

# Arthur Morrison, Criminality, and Late-Victorian Maritime Subculture

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## I

### Introduction

Modern critics commonly classify Arthur Morrison as an East End novelist. Following the vital scholarship of Peter J. Keating in the 1970s, they associate Morrison with other 1890s slum writers who employed unconventional spelling and punctuation to evoke Cockney speech: Henry Nevinson, Rudyard Kipling, W. Somerset Maugham, William Pett Ridge, Edwin Pugh, and Clarence Rook.<sup>1</sup> For sure, Morrison was a native of Poplar, and lived much of his childhood in Grundy Street, just above the East India Dock Road. But the idiosyncratic identities of districts like the docks have been obscured by the repeated use by cultural historians of the generalizing phrase ‘East End’. In fact, as this essay explores, it was this close proximity to the wharves in particular that provided a key influence in Morrison’s other fictions.

A way of addressing Morrison’s own interest in the specificity of locality is to examine his treatment of urban geography and consciousness of emerging methods of ethnography. Morrison prefaces his most well-known novel *A Child of the Jago* (1896) with a graphic map, and his frequent allusions to the ‘posties’ bounding the slum convey the district’s claustrophobic containment.<sup>2</sup> As old Mr Beveridge tells the slum boy Dicky, one can only escape from the Jago by way of ‘gaol, the gallows, and the High Mob’ (pp. 51, 96). Dicky’s final revelation to Reverend Sturt that there is ‘nother way out’ of the Jago points to his own ‘chiving’ [knifing] — and transcendent escape — at the hands of his arch-enemy Bobby Roper (p. 159). Yet Morrison’s later fictions suggest yet another way out for the indigent East Ender: the sea. In *Jago*, Morrison deliberately obfuscated the proximity of the Thames, characterizing the Jago as a landlocked entity. By contrast, the critically neglected *To London Town* (1889) and *The Hole in the Wall* (1902), which Morrison based respectively in Blackwall and Wapping, explore a nautical East London, with its subcultures of shipbuilding, dockland labour, and sailors’ pubs. In the process, Morrison also references earlier novelistic traditions regarding the wharfside and its distinct species of crime. This docklands area, which Morrison knew firsthand, prompts a

treatment that is less exaggerated and metaphoric, where criminality is ambiguously central and yet less concentrated than in the Jago.

## II

### **Morrison's Designs in *A Child of The Jago* and Phantasmagoric Realism**

It is a truism among his critics that Arthur Morrison was ashamed of his Cockney roots and so obscured them. When completing census forms in 1891 and 1901, he respectively claimed to have been born in Sheerness, Kent and Blackheath, South London.<sup>3</sup> In interviews he alleged that his father had been a professional man, when he was actually an engine fitter from Poplar.<sup>4</sup> Recalling his inspiration for *A Child of the Jago*, Morrison reported his fateful 'encounter [with] a place in Shoreditch' where the children were 'born fore-damned to a criminal or semi-criminal career'. He claimed that this chilling discovery compelled him to 'learn the ways of the place, to know its inhabitants, to talk with them, eat, drink, and work with them'.<sup>5</sup> Morrison thus positioned himself as a social observer/anthropologist, taking responsible notes and assembling his data through interviews. His mentor Arthur Osborne Jay had earlier praised Morrison's systematic research process and attention to detail when a critic had accused Morrison of cribbing from Jay's *Life in Darkest London* (1891):

Mr. Morrison's laborious and persistent care amazed me. He would take nothing for granted; he examined, cross-examined, and examined again as to the minutest particulars, until I began to fear his book would never be begun. Till then I had never realised what conscientious labour art involved.<sup>6</sup>

One of Morrison's journalist-defenders cited him 'haunting the public-houses, sitting with the people in their homes, even trying in his own person what it feels like to earn a living by making match-boxes' — this last so that he could adequately describe Hannah Perrott's foray into home labour.<sup>7</sup>

