begun to revise its housing policy to respond to the problem of overcrowding. It aimed to move beyond simply demolishing and redeveloping slum locales, which required all un-housed former tenants to find new homes somewhere else. Instead, the L.C.C. undertook to construct entirely new housing estates on undeveloped land outside the City, to better accommodate its growing numbers. According to one historical account of the Boundary Estate project,

[n]ot only was it expensive for local authorities to clear slums but, coupled with rising building costs, rising standards, and the requirement to rehouse those displaced, it seemed easier and cheaper to develop virgin land where construction could be

¹²The LCC aimed to match the current rents in the area at 3s per room (167), but forgot to take into account that rooms had previously been shared by whole families. The new regulations requiring families to have two rooms ultimately doubled the rents they had previously paid so that few of the original inhabitants could afford to be re-housed there. The tenements were instead occupied by working-class artisans, middle-class clerks and policemen, and in a few units, clergymen, nurses, and a doctor (Steffel 167).

cottage or two-storeyed dwellings instead of five- or six-storeyed tenements. From 1900 to the start of World War I scarcely any slums were cleared, while new construction in the suburbs burgeoned. (Steffel 165)

While the Jagos are ultimately thrust out of their territory in this first novel, beyond the “boundaries” of the new estate, the problems of maintaining territorial borders nonetheless remain a central feature of Morrison’s later novels. In the following chapter, I will consider this new “sub-urban” approach to the problem of the overcrowding and degeneracy of the slums in relation to Morrison’s subsequent novel, *To London Town* (1899). From its suburban perspective, this later novel considers the problem of containing an expanding population in relation to the greater city itself. Morrison once again appeals for an interior containment of the masses, but this time, with a view to protecting the respectable outlying landscape from the crowds of London itself, from the degenerative threat posed both by developers and by residual East-Enders like the “dispossessed Jagos.” This problem of “marking” territorial boundaries, I will suggest, is sustained in Morrison’s third East End novel, *The Hole in the Wall* (1902), which can be seen to present an imaginative response to the problem of London’s precarious borders.

CHAPTER III. “FINGS INDEED AIN’T WOT THEY USED TO BE”: LONDON’S PRECARIOUS BORDERLAND AND THE LITERARY IMAGINATION

From the brutal realism of *A Child of the Jago* (1896) Morrison moves to a more romanticized mode of representation in his later novel, *To London Town* (1899). His thematic focus also shifts substantially, from the overcrowded residents of a dilapidated rookery to a family of four, living amid the natural landscape of Epping Forest. Though the May family — Nan May, along with her children, Johnny and Bessy — once lived in London’s East End, they came to settle in the forest with the children’s grandfather following the sudden death of their father. Johnny and Bessy experience most of their childhood in the forest catching butterflies and reading romance novels. Quite early on in the novel, however, Old May, on one of his own excursions to collect butterflies, stumbles into a gully and is fatally injured, and Nan May decides to move her children back to London. Though they eventually come to adopt an urban lifestyle there, the May children twice return to the forest, so that the novel’s plot is largely developed around their transitions between the country and the city. Their travels between their new home in London’s East End and their former home in Epping Forest expose the gulf dividing these disparate lifestyles, a division which is greatly amplified by the unrelenting metamorphosis of the city. Against the ephemeral backdrop of the city, the country appears a timeless, permanent place, which holds true to the Mays’ memories each time they visit it. While the London they encounter in their present is irreconcilable with the city of their past, the countryside remains true to its evocations in their own memories, and indeed, in a much greater collective, historical memory.

While the violent East End presented in Morrison’s earlier novel is almost entirely absent from *To London Town*, many of its spatial allusions remain relevant to this later

representation. In fact, *To London Town* can be seen to pick up where *A Child of the Jago* left off: just beyond the Jago's "boundary," amidst an imminently changing topographic and demographic landscape. The new border formed "round about the great yellow houses" (135) of the Boundary Estate at the end of *A Child of the Jago* is seemingly echoed in Epping Forest's own situation, at the northern edge of the East End, forming the northeasterly boundary between Greater London and Essex. The problem of "borders" apparent throughout the Jago is reflected in *To London Town's* expression of a similar problem facing Greater London. More specifically, *To London Town* adopts a parallel trajectory of containment and repulsion in relation to the East End, yet not merely in an attempt to "symbolically segregate the East End from the rest of London," as Simon Joyce has suggested. Instead, the East End itself becomes a boundary — the precarious easterly fringe of Greater London, that separates it from the surrounding countryside — which is imaginatively repelled from the country and contained within the city.

From the Mays' rural perspective outside of London, the crowds of East Enders seeping into the forest are a sign of London's borders extending beyond "London" itself. Like the Jagos, the East Enders' border crossing is deemed a "contaminating" influence, and is similarly met with "containment." Though not physically contained by policemen, the dispersed Londoners are imaginatively restored to London proper, to the elusive interior borders where the Mays imagine Londoners to "belong." This repulsion of the East Enders from the Mays' external, rural perspective is inverted, however, with their own move to London's East End, whence they imaginatively rein-in the borderland that has been diffused into the surrounding countryside. The Jagos' containment and subsequent dispersal in Morrison's first novel is expressed metonymically through London's dispersal and containment in his second East End novel. The East End's threat to respectable

surrounding neighbourhoods becomes, in *To London Town*, a mere synecdoche of an overcrowded London's "evil" encroachment upon the tranquil countryside. Thus, together, Morrison's first two novels can be seen to capture an historical dilemma that arose as a result of London's urban expansion: the attempt physically to "un-crowd" borderland slums would not simply preserve London's centre from their contamination, but would effectively thrust the whole of Greater London beyond its borders, obscuring any former distinction between the city and its periphery.