Critics have asserted Morrison's anxiety to assume a bourgeois identity and to disavow his working-class origins.<sup>8</sup> His claims to a professional investigative rigour compound this distance from his subjects. But to make the leap and imply that Morrison suffered an insiders' shame of the Nichol would be reductive. Though an East Ender, he was not a local of Bethnal Green, nor of the enclave within it that was the Nichol. Poplar, the home of Morrison's family and the site of much of his upbringing, was a full three

miles, or one hour's walk, from the Old Nichol on the boundary line of Bethnal Green and Shoreditch. As one of the stories from *Tales of Mean Streets*, 'A Conversion', demonstrates, Morrison already knew some criminal slang before he began visiting the Old Nichol, but it is very likely that he did feel an outsider learning the culture of coshers, dippers (pickpockets), busters (burglars), and 'fat's a-running' boys.<sup>9</sup> In a word, he was no Arthur Harding.<sup>10</sup>

Just as we cast doubt on Morrison's physical and psychological proximity to the Jago, we must also second-guess Morrison and Jay's claims to his professional ethnographic detachment. Morrison seems to defy the constraints that would render him an ideal participant-observer. First, his participation in the life of the Old Nichol is true only up to a point. In his quest after linguistic authenticity, Morrison shifted the scene, inviting the Nichol men to his home in Loughton, Essex so that he could jot down their slang and make note of their mannerisms.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps more pertinent, his involvement was further limited because he could not compel himself to claim membership, even what the critic James Buzard calls 'simulated membership', among his subjects.<sup>12</sup>

Morrison is not so emotionally distanced from his subject to produce consistently neutral observations. Nor does he necessarily want to. His omniscient narrator responds to Jago violence with humour, satire, contempt, and sarcasm. Since Morrison is a fiction writer rather than an urban sociologist, this inconsistency is his right. Summarily, then, Morrison is too detached to be a participant and too repulsed to be a disengaged observer. Ever guarded, through his use of an omniscient narrator, Morrison effectively puts up blinders that prevent our analysing his perspective as autoethnography. His narrator is alternately too stagey, deadpan, and melodramatic for us to get a close reading of the author himself.

But critics can — and have — pursued readings of *A Child of the Jago* as an experiment in ethnography, if not autoethnography. In the early 1990s, Roger Henkle and John Kijinski demonstrated Morrison's investment in representing the Jago as a closed community with its own systems of value and meaning, its own rituals and hierarchies.<sup>13</sup> It is a microcosm of nothing else; it constitutes its own totality. At times, the narrator shifts into irony to reveal the dominant culture's hypocrisy, as when Morrison unpacks the assumptions undergirding the East End Elevation Society and Pansophical Institute. But more frequently, when the greater normative British culture appears in the form of Father

Sturt or through the condemnatory words of a local physician, their authoritative stance reinforces the Jago's inferiority, barbarism, aggressive dishonesty, and inherent disease.

In 1897, the respected literary critic H. D. Traill accused Morrison of having painted the criminal culture of the Old Nichol as lurid and macabre. He famously denounced the 'extraordinary unreality' of the novel's style, claiming that rather than experience a realistic encounter with the district, the reader feels as if he 'has just awakened from the dream of a prolonged sojourn in some fairyland of horror'.<sup>14</sup> Traill characterized Morrison's error as a kind of distillation:

He has taken the brutal pugnacity of one of the courts of an Irish quarter, mixed it with the knavery of a thieves' kitchen in some other district, made 'the gruel thick and slab' in his infernal cauldron with a highly concentrated dose of the foul scum which is found to be floating, though in a much diluted form, on the surface of the vast sea of poverty in all great cities; and, pouring the precious compost into a comparatively small vessel, he invites the world to inspect it as a sort of essence or extract of metropolitan degradation.<sup>15</sup>

The 'Irish quarter' and 'thieves' kitchen' have been blurred. The Jago becomes a glutinous concentration of many vices that, according to Traill, occupy their own neighbourhoods. As Henkle later sums up in his criticism on Morrison, '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*'.<sup>16</sup> Morrison had created a realm of phantasmagoria, and Traill was most offended by this totalizing effect.

It is perhaps natural for enthusiasts of *A Child of the Jago* to want to claim its veracity and dismiss Traill's shrill charges of 'artistic insincerity'. Yet these allegations do hold some water. In 1896, Morrison defied Traill to 'trot out his experts'.<sup>17</sup> In the extended version of his essay in *The New Fiction and Other Essays on Literary Subjects* (1897), Traill took the bait. He confidently cited a former Nichol Street School Board Manager, who affirmed that Morrison had overstated the viciousness of the district, and an employee of the Nichol Street Penny Bank, who carried cash on the street for twenty years and was never robbed. In this addendum, Traill named civic, local amenities in the Nichol that Morrison had omitted: not just a board school and a penny bank, but also a major employer, a textiles warehouse which had never been burgled, despite storing expensive silks.<sup>18</sup> The Nichol hosted Mothers Meetings and housed churches and chapels of several denominations, not simply Father Jay's Holy Trinity.<sup>19</sup> Evangelism had a foothold there.<sup>20</sup>