This chapter is divided into two parts, the first of which will focus on the implications of the city's expanding borders for natural or suburban locations in *To London Town*. While, at its surface, the novel illustrates how London's expansion and suburban development "drove off the butterflies" of Epping Forest, it also more subtly exposes urban development's detriment to the May family's memories of London. And, while their imaginative "containment" of London reflects an impulse to protect the forest, it also reflects the Mays' desire to protect the London of their memories. For, just as the city's expansion jeopardizes the boundaries that separate it from outlying territory, it also threatens the remembered "place" of London as a geographically-defined entity.

In light of the various problems associated with London's changing borders in each of these first two novels, part II will consider how Morrison's later novel, *The Hole in the Wall* (1902), forms an imaginative response to some of these issues. In particular, Morrison restores London's East End borderland to a fixed and indisputable geographic limit — one which cannot be extended, changed or modernized, despite any alterations to its interior topography. The novel takes place within the fixed boundaries of the East End: to the east of the original walls of the City, north of the River Thames, and west of the River Lea, its border to the East. The rivers lend the area a sense of permanence in spite of many East

End topographies which, like the Old Jago, had since been eradicated or gentrified. Yet, the particular maritime qualities of this borderland also imbue the landscape with a certain timelessness, which likewise preserves the area of young Stephen Kemp's memories. With this final novel in his East End trajectory, Morrison turns towards the East End's, and London's, enduring limits, to both anticipate and encapsulate a distinctly modern discourse on the problems of London's geographic borders.

Part I: The "Scummy Edge" of London Town

To London Town begins in a small cottage in Epping Forest, where the May family — Nan May, her son Johnny, and her younger daughter Bessy — have come to live with the children's grandfather, following the death of their father in an industrial accident in London. Johnny May spends his days with his grandfather, hunting moths and butterflies to be sold to lepidopterists in the city. Yet the peaceful tranquility they find in the forest is at times disrupted by parades of people rollicking along the paths about their home. As the Mays approach the inn "across the way," for example, a crowd of some thirty "beanfeasters" from London is found carousing in an open clearing: "some waved branches torn from the trees, others stood up empty bottles and flung more bottles at them; they stood, sat, ran, lay, and rolled, but each made noise of some sort, and most drank [...] a man and a boy had gathered their half-dozen donkeys together, and were driving them off" (6). This boisterous caravan of costers who have come to the forest to pick beans contributes an intermittent refrain to the early pages of the story. Even after dark, the Mays are subjected to their disturbance, as they head home along Robin Hood Road with "a rumble and a murmur [...] the glare of hand-lights red and green, the sign and token of homing beanfeasters" (23).

Beyond their being itinerant costermongers from the East End,¹ the interlopers are more generally identified as “Londoners,” from whose unruly behaviour Bessy could only infer what London itself was really like: “[she] conceived London to be a very merry and noisy place, very badly broken, everywhere, by reason of the Londoners” (6). In addition to these noisy costers, the forest has lately been disrupted by other Londoners, who have come to settle in the suburban districts around the forest. The migrants echo the degeneracy of the East Enders driven out of the Jago in Morrison’s previous novel. They are “poachers” and “village loafers” (31), and the police had seen them stealing deer (32). Towards the end of the novel, it is revealed that among these new, “low” residents of the Epping Forest district was Stiles, the man responsible for Old May’s death, who had recently settled in Coopersale. Fearing that while Old May hunted for butterflies he had stumbled upon his illegal rabbit-poaching traps, Stiles had knocked the old man over the head.

Though these instances provide evidence for the intrusion of East Enders upon the Mays’ peaceful existence in the forest, the degeneracy they precipitate merely echoes the damage inflicted by greater “London.” While the developers of a modern, healthy, moral London had envisioned the overcrowded slums of the East End to be the crux of filth, illness and depravity, Old May imagines this degeneracy to be pervasive throughout the whole of London itself: the little cottage was “healthier an’ cleaner” than London (27). London’s contaminating influence seems to radiate from the East End border, whence the air-born smoke and odours had drifted. Old May detects “some subtle influence from the great smoky province that lay to the south-west [...] And indeed when the wind came from

¹As Mayhew notes, in his *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861), “the itinerant costermongers, as contradistinguished from stationary street-fishmongers and greengrocers, have in many instances regular rounds, which they go daily, and which extend from two to ten miles” (7). Some “embrace a suburban part” and some go “on a country round” (7). Most costers lived in the East End, “in the same courts and streets as the poor” (21).

the south-west the air seemed less clear, in the old man's eyes, than was its wont a dozen years back" (25). Yet the smells which had been a reminder of the poverty and disease of the nearby slums just a generation or two earlier do not, to Grandfather May, signify the threat of the East End, *per se*, but the more general threat of London's encroaching borders. May has noticed, in recent years, a decline in the number of butterflies; though he had once been able to find moths and butterflies at the fringes of the city, and had even discovered "the Emperor Moth at Stratford in a place long covered with a row of grimy little houses; now the Emperor was none too easy to find in the thickest of the woodland" (25). The "barren" countryside that was once a large part of the district of Stratford had long since been developed, and London was growing still:

London grew and grew, and washed nearer and still nearer its scummy edge of barren brickbats and clinkers. It had passed Stratford long since, and had nearly reached Leyton. And though Leyton was eight miles off, still the advancing town sent something before it — an odour, a subtle principle — that drove off the butterflies. (*To London Town* 25)

This advancing entity was threatening to overflow into the outlying natural world, and Old May imagines that one day there will be no livelihood to be found in butterflies at all. In his final moments of disorientation before he dies, he is haunted by an approaching London. He mutters in the delirium of his injury, "all gone because o' London comin', an' I give in my empty bag" (47) and "London's comin' fast, London's comin' an' a-frightenin' out the butterflies" (50).