This was not the pit of bestial violence Morrison (and his predecessor, Jay) would have us believe. Reflecting on his late-Victorian childhood in the Nichol, Arthur Harding admitted that shop owners (including his own aunt) did fence stolen goods, and he acknowledged the presence of bloody gang wars (in which his own family had clan status).<sup>21</sup> But he claimed that few of his neighbours were physically hearty enough to attack toffs with a cosh.<sup>22</sup> Robbery and assault of strangers did occur, but no more frequently than in other East End districts. While recognizing that not all crimes were reported, the historian Sarah Wise, reviewing police reports, concludes that criminal offenses in the Jago were by and large mundane ones: drunk and disorderly behaviour, altercations between married couples, parents' refusal to comply with laws concerning mandatory school attendance and vaccinations for their children, and so on.<sup>23</sup>

Morrison is, then, at once devoted to the evidence that he has located in his eighteen months of research in the Nichol, and selective with it. This selectivity leads to some intentional derailments from historical truth, so that he may heighten the drama of the Jago. It is, for instance, far more striking to depict the heroic Father Sturt single-handedly fighting his battle against sin than to posit him as part of a network of religious devotees serving the Jago. The Jago is more barren if one banishes its board school beyond its perimeters to Dove Lane.

As John Kijinski reminds us in his analysis of the novel, Victorian ethnography was inherently moralistic rather than impartial, espousing a faith in gradual social improvement as well as an ideology of Western superiority.<sup>24</sup> Envisioning a residuum who live by tenets of savagery, Morrison tapped into tropes of nativism familiar to any readers of E. B. Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871): physical degeneration, tribal warfare, and the communal acceptance and normalizing of deviant behaviour. These tropes at once compromise Morrison's meticulous recording of the details of Jago speech and ways, and act as an overlay, contributing to the totalizing aura of depredation that characterizes the Jago.

### III

#### *The Hole in the Wall: Morrison's Wharfside Realism*

I would like to suggest that Morrison's 1902 *The Hole in the Wall* plays a particular role as a rejoinder to Traill's charges, sustaining a pattern of response between Morrison and

his critics. When reviewers flinched at the brutality of the story 'Lizerunt' in his 1894 *Tales of Mean Streets*, Morrison responded by beginning his milder novel, *To London Town*, ostensibly as a means of placating them. One wonders whether *The Hole in the Wall* was to function in the same way as *To London Town* — to test Morrison's skills as a novelist. Specifically, Morrison would reconfigure his earlier design by addressing crime less metaphorically and extending it beyond a narrow perimeter, undercutting the intensified urban phantasmagoria that he had achieved in *Jago*. In place of the Jago's luridness, Morrison focuses on the quotidian character of a working-class district, its trades, its ethnicities, the customs of its working poor and their less respectable neighbours. It follows that he does not situate criminality in a stable place: if he overtly concentrates vice in a slum quarter on one page, he identifies it in the wider neighbourhood on the next. Ultimately, in this novel, delinquency is as mobile as the criminal who performs it.

*The Hole in the Wall* reiterates themes recognizable in Morrison's earlier work. Like *To London Town*'s Johnny May and *A Child of the Jago*'s Dicky Perrott, Stephen Kemp is the child in an urban *Bildungsroman*. Yet, while Johnny reaches maturity and an engagement at twenty-one and Dicky dies of a stab wound at seventeen, Stephen's tale ends when he is seven, at which point his grandfather and guardian, Captain Nat Kemp, sends him away from London to be educated as a gentleman. Persistently sheltered by Captain Kemp throughout the story, Stephen only dimly perceives the criminal events around him — a far cry from Dicky's quick training and assimilation into the Jago's culture of thievery.