Ephemeral London

Following Old May's death, Nan May decides to move her family to London, in order to find work to support them, and so that Johnny may find a career of his own. With

their relocation from Epping Forest to Harbour Lane in Blackwall, the Mays' reaction to the East Enders undergoes a parallel change. While, from their perspective as inhabitants of the forest, the noisy, itinerant crowd, industrial waste, and migrant "loafers" were all symbols of the East End they had resisted, their point of view is inverted when they themselves move to the East End. As they approach London from the forest, the Mays perceive London's growing industrial landscape as a contaminating influence, an encroaching degeneracy; its "sludge," "waste" and the "fouler" odours of alleyways and factories were destroying the natural landscape. There was

clatter and smoke and mud. Stratford Broadway lay wide and busy [...] But soon the road narrowed and grew fouler, and the mouths of unclean alleys dribbled slush and dirty children across the pavement. Then there were factories, and the road passed over narrow canals of curiously iridescent sludge, too thin, to the casual eye, for the passage of any craft, but interesting to the casual nose. And there was a great, low, misty waste of the dullest possible rubbish, where grass would not grow. (75-76)

As outsiders, the Mays perceive London to be a hotbed of noise, filth and smog, of pavement and pollution that had begun to contaminate the natural environment, killing off the grass. Once they have arrived in the East End, however, Nan acknowledges the improvement the expanding industrial landscape has made to their former home: "the changes seemed not all for the worse. There were busy factories, and some that had been small were now large" (97). And, though the procession of raucous costers had disturbed the tranquility of the forest, the Mays begin to long for the crowds and the noise they associate with the East End of their former home. When they arrive in Harbour Lane, they find quiet, seemingly deserted, shops and shipyards, where once men had "swarmed like ants" (36). While this silence signals "workmen living further from their labour" (120), and

is perhaps evidence of a more positive change in the overcrowded area, “the silent shipyard oppressed [Nan’s] fancies” (95). The Mays encounter Mr. Butson in the harbour, who was among the East Enders who had disrupted the forest (he had been “takin’ a day’s ‘olludy with a select party by name of beanfeast [...] that coster crowd in vans” (10)). Yet, from within the East End, this village loafer and bully becomes a “stranger” dear enough to Nan for her to marry him (197). Though the Mays had perceived these to be features of the East End, and of London more generally, which were destructive, disruptive, and generally degenerative to the forest, they are nonetheless what they expect to find when they return to their former home. The East Enders were unwelcome in the forest, but the Mays long for them to be once again contained in the East End, the place where they “belong.” While industry, crowds and noise jeopardize the forest, it is, ironically, the absence of these factors that degrade London in the Mays’ imaginations.

With their move to London, the Mays anticipated their return to a familiar place. Yet, when they find the place they had once called home no longer recognizable, their impression of London is that of a city vastly degenerated from the one they fondly remember. Johnny had dreamed of revisiting the London dockyards of his childhood, where “he could see from his bedroom window, the masts of many ships, quite close,” where “the weather was ever cold,” and where “[m]en swarmed like ants” about the “monstrous skeleton of a great ship” (36). He longed to rediscover the familiar smell of roasting chestnuts and to see a certain “pock-marked man,” warming his hands over an open coke fire, “whom he would know anywhere now” (37). Among the recollected images that Johnny would search for was a big blank wall, behind which workers built ships (36); yet, when he does find such a wall, he discovers that “no great skeleton ship lifted its ribs above the bricks, and no hammers clanged behind them; for it was a shipyard abandoned” (90).

Though Johnny does see the pock-marked man before a coke fire, the man fails to recognize him. Johnny resolves that he, too, was somewhat deteriorated: “perhaps the pitted face was a trifle paler” (91). Finding the dockyard greatly changed, Johnny realizes that he is “not to return to this place of wistful memory after all” (37).

Like Johnny, Nan May searches the streets of London for signs of the place and people she remembers, but “encountered no old friends, and now, though she walked through familiar streets, she had little but fancied recognition, now and again, of some face at a shop door” (95). Her disappointment in this changed and now unrecognizable place gives her the impression of a London degenerated from what it was before: “[t]ruly London was changed, even more in Nan May’s eyes than in Johnny’s. The people seemed greyer, more anxious, worse fed, than when she lived among them before [...] the shops were worse stocked, and many that she remembered well were shut” (94). Like the new shops that have replaced the old ones “she remembered well,” these people are in her eyes unfamiliar, and thus degraded. Her outlook is confirmed by an encounter with Emma Pacey, who had once been her rival. Nan fails to recognize her and is shocked by the aged, “grimmed and bloated” (96) face that meets her.

The Mays’ sense of the city — whose foreignness renders it vastly inferior to the London of their memories — is perhaps best captured in the contrast it provides to their image of Epping Forest. While London’s transformations have distanced it from the city of their memories, the forest has remained much the same since they left it. When Bob Smallpiece, their former neighbour, comes to visit them, he appears, amid their developing, modern landscape, to have been preserved in history: an “Essex bumpkin” (180) in velveteen and leather. This immutable, reliable figure from the Mays’ past appears as a foreigner against a city in transition; London creates in him “a frame of mind so foreign to

his simple habit,” provoking him to leave “things to chance and impulse [with] no definite design” (179-180), much like the nature of the city itself. Indeed, when Johnny and Bessy return to London after their first visit to the forest, to discover that their mother has married Mr. Butson, “the change took Johnny two or three days to realize” (196). Just as Bob Smallpiece is alienated by the transitory nature of the city, Johnny is confounded, with his own return from the country, by the dramatic changes that have occurred in his own home. The familiar setting he expected had been thwarted by the change that would take him days to grasp.

The Familiar Forest

The rapidity of the city’s transformations becomes more vivid to Johnny and Bessy with their return to the forest: “out beyond Stratford, through Leyton and Leytonstone, they saw that the town had grown much in twenty months, and was still growing (186). While Greater London has grown and expanded further outwards, the forest and their own cottage have stayed much the same. The grass was cut and the fence mended; otherwise the “new tenancy had made little change” (191). And, unlike the city’s rapid changes, which undermined the familiar scenes Johnny and Nan had anticipated, the forest remained unchanged, and was true to Bessy’s memories. Since she had left the forest, “every day some forgotten circumstance, some moment of delight, some long-dead bunch of wildflowers [...] had come back to lend one more touch to the fairy picture [in] her memory” (179). Upon her return, she finds the forest’s natural imagery to be just as she had remembered it: “over the deep-grown flat of Debden Slade Bessy stopped again and again to recognise some well-remembered flower” (188). Though the city’s infrastructure and topography had been subjected to modern development, the forest’s distinguishing natural resources remained the permanent, timeless fixtures they had been for generations:

Brother and sister [...] stood at the point of the ridge, in the gap through the earthwork made by ancient Britons. This beyond all others was the spot Bessy had loved best. This ragged ring of crumbling rampart and ditch [...] was the place where [...] two thousand years ago, the long-haired savages had stood, in real fact, with spears and axes, brandishing defiance to foes on the hillside. Here they had entrenched themselves against the Roman legions — they and their chief, fierce Cassivellaunus: more to her than a name in an old history book. (189-90)

The natural location Johnny and Bessy revisit is imbued with the topographical markers of Britain's greater history. Loughton Camp, the stronghold of the very first known British citizen, Cassivellaunus, remains identifiable by its Iron-Age rampart. Even on Johnny's final trip to the forest, before heading off to begin his career as a ship engineer, Wormleyton Pits, Loughton Camp, and the sites of his childhood memories remain unchanged. Although, in the six years since he had last been there, a few "[b]rambles and bushes" had "grown higher and wider" (308), he could still identify where "branched the track by which he had made for Theydon [...] the tree under which he had last seen the old man's lantern-light [...] the hold where the old man had taken his death-blow" (309).

In London, the "harder shapes" of Nan's "days and months" were "lost in her remembrance" (306), but the Mays' memory of the forest reserve remained, "and in green the exiles saw it, once a year" (307). While the topographical markers of a former "London," and indeed the very borders that defined it, have been perpetually challenged by modernity, the forest which demarcates the natural boundary between Greater London and Essex, like the ancient earthworks, endures. More importantly, whereas the instability of London's borderland is its source of "degeneration" in the eyes of the May family, for the continued deferral of recognition it effectuates, the forest provides an enduring landmark,

which not only preserves the northeasterly boundary of “London” but also the “place” of their memories. Thus, according to the Mays’ own experiences of “place” in the novel, the preservation of borders is central to the preservation of memories, so that London’s memorial preservation, too, would seem to lie in the preservation of its borders.

Part II: “divers disconnected impressions” of Blue Gate Fields

By the turn of the century, the overcrowded “East Enders,” being those who occupied the traditional limits of the East End, had begun to seep into outlying areas of London — a fact that is progressively amplified in Morrison’s first two East End novels. As a result, the already rather ambiguous geographic borders of the East End, and of an expanding London, were increasingly blurred. Yet, conceptions of an original East End were further complicated by the contemporary sense of the area as a symbolic place, constituted by the social character of its people: was this an area fixable by its geography, or could it shift alongside the movements of “East Enders”? As Alan Palmer notes in his preface to *The East End: Four Centuries of London Life* (2000), there has always been “[c]onfusion over the precise borders of the East End” and, while “everyone may think that they know the East End, to pinpoint it on a map is harder” (xvii). Indeed, the East End’s borders vary in cartography, in history, and in the popular imaginations of many Londoners. Its so-called “traditional limits — the old Inner London Boroughs of Hackney and Tower Hamlets, together with the western fringe areas of Hoxton and Shoreditch” (Palmer vii) were perpetually shifted to accommodate population flows. And, in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the conceptual borders of the East End could often be stretched to include “the dockland overflow into West Ham and East Ham” (Palmer xvii). It seems appropriate to Morrison’s topographic trajectory, then, that his subsequent East End novel, *The Hole in the Wall*, would increasingly engage with those physical boundaries which are

fixed by the natural landscape. As a response to the shifting populations and territories of his first two East End narratives, he moves to restore the East End to its conventional boundaries: the Thames in the South and the Lea in the East. These natural confines not only reassert the area's topographical borders, but contribute to the imaginative preservation of London's borders, via its East End borderland.

The Hole in the Wall, like the two previous narratives, traces the East End experiences of a young boy who has been uprooted from his former home. Following the death of his mother, young Stephen Kemp moves from Blackwall Pier to Wapping, to live at his Grandfather Nat's public-house, the Hole in the Wall. The slums of Blue Gate Fields in Wapping are as much the teeming hotbeds of filth and criminal activity as was the Jago, yet the unique resources supplied by its maritime environment respond to some of the problems of containing the "East End" which surface in Morrison's earlier novels. Shortly after Stevie's arrival in Blue Gate, Bob Kipps is found murdered on the doorstep of the public-house, having dropped a large sum of money that Stephen secretly recovers. The circumstances surrounding the murder and money remain for some time a mystery, until Grandfather Nat receives word that his son Nathaniel, Stevie's father, has drowned at sea. Nathaniel Kemp had been the first mate aboard a sinking ship called the *Juno*, which was owned by Henry Viney and Lewis Marr. Rumours begin to circulate about the shipping company's impending bankruptcy, and the ship's sinking as an ostensible ploy to collect insurance money. When Marr is also found drowned, and his monogrammed pocket watch acquired through Grandfather Nat's backroom fencing business, Nat begins to unravel the connections between the deaths of his son, Bob Kipps, and Lewis Marr. The man found murdered at the doorstep of the Hole in the Wall had stolen the insurance money from Marr, and someone else had murdered him in an attempt to get a hold of the stolen money

— the money which Steven has incidentally recovered. The novel's plot unfolds through a series of attempts by local criminals, including Dan Ogle and Musky Mag, Blind George and Mrs. Grimes, to locate and steal back the money, without knowing that it has entered into Grandfather Nat's possession. In the midst of it all, Dan Ogle is found responsible for the murder of Bob Kipps and enters into hiding along the River Lea. Blind George tracks him via the "limy" scent that exposes his route through the riverside lime kilns, which leads to a confrontation between the two, and Ogle's own blinding by wetted lime. Though Grandfather Nat's public house in Blue Gate Fields remains at the center of this web of criminal activity, the villains' dispersion into outlying areas is contained by the River Thames and the River Lea — the fixed topographical extents of the East End.