In *The Hole in the Wall*, Morrison shifts the scene south-east from Shoreditch to the wharves and docklands of Wapping. Here the criminals alternate between visits to the pub owned by Captain Kemp and their lair in Blue Gate. During the novel, Stephen and his grandfather learn of the death of Stephen's father at sea due to the physical shoddiness of the ship, whose corrupt, miserly owners had insured it and sent it out, knowing it would founder. After witnessing a savage fight in his grandfather's pub, Stephen discovers the murdered shipowner's wallet left behind on the floor. The remaining plot concerns thieves' efforts to reclaim the fortune against Captain Kemp's resistance. Plagued by his own shady past, he is determined to redeem himself through his provision for Stephen.

In an early scene in *The Hole in the Wall*, young Stephen must choose between two treats, a ride in his grandfather's dinghy or a trip to the London Dock, 'a paradise', he

gathers, 'where sugar lay about the very ground in lumps, and where you might eat it if you would, so long as you brought none away'.<sup>25</sup> Without much hesitation, Stephen chooses the sugar and his expectations are fulfilled: 'nothing but Grandfather Nat's restraining hand postponed my first bilious attack' (*HW*, p. 54). One cannot help but imagine how avidly Morrison's other young protagonist, Dicky Perrott, would have descended on its mountains of loose sugar. Presumably, Stephen Kemp has access to the warehouses because of his grandfather's status as a retired seaman with friends throughout the docklands. Dicky has no such connection and would be detained outside the gates.<sup>26</sup>

The East London that Morrison knew best comprised a nautical subculture hardly accessible to residents of Whitechapel, Bethnal Green, and Spitalfields. The river districts of Wapping, Limehouse, Shadwell, and Ratcliffe Highway were shaped by the ubiquitous presence of seamen and marked by their patterns of consumption. There were sailors' pubs and lodging houses, shops that sold their crafts and the novelties they had picked up on voyages east, chandler's shops where they bought their clothing and equipment, and brothels catering to sailors on leave. English sailors were recognizable by their gait, sunburn, attire, and language. In the eighteenth century, Sir John Fielding had observed that

when one goes to Rotherhithe or Wapping, which places [in London] are chiefly inhabited by sailors, but that somewhat of the same language is spoken, a man would be apt to suspect himself in another country. Their manner of living, speaking, acting, dressing, and behaving are so peculiar to themselves.<sup>27</sup>

Early in *The Hole in the Wall*, Morrison notes how, just as a lack of sunburn betrays the shipowner Marr as a sailor in disguise, the thief Dan is 'singular in that place, as bearing in his dress none of the marks of waterside habits, crimping and the Highway, but seeming rather the commonplace rat of Shoreditch or Whitechapel'.<sup>28</sup>

The Morrison family's Poplar home and professions were closely allied to maritime building and small-scale commerce.<sup>29</sup> Morrison's own Poplar childhood was influenced by nautical subculture, and we know that his frequent wanderings in curio shops by the wharves inspired his lifelong fascination with Japanese art and its acquisition.<sup>30</sup> He evinced a strong familiarity with Wapping, the site of Nat Kemp's pub in *The Hole in the Wall*. Likewise, he was at home along the docks of Blackwall, where his father worked, and where he gained inspiration for his 1888 journalistic sketch, 'On Blackwall Pier', where he set the May family's lodgings and shop in his 1899 novel, *To*

*London Town*, and where Stephen Kemp is born and lives with his mother until her death in *The Hole in the Wall*.<sup>31</sup> *To London Town* especially conveys his ease in writing of the small shop on the small street as it borders the docks and his comfort at Blackwall's neighbourly, village-like scope. To read *Jago* without these novels beside it is to gain a limited sense of Morrison's apprehension of East London.

We might speculatively attribute some of the everyday maritime activities that Stephen Kemp experiences as a boy to the Morrison family's home culture. Young Stephen is accustomed to the sight of sails drifting past the windows of his quaint Blackwall home, which is on a quay and only accessible through a swinging bridge (*HW*, p. 8). He grows up with the capstan songs of the dock labourers as his nursery rhymes (*HW*, p. 9). He wants nothing more than to be a sailor, then an engine driver, then a purlman selling hot beer to the sailors on cold mornings (*HW*, p. 41). He is initially dazzled by the tattoos worn by Grandfather Nat and his father and, it turns out, every other man he encounters on Ratcliffe Highway (*HW*, p. 49).

Readers will remember that, as much as Dicky Perrott's life in *A Child of the Jago* is defined by want and hunger, Morrison characterizes certain spaces of Shoreditch by an exaggerated abundance: the miscellaneous articles that Dicky eyes at a shop for secondhand goods, the lavishly displayed boats and tops and whips in the toyshop (*Jago*, pp. 42–43). In *The Hole in the Wall*, such lush, colourful lists reappear but specifically catalogue nautical items. Entering Ratcliffe Highway, Stephen sees

shops full of slops, sou'-westers, pilot-coats, sea-boots, tin pannikins, and canvas kit-bags like giants' bolsters; and rows of big knives and daggers, often engraved with suggestive maxims. [...] Every shop almost [...] had somewhere in its window a selection of those curiosities that sailors make abroad and bring home: little ship-models mysteriously erected inside bottles, shells, albatross heads, saw-fish snouts, and bottles full of sand of different colours, ingeniously packed so as to present a figure or a picture when viewed from without. (p. 48)

Morrison then moves into a vivid account of the customary garb of sailors from different nations. In *A Child of the Jago* Morrison had described the High Mobsmen, strutting and glowing, however greasily, in their 'check suits and billycocks, gold chains and lumpy rings' (p. 56). Presumably they shop at tailors like the one on Meakin Street for the articles that Morrison names in the local slang: kicksies (coats), benjies (waistcoats), and daisies (boots), all bang-up and cut saucy (stylish) with pearlies (pearl buttons) (p. 84). Similarly, in Wapping in *The Hole in the Wall*, the women 'were brilliant enough in violet



or scarlet or blue, with hair oiled and crimped and hung in thick nets, and with bright handkerchiefs over their shoulders — belcher yellows and kingsmen and blue billies’ (p. 49). ‘At once so foul and so picturesque’, Ratcliffe Highway is a gaudy spectacle to the newcomer (p. 47).

That *To London Town* and *The Hole in the Wall* occupy a different world from the Jago is best demonstrated by their representation of East End maritime economies. In *The Hole in the Wall*, Stephen Kemp’s grandfather smuggles black market tobacco through boats which arrive between the pilings that support his pub. In a dramatic scene, he pulls up the goods through a hole in his floor while his accomplice perches precariously in the boat below (*HW*, p. 65). Virtually every service industry in *The Hole in the Wall* caters to seamen. The cabs reek universally of tobacco and liquor for ‘half the employment of such cabs as the neighbourhood possessed was to carry drunken sailors, flush of money, who took bottles and pipes with them everywhere’ (*HW*, p. 99). In *To London Town*, Johnny May apprentices at one of the large engineering firms by the docks in Blackwall, offering a view of a professional world that Morrison may have glimpsed as a young boy.<sup>32</sup> (One of Johnny’s neighbours is a friendly engine fitter; thus Morrison pays implicit homage to George Morrison and his career.) Midway through the novel, the opening of a new shipyard gate at the end of Harbour Lane brings riveters who use the street as a thoroughfare. Johnny’s mother shrewdly saves her failing chandler’s shop by selling these men cheap, ready-made foods.<sup>33</sup>

Social historian Ellen Ross has illustrated the acute sense of social status among the poor, and the struggles of East End mothers and wives to perform their respectability through chalked front steps and proper funeral processions.<sup>34</sup> In his essay ‘What is a Realist?’ Morrison keenly wrote: ‘Though the steps between be smaller, there are more social degrees in the East End than ever in the West’.<sup>35</sup> Poplar had its respectable families, with each home bearing the particular stamp of its wharfside culture. In his 1921 memoir, *London River*, the novelist H. M. Tomlinson waxed lyrical over the lost world of the docklands that were now vacant with the collapse of the shipbuilding industry. In one chapter, ‘A Shipping Parish’, he recalls the front room of his grandmother’s Poplar house (and every family’s house by the docks), where the horsehair sofa, lacquered tea caddy, and polished fender shared space with a requisite lithograph of the ship to which the family owed its allegiance and which may have foundered, a part of their intimate history.<sup>36</sup>

Urban ethnographers can place Morrison's family among the ranks of the respectable working poor. Morrison also projects his family's class anxieties onto his decent Blackwall and Wapping characters. The Mays' neighbours in Blackwall compulsively spend their leisure hours painting the exteriors of their homes in bright colours.<sup>37</sup> Young Stephen Kemp intuitively feels that his mother's family looks down on Captain Nat as a disreputable old salt (*HW*, p. 12). Stephen's first concern after the death of his mother is how he will manage the housekeeping; he has witnessed her scrub and maintain the house in anticipation of his father's return from sea (*HW*, p. 14). As Stephen comes to learn of his beloved Grandfather Nat's complicity as a fence and smuggler, the old man struggles to rationalize these crimes to Stephen before finally renouncing them (*HW*, pp. 67, 154, 104, 170). Morrison's wharfside realism draws attention to the private concerns and public performances of class respectability — anxieties that generally had not propelled characters in his *A Child of the Jago*, but that he recognized as authentic.