The Hole in the Wall can be seen, geographically, to pick up where Morrison's preceding East End novel leaves off. Just as *To London Town* takes place at the periphery of Morrison's earlier Jago, *The Hole in the Wall* begins at the water's edge, in Blackwall Pier, the location of the Mays' London home. *The Hole in the Wall* can also be seen to take up the motif of borders begun in Morrison's first two East End novels. Yet, while the Hole in the Wall public-house is, like Mother Gapp's, destroyed at the end of the novel, and while, like the Old Jago, the Wapping slums are ultimately eradicated, the more permanent topographic markers of the East End, like those of Epping Forest, remain largely unchanged. The waterways of the Thames and the Lea not only preserve the southern and easterly borders of the East End but also contribute to the imaginative preservation of this borderland in the memory. The maritime periphery enshrouds the area in a perpetual fog, casting the slums of Bluegate Fields and the ambiguous "edge" of the East End into a timeless obscurity, which persists in spite of modern-day gentrification.

The Evils of Blue Gate Fields

The story takes place in the borough of Tower Hamlets, which contains a large portion of the East End. Though Kemp's public-house, "on the river's edge at Wapping" (13), remains at the centre of the story, criminal activity extends to the very limits of the East End — along the River Thames, which forms its southerly border, to its easterly border, the River Lea. Much like Morrison's Old Jago, Blue Gate Fields was a site of extensive "squalor" at mid-century. It "was a street, narrow, foul and forbidding, leading up to Back Lane" and was "almost opposite an evil lane that led downhill to the New Dock" (*The Hole in the Wall* 22). It was a "filthy and menacing" street, surrounded by others closely knit, over which the air hung "thicker and fouler" (60). The children who dwelt there were "disguised in crusted foulness" and "forbidding men and women" hung about the entrances to equally forbidding alleys, where fights broke out amid the crowds (60). Like the Jago, "[f]ront doors stood ever open in the Blue Gate, and some houses had no front doors at all." Four or five tenants were often housed in their "noisy and ill-smelling room[s]," ill-smelling "because of the tobacco and the liquor of many that had been there before, and because of the aged foulness of the whole building" (22). While the contaminating influence of the slums inevitably threatens to seep into more respectable outlying neighbourhoods, as in each of Morrison's earlier novels, the "evils" of this East End locale can only spread so far. They are ultimately contained within the boundaries of the East End itself.

The fixed boundary of the Thames in the southeast contains and controls much of the area's material and moral "filth." The Thames was a "convenient receptacle for rubbish. Slops were flung out of a back window, and kitchen refuse went the same way, or was taken to the river stairs and turned out, either into the water or on the fore-shore, as the tide might chance" (100). While literally containing much of the filth that had been discarded into it,

the Thames also restricts the spread of rubbish beyond the river, into South London. Like its rubbish, the area's moral "filth" is contained by its topographical boundaries. The river poses a natural impediment to transitions beyond the East End, as is evident in the bills "of men and women Found Drowned" (181) that line the walls of the Hole in the Wall. Yet, Morrison also notes that authorities, while rarely venturing into Wapping itself, patrolled and contained criminals from police boats which lined the rivers (70), barring them from atop the high walls of docks and bridges (192, 337). While waterways and docks provide physical barriers for the containment of the slums, the neighbouring borough of Limehouse, and indeed, much of the riverside route to the edge of the East End at the River Lea, provides additional environmental obstacles: lime deposits and fog.

In an attempt to claim Viney and Marr's stolen insurance money for himself, Dan Ogle murders Bob Kipps on the doorstep of the Hole in the Wall, and is forced to go into hiding. He heads for the limits of the East End, to Kemp's Wharf on the River Lea, where he hides himself in the shadows of a dip in the river wall. Yet the river's embankment is not the only physical impediment to a further escape. His route there necessarily takes him over a "lime-strewn road," where Limehouse's historic riverside lime kilns have left behind their residues (Ackroyd, *Thames* 441),² and ultimately to the Lea, where "[m]ost o' the lime comes off the barges [...] for the new gas-works" (*The Hole in the Wall* 110). By the time Ogle arrives at the Wharf, he is so covered in lime that in a short time it "had penetrated clothes and skin and had invaded his very vitals. More particularly it had invaded his throat; and the pint or so of beer that Mae brought in a bottle was not enough to do more than aggravate the trouble" (159-60). Yet the lime not only limits him physically, but ultimately reveals the

² Ackroyd notes that the kilns or "oasts" had been positioned along this stretch of the Thames (for which Limehouse Basin and Limehouse were named) since the fourteenth century, and were only removed in 1935 (441).

secret site of his refuge, limiting him criminally. When the “wharfinger,” Mr. Grimes, comes to deliver the message of Ogle’s whereabouts to his companion, Musky Mag, Grimes’s “limy” smell reveals the secret of Ogle’s hiding place to Blind George. Because George was blinded by lime as a child, he could “never forget” its smell (131), and tracks Ogle to the site of the riverside lime beds. George’s blindness can be seen as providing an extreme example of lime’s capacity for disabling, physical “constraint” — which George himself harnesses to discipline Ogle. When George arrives at Dan Ogle’s hideout, Ogle beats the blind man savagely. In retaliation, Blind George creeps back with a cloth of wetted quicklime, which he thrusts into Ogle’s eyes: “the mess of smoking lime [...] clung and dripped about Ogle’s head. It trickled burning through his hair, and it blistered lips and tongue, as he yelled and yelled again in the extremity of his anguish [...] Blind George gasped between quick breaths. ‘Hit me now you’re blind as me!’” (166). This “resource” of the Thames and Lea allows George not only to discipline Ogle for beating him, but also indirectly punishes him for the murder of Bob Kipps. While the lime’s pungent scent limits his clandestine activities, it also disables his physical freedom to act criminally. More importantly, the lime deposits along the Thames reinforce the waterfront boundary. They physically contain the land from the water, along the southerly border of the Thames, and at the natural easterly boundary of the East End: the River Lea.

This longstanding resource of the East End’s waterfront topography obscures Ogle’s vision to the utmost degree: blindness. Yet, lime can also be seen throughout the novel to perpetuate a more subtle, atmospheric obscurity. When Mr. Grimes, the “limy man” (131), seeks out Musky Mag in Blue Gate, he takes on rather spectral qualities as he wanders through the streets. The lime obscures him, so that the man appears other-worldly, an “uncertain” and ghost-like figure who seems to “drift” through the mist: “there grew visible,

coming through the mist from the Highway, the uncertain figure of a stranger: drifting dubiously from door to door [...] all dusty with lime" (131). When Viney tries to follow this dubious "man of lime" (150) to Ogle's hiding place, the spectral "man of lime went wholly amissing" in the midst of "some stray rack of fog" (150). The lime not only lends a foggy, mystifying appearance to the wharfinger, but also imbues the landscape with an ethereal glow. The patches of lime which scattered the ground en route to the Lea seemed to glow against the shadows cast on them (165), and made visible in the darkness the roads on which they were strewn (134). This ghostly shroud over the landscape melds with the fog over the marshlands, casting the maritime atmosphere into hazy obscurity.

The overhanging fog similarly contains the novel's characters within the East End's maritime boundaries. When Musky Mag travels to Kemp's Wharf to meet Ogle, she is perpetually challenged by the fog that hovers over the dockyards just below the highway in the north, and along the Thames at Limehouse. The fog creates an elusive barrier where the walls of the dockyards cease: "fog that had dulled the lights in Ratcliff Highway, met her again near Limehouse Basin," until she came to a place where "the East India Dock gates stood dim and tall, flanked by vast raking walls" (133-4). Musky Mag is contained by those walls on one side and by the road on the other, which was lined by a "hedge and ditch, with meadows and fields beyond that were now no more than a vast murky gulf" (134). She observes that "no stranger peering over the hedge could have guessed aright if he looked on land or on water, or on mere black vacancy [...] the great blackness was before her and about her, and she stumbled and laboured on the invisible ground" (134). Though it is dark, the fog wraps the road in an "invisibility" that disables her progress "for what seemed miles," as she traverses the "marshy field" of "waste" called The Cop that lies between the East India Dock and the River Lea (134). The fog that hovers over the marshlands along

the river swathes the landscape in such obscurity that to Dan Ogle, the sounds of wind and water seem ‘indistinct’ and “ghostly” as they lap against barges and wharfs made “invisible” by the fog (165). The spectral qualities of the maritime and marshland fog contribute to Musky Mag’s disorientation and, as with Viney and Ogle’s encounters with lime and the “limy man,” to a sense of uncertainty, of obscurity. These natural resources of the East End’s maritime borders ultimately determine the clouded, “disconnected impressions” of the place these characters wander (199) — impressions that are not unlike those of a young Stevie Kemp growing up in Bluegate Fields.

Spectres of Blue Gate Fields

The story of *The Hole in the Wall* is partially narrated in the first person, by Stephen Kemp himself. While the novel is mostly set around mid-century, Stephen is reflecting back on his childhood experience of a place which no longer exists by the time he tells his tale. Just as the original house of Dicky Perrot’s childhood, and the remembered home of Johnny May, have vanished amid London’s changing landscape, Stephen Kemp’s childhood home has ceased to exist. The adult narrator recalls the house where he had lived prior to his mother’s death: “a little house of a short row that stood on a quay” (14), on what was “not exactly a dock, nor a wharf, nor a public thoroughfare; but [...] a detached piece of Blackwall which had got adrift among locks and jetties” (14). This childhood home, he explains, is now gone: “the cottages on the quay are gone, and the neighbourhood is a smokier place, where the work is done by engines” (15). Grandpa Nat’s public-house is gone too, having been reduced to ashes in the final chapter of Stephen’s story. In fact, like the Old Jago which disappeared in its entirety, Blue Gate Fields, the “narrow, foul and forbidding” slum where Stevie lived with Grandfather Nat, has utterly vanished from London’s geography by the time his tale is told:

Blue Gate is gone now — it went with many places of a history only less black when Ratchiff Highway was put to rout. As you left High Street, Shadwell, for the Highway — they made one thoroughfare — the Blue Gate was on your right, almost opposite an evil lane that led downhill to the New Dock. Blue Gate Fields, it was more fully called, though there was as little of a field as of a gate, blue or other, about the place, which was a street, narrow, foul and forbidding, leading up to Back Lane. (*The Hole in the Wall* 22)

Though it has been stripped of superficial markers — of the “blue gate” and field for which it was originally named, and of the crowded, doorless hovels of its slums — the topographical boundaries which orient it remain: the docks below the highway, and the banks above the Thames. Thus, while its slums were cleared, even by the time the story was published in 1903, the area’s permanent borders fix its geography in place. In fact, as Peter Ackroyd notes, the dwellings of those who lived along the Thames embankment had “always ha[d] a makeshift and temporary air;” it was instead the neighbouring river that had permanently “determined the people and their habitations” (Ackroyd, *Thames* 182). The experiences of the people who inhabited the maritime districts of the East End were, like those of Dan Ogle and Musky Mag, Viney, and even Blind George, determined by the conditions of the River Thames and its surrounding docklands, not by infrastructure or by signage. Thus, though Blue Gate Fields no longer exists, the maritime features which would have shaped Stephen’s experience of that place remain, and thus hold true to his memories in spite of historical distance.