#### IV

#### Mythologizing Depravity: The Docks and Blue Gate Fields

Writing his essay 'A Riverside Parish' in 1892, Walter Besant set up a historical scenario of an eighteenth-century wharfside culture where everyone was complicit in theft from the ships.

The people of the riverside were all, to a man, river pirates; by day and by night they stole from the ships. There were often as many as a thousand vessels lying in the river; there were many hundreds of boats, barges, and lighters engaged upon their cargoes. They practised their robberies in a thousand ingenious ways; they weighed the anchors and stole them; they cut adrift lighters when they were loaded, and when they had floated down the river they pillaged what they could carry and left the rest to sink or swim; they waited till night and then rowed off to half-laden lighters and helped themselves. Sometimes they went on board the ships as stevedores and tossed bales overboard to a confederate in a boat below; or they were coopers who carried under their aprons bags which they filled with sugar from the casks; or they took with them bladders for stealing the rum. Some waded about in the mud at low tide to catch anything that was thrown to them from the ships. Some obtained admission to the ship as rat-catchers, and in that capacity were able to carry away plunder previously concealed by their friends; some, called *scuffle-hunters*, stood on the quays as porters, carrying bags under their long white aprons in which to hide whatever they could pilfer. It was estimated that, taking one year with another, the depredations from the shipping in the Port of London amounted to nearly a quarter of a million sterling every year.

All this was carried on by the riverside people. But, to make robbery successful, there must be accomplices, receiving-houses, fences, a way to dispose of the goods. In this case the thieves had as their accomplices the whole of the population of the quarter where they lived. All the public-houses were secret markets attended by grocers and other tradesmen where the booty was sold by auction, and, to escape detection, fictitious bills and accounts were given and received. The thieves were known among themselves by fancy names, which at once indicated the special line of each and showed the popularity of the calling; they were bold pirates, night plunderers, light horsemen, heavy horsemen, mud-larks, game lightermen, scuffle-hunters and gangsmen. Their thefts enabled them to live in the coarse profusion of meat and drink, which was all they wanted; yet they were always poor because their plunder was knocked down for so little; they saved nothing; and they were always egged on to new robberies by the men who sold them drinks, by the women who took their money from them, and by the honest merchants who attended the secret markets.<sup>38</sup>

Besant claimed that, although the docks were now monitored by police and cordoned off from the public through gates, the young generation had absorbed those ethics from their elders; it is hard work elevating them.

I dwell upon the past because the present is its natural legacy. When you read of the efforts now being made to raise the living, or at least to prevent them from sinking any lower, remember that they are what the dead made them. We inherit more than the wealth of our ancestors; we inherit the consequences of their misdeeds. It is a most expensive thing to suffer the people to drop and sink; it is a sad burden which we lay upon posterity if we do not continually spend our utmost in lifting them up. Why, we have been the best part of two thousand years in recovering the civilization which fell to pieces when the Roman Empire decayed. We have not been fifty years in dragging up the very poor whom we neglected and left to themselves, the gallows, the cat, and the press-gang only a hundred years ago. And how slow, how slow and sometimes hopeless, is the work! The establishment of river police and the construction of docks have cleared the river of all this gentry. Ships now enter the docks; there discharge and receive; the labourers can carry away nothing through the dock-gates. No apron allows a bag to be hidden; policemen stand at the gates to search the men; the old game is gone — what is left is a surviving spirit of lawlessness; the herding together; the hand-to-mouth life; the love of drink as the chief attainable pleasure; the absence of conscience and responsibility; and the old brutality.<sup>39</sup>