An element of historical distance is indeed present in Stephen’s narration, which suggests that, just as the familiar landmarks of his childhood have faded into obscurity, so, too, have many of his memories. He admits that, even as a child, he could not well

remember his father, nor had he recognized or remembered any of the relatives at his mother's funeral (15-16). Even characters that make frequent appearances throughout the novel are only vaguely recalled. Mr. Cripps, for example, a figure who spends all of his days at the Hole in the Wall, sustaining his tab with the promise of a new sign for the public-house, is only remembered by his nose, not by his face (35). Like that of Cripps's nose, those memories that do remain are comprised of "divers disconnected impressions" (199), much like those with which he is left the morning after the fire: "[f]aint by contrast with the vivid scenes of the night" (199) on which they actually took place.

Yet Stephen seems to emphasize that such experiences are perpetually veiled in obscurity, even in the present. His perceptions of his maritime milieu were not unlike the clouded, spectral ones of Viney, Musky Mag, and Dan Ogle. Being accustomed to the fog and darkness outside the public-house, his view of the corpse on the doorstep of the public-house was not made clear but was "confused by the light from the bar-parlour" (66). From his bedroom window at Grandfather Nat's, the river appears to Stevie "[v]ery black and mysterious [...] the blacker, it seemed, for the thousand lights that spotted it, craft and shore [...] once a shout and now a hail came over the water, faint or loud, far or near; and up the wooden wall [he] leaned on came the steady sound of the lapping against the piles below" (76). Though Stevie is haunted by these ghostly sounds at night, Ogle notes that the few disconnected sounds drifting over the river, and the subtle lapping of the water, "blotted the great hum of London from the consciousness" (165), so that the inhabitants of Wapping are seemingly entranced by their environment. Towards the end of the novel, Stevie remarks that, when Viney plunged into the dark water to escape the dockmen, he found himself "dizzily conscious" (195) of his emotions, a confused state which echoes an earlier instance in the novel. Stevie became aware, following his father's death, of a kind of daze that had

come over him. Yet, in light of the hazy, mystifying elements of his surroundings, he was perhaps not merely being awakened to a sense of disconnection created by his father's death, but to the obscure distance that pervades his everyday experience of this East End borderland. Though he "cannot remember how [he] reached Grandfather Nat" (112) with the news of his father's death, he recalls later being knocked out of a stupor — "an odd vacancy of mind" (113) — as he leaves Wapping for Blackwall Pier. Stevie speculates as to why the journey out of Wapping "shook [his] faculties into place" (113), whether by the "jolting of [a] cab" over cobblestone streets, or by the journey's reminder of his mother's funeral (113). Yet, it was perhaps his simple escape from Wapping's muddled maritime environment that restored him to clarity.

Indeed, throughout the novel, few characters are able to "see" very clearly: whereas neither Cripps nor Grandfather Nat could make out the murderer's face, and Musky Mag struggled along the misty marshes, Blind George could often "see" and move "in that murky darkness with an amazing facility" (165). He *sees* the murdered man "as clear as a blind man could" (84) — which is perhaps as clearly as any of the characters do. Thus, when Stevie's recollections of Blue Gate take on the form of "divers disconnected impressions" — of the unforgettable "vulgar smell" of pear-drop candies (13) and of the "curious" maritime smell "that had in it something of tar, something of rope and junk, something of ships' stores, and much of a blend of unknown outlandish merchandise" (28), interwoven with disjointed images of Cripps's face, for example, made faint by his historical distance — they nonetheless capture the abiding discontinuity evoked by the East End's maritime topography. This East End borderland upholds the ambiguous, discontinuous city that is London itself.

As Robert Alter suggests in *Imagined Cities: Urban Experience and the Language of the Novel* (2005), because London was “built along marshlands, and thus prone to fog,” it seemed to “dissolve” into an “unreal city,” encouraging many novelists to represent it as a “spectral apparition” (Alter 70). Morrison’s imaginative representation of the East End, then, captures an inherent quality of London’s landscape. The East End gives way to a maritime parameter which determines the geographic reality of London, and at the same time, the sense of London as an enduring place in the imagination. While Morrison employs symbolic resources as a means of exploring East End borders in *A Child of the Jago*, the enduring borders made possible by natural resources become increasingly important to his later novels. Rather than merely employing the East End as a symbolically “marked” territory, Morrison moves increasingly towards employing the East End itself as a means of “marking the territory” of Greater London. Indeed, the very geographic extent of the East End, the River Lea, naturally reinforces London’s easterly boundary in *The Hole in the Wall*. It is significant that the very subtext of this, Morrison’s final East End novel, involves Mr. Cripps’s work on a new sign to identify the “place” of Grandfather Nat’s public-house. Though he symbolically represents the place — by painting “a wall with a hole in it” — he insists that while his use of symbolism appears, at first, “simple enough,” the symbol itself is less important than how he *treats* that symbol: “As you observe, Cap’en Kemp, it may seem simple enough; that’s because you’re thinkin’ o’ subjick, instead o’ treatment. A common jobber, if you’ll excuse my sayin’ it, ’ud look at it just in that light — a wall with a ’ole in it” (41). The same may be said for Morrison’s own representation of London’s East End: the tendency to focus on its symbols of violence and depravity as the subjects of his novels detracts from his particular treatment, his shifting engagement with the enduring topographic qualities of the East End, and with their capacity for solidifying urban borders.