In *The Hole in the Wall*, Morrison represents this ‘old brutality’ with greater complexity than Besant. The novel rests on a tension between Nat Kemp’s contradictory ethics (his protective love of Stephen, his unlawful business practices) and the all-out rapacity of some of his clientele. This ambiguity is reflected spatially. The pub The Hole in the Wall is a relatively safe spot, where Captain Nat can store his treasures and where

comic characters like Mr Cripps can hold forth; it is respectable enough that an inquest is held there and Captain Nat offers to host the coroner to dinner (*HW*, pp. 85–86). But it is not inviolate, as demonstrated by Mrs Grimes's attempted theft there and Kemp's obligation to serve the dodgy Blind George if he comes in as a customer (*HW*, pp. 87, 24). Whereas Nat Kemp would like to keep all criminality out, it leaks in as long as he accepts 'hot' watches and spoons. The pale man at the bar serves as a buffer in more than one way. By doing Captain Kemp's transactions for him, he prevents Kemp from ever being indicted for fencing and keeps base thieves at an arm's length from him (*HW*, p. 35). But criminals from all over the docklands will penetrate the pub, and, like Dan Ogle, even commit murder there. Further, once detected, criminals flee south across the river to rookeries in Rotherhithe, a common enough custom that there is a slang phrase, 'to go for a change', encompassing it (*HW*, p. 107).

To drive home this image of Wapping as an underworld, Morrison relies upon a few deliberate omissions. Although many sailors were family men and had their wages forwarded to their wives by the shipowners (as Stephen Kemp's father does in this novel) or paid their wives when they arrived home (as the black sailor Sissero does in Henry Nevinson's story 'Sissero's Return'), sailors were just as likely to be without solid roots or family.<sup>40</sup> They could easily dock for the short term, renting at a common lodging house until, having exhausted their pay, they boarded another ship for several months' journey. For this reason, they were markedly nomadic and untied. Morrison rests on this stereotype so that he can create a Wapping populated mostly by grown single men and tawdry women.

Further, with the exception of one glimpse into the ragged children in a side street, Morrison's Wapping is devoid of children, so that Stephen, alone of his kind, is intensely protected by his grandfather, who frets that the wharf is no place for a child (*HW*, pp. 94, 154). Unlike Dicky Perrott, who re-enacts the Rann and Leary feuds with his best friend Tommy Rann, Stephen never has playmates his own age, nor is he ever alone. Stephen's constant accompaniment by his grandfather means that Morrison must alternate between first-person and third-person chapters in order to convey Stephen's sheltered point of view and the events in the story beyond his apprehension. In reality, Wapping was a family community, where children had a visible presence, assisting their parents at work, running errands, and playing in the streets. It had several schools, including St John of Wapping, a charity school that had been established as early as 1695.<sup>41</sup> In her autobiography, *My Part*

*of the River* (1972), Grace Foakes recalls how she passed warehouses stocked with cork, bananas, and sugar on the walk to her board school and how the children ran quickly past the spice warehouse, because the air there made them sneeze.<sup>42</sup>

Although Captain Nat worries that the wharf in general is unsuitable for a child, Morrison overtly targets Blue Gate Fields, a locality further down Ratcliffe Highway, as its explicit heart of darkness, its Jago. Just as the Jago has its commandment, ‘Thou shalt not nark’, so too Blue Gate condemns and endangers any resident who would go to the police to report a crime (*HW*, p. 146). To nark on another is senseless anyway, since ‘everybody was “wanted” in turn’ and, upon charging a neighbour, one would risk arrest oneself (*HW*, p. 153). Blue Gate Fields is ‘the worst in all that neighbourhood: worse than Frederick Street — worse than Tiger Bay’, references that are reinforced by the claims of the narrator and Nat Kemp in different chapters (*HW*, pp. 16, 50). ‘You must never go near Blue Gate’, Nat Kemp warns. ‘People get murdered there, Stevy — murdered — many’s a man; sailor-men mostly; an’ nobody never knows. Pitch them in the Dock sometimes, sometimes in the river, so’s they’re washed away’ (*HW*, p. 50). Just as the Jago rats use the labyrinthine alleys as their getaways, these criminals exploit the dock for their own sinister uses.