CONCLUSION

A CRITICAL SHIFT: “THINKIN’ O’ SUBJICK, INSTEAD O’ TREATMENT”

While the symbolic East End of Morrison’s first realist novel perhaps best reflects the moralizing language of his fellow Victorian writers — Besant, Sims, Mearns, and later Booth and Chadwick — it is perhaps less remarkable that he captured a contemporary zeitgeist than that he explored the ways in which the East End’s symbolic resources could function as narrative devices. Yet the East End was not simply a valuable subject for Morrison’s novels, but an area which made available a well of social, topographical and natural resources which would inform the course of his narrative trajectory. In fact, the East End supplied Morrison’s narrative with a burgeoning social and geographic landscape, which gave way to parallel discourses of social and geographic expansion and contraction, or containment. In his first novel, the teeming Jago is met with a vast devastation and reconstruction of “walls”; in his second, London’s overspill is contained from rural Essex by Epping Forest; in the third novel, the East Enders are contained by the walls of the rivers and docklands. With each of these novels, Morrison increasingly emphasizes those limits that are indisputable and immovable — the natural barriers of the River Thames and the River Lea.

Critics of Arthur Morrison’s works nonetheless continue to take for granted his use of the East End as a literary subject — as metonymic of the poverty, violence and other social vices, which were the conventional repositories of a moralizing Victorian middle class. The critical tendency to pigeonhole Morrison alongside other Victorian writers has perhaps also been misguided, considering that his narrative trajectory in fact straddles the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. His works may therefore benefit from fin-de-siècle scholarship, from investigations of those moments at which his perspective may be seen to diverge from a recognizably “Victorian” one — if a single Victorian perspective of the East End could be

said to exist. For Morrison's novels offer a more complex depiction, capturing not only established reactions to London's urban expansion, but also emerging ones. The containment and expulsion exhibited in that first novel, though arguably verging on a certain middle-class moralizing, came to provide an important framework for the discussion of boundaries that emerged in later "modern" discourse, alongside the rise of the suburbs. This early narrative device ultimately allows Morrison to move beyond socio-geographic problems to anticipate an even broader urban dilemma at the start of the new century.

Morrison's early explorations of "the evils" of London's expansion and overflow importantly anticipate a very modern anxiety about urban sprawl. With the "demographic mushrooming" (Alter 103) that occurred alongside London's industrial expansion in the nineteenth century, many Londoners felt the city was "tumbling out of control" (Alter 50). By the turn into the twentieth century, a profound concern about the implications of urban expansion for the future of London was being articulated by writers such as H.G. Wells, who prophesies the fate of modern development in *Anticipations* (1902). In particular, his chapter on "The Probable Diffusion of Great Cities" encapsulates the very limits of the border anxieties taken up much earlier in Morrison's novels — that is, that the very divisions between city and country would themselves collapse:

the city will diffuse itself until it has taken up considerable areas and many of the characteristics, the greenness, the fresh air, of what is now country [...] the country will take to itself many of the qualities of the city. The old antithesis will indeed cease, the boundary lines will altogether disappear; it will become, indeed, merely a question of more or less populous. (Wells 27)

With the disappearance of the great city's "boundary lines," and its diffusion into the country, London would "amount almost to obliteration, so far, at least, as the blot on the map goes" (Wells 17).

Morrison's progressive attempts to re-describe and to re-map the city's historical geography, to imaginatively preserve London via its East End borderland, would also anticipate a reactionary trend that would follow London's fringes into the twenty-first century, with the writings of Peter Ackroyd and Iain Sinclair. Throughout the modern history of representing London, anxieties over the city's transformations, and over the risk of its "disappearance" from the historical map, have continually been met with an "Imagineering" (Sinclair 11) of London's topographical borders — with attempts imaginatively to seal London off at its very edges. Historians, citizens and writers of London persist in their efforts to reassert its "true" geographical boundaries, returning to the ever-ambiguous borderland that is the East End. Peter Ackroyd, in his "biography" of London, asks where did, and "where does the 'East' begin?" (676):

According to certain urban authorities the point of transition was marked by the Aldgate Pump, a stone fountain constructed beside the well at the confluence of Fenchurch Street and Leadenhall Street [...] Other antiquaries have argued that the real East End begins at the point where Whitechapel Road and Commercial Road meet. (676)

Yet, according to Ackroyd, the transitory qualities of these topographical markers (fountains, wells, streets) can be reconciled in the more permanent or timeless features of the area's landscape, determined by its natural waterways. The East End boroughs of Tower Hamlets, Limehouse and Bow, he suggests, have always "rest[ed] upon a separate strip of gravel, one of the Flood Plain gravels which were created at the time of the last glacial eruption some

15,000 years ago” (*London* 675). The area has also been the historical “flood plain” of the Thames. In the late nineteenth century, evidence of a medieval wall was discovered, which ran along “the eastern portion of the Thames, down the river bank and along the Essex shores” (Ackroyd, *London* 675). The wall protected the land from “depredations of the tidal river [...] keeping at bay the water, and [...] helping to drain the marshland of the eastern areas” (Ackroyd, *London* 675-676). The East End thus became the literal “gutter” of London’s marshlands.

Striking echoes of Morrison’s much earlier narrative strategies are not only apparent in Ackroyd’s imaginative attempt to “seal London off” at its natural, enduring edges, but also in Iain Sinclair’s musings about London’s artificial boundaries. In *London Orbital*, Sinclair traces the city’s peripheral M25 motorway, completed in 1986. He speculates that the orbital highway, constructed to encircle “Greater London,” was a reaction to London’s “rippling” borders, too: “The ripples had to stop somewhere....Was this grim necklace...the true perimeter fence? Did this conceptual ha-ha mark the boundary of whatever could be called London? Or was it a tourniquet...to choke the living breath from the metropolis” (Sinclair 3). Sinclair’s sense of the M25 as yet another effort to secure London’s ambiguous borders resonates with Morrison’s much earlier, turn-of-the-century concerns, suggesting that his works may belong not simply to a specific era of urban representation, but to a greater history of “imagineering” London. With this larger context in mind, one may confront new questions about Morrison’s perspective and relationship to the East End, moving beyond mere biography-based speculations. We may instead begin to ask why it might have been aesthetically and socio-politically important for Morrison to redraw the geographic boundaries of London, the East End, and Essex. In asking such questions we are necessarily

locating Morrison's own "Imagineering" impulses within the wider and still evolving history of the representation of London's eastern borderland.

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