Blue Gate had long had notoriety as an enclave of crime and sin. In 1872, Gustave Doré illustrated Blue Gate Fields through a haunting plate in his and Blanchard Jerrold’s *London: A Pilgrimage*, with Jerrold further sensationalizing the scene through the accompanying prose:

If in the densely-packed haunts of poverty and crime — in the hideous tenements stacked far and wide, round such institutions as the Bluegate Fields Ragged Schools in Shadwell — there are hundreds who have never had the chance of escape to comfort and virtuous courses; there are — and they are the main body of the army — the victims of Drink, illustrators of every horror, form of suffering, and description of crime, to which the special curse of our land leads the poor. At the corner of every tumbledown street is the flaring public-house lamp — hateful as the fabled jewel in the loathsome toad’s head’.<sup>43</sup>

Earlier, in his section on ‘Sailors’ Women’ in *London Labour and the London Poor*, Henry Mayhew had observed that ‘Bluegate Fields is nothing more or less than a den of thieves, prostitutes, and ruffians of the lowest description’.<sup>44</sup> Since Morrison’s novel is retrospectively about the 1840s, anchored in the voice of mature Stephen, we learn that the worst days of Blue Gate are now past. This was, in fact, true by the turn of the century.

Like his decision to absent children from the streets of Wapping, Morrison has obscured the centrality of Indians and Chinese in Blue Gate, even though other sensationalistic fiction and exploration narratives reveal that this district was as associated with the Chinese as Limehouse. After surveying various pubs populated by sailors and their women, Mayhew had followed with a scene of a Lascar sailor and his wife wasting in an opium den there, defining the brothel through an orientalist lens that Morrison never employs (*London Labour*, p. 231). Mayhew also goes on to interview an alcoholic prostitute, ‘Chaney Emm’, so-called because her partner is a Chinese sailor (*London Labour*, p. 232). In *The Hole in the Wall*, Stephen does see a variety of ethnic types when his grandfather first escorts him through Ratcliffe Highway — Africans, Spaniards, Malays, Lascars, Russians, and Swedes — but the central villains, Dan Ogle, Blind George, and Mrs Grimes, are all English, as are the protagonist Stephen and his family. Dan Ogle’s consort, Musky Mag, is formally named Margaret Flynn, and is presumably a second-generation Irish Londoner. Significantly, Morrison locates criminality among the English rather than foreign visitors to Wapping.

Morrison does not simply look to Blue Gate in his excavation of old wharveside history, but he focuses further in and names the actual historic Paddy’s Goose, a pub and dancing hall infamous for the ruination of sailors. It was commemorated in the ballad ‘Ratcliffe Highway’:

You jovial sailors, one and all,  
When you in the port of London call,  
Mind Ratcliffe highway and the Damsels loose,  
The William, the Bear, and the Paddy Goose.<sup>45</sup>

The pub, which had been renamed the White Swan, was finally closed in 1911, its site ironically finding a new use as a Methodist mission. The social explorer George R. Sims, visiting the new mission, recalled the old pub elegiacally:

Who has not heard of ‘Paddy’s Goose’? In the old days this house was typical of the Highway of Infamy. The ‘White Swan’ — the origin of ‘Paddy’s Goose’ is obvious — was the most notorious drinking and dancing den for sailors in the world.<sup>46</sup>

Like the Jago, Blue Gate is marked by a kind of signature pandemonium. Here the poor are at their most atavistic. After 1 a.m., stragglers head to Blue Gate where they can count on publicans to disobey mandatory closing hours. Yet just as much action occurs

outside Paddy's Goose, as Blind George fiddles for people dancing in the street. Morrison hones in on the scene:

Close by, a woman and a man were quarrelling in the middle of a group; but the matter had no attention till of a sudden it sprang into a fight, and the man and another were punching and wrestling in a heap, bare to the waist. (*HW*, p. 37)

A negro who has been shining a ship's blue phosphorescent lamp on the dancers, runs 'yelping' to shed this 'ghastly', 'deathly' light on the fight (*HW*, p. 37). Not simply Morrison, but the debased participants of the scene are conscious of it as a theatrical entertainment. During this scuffle, as 'the crowd howled and scrambled', a drunken sailor falls in the mud. 'Quick at the chance, a ruffian took him under the armpits and dragged him from among the trampling feet to a near entry, out of the glare' and 'dived among his pockets' (*HW*, pp. 37–38). The orgy of drinking and fighting has precipitated one more robbery. While this scene in Blue Gate is the closest that *The Hole in the Wall* ever gets to invoking a *Jago*-like phantasmagoria, we may notice ways in which its depravity is milder and minimized: first, the fight has not escalated into a mob; second, it is too spontaneous for any High Mobsman to have laid bets on the winner; and third, it is the men and not the women who are naked to the waist.

Far from the centre of the novel, Blue Gate is actually on its periphery; it constitutes a sort of mini-Jago, apparent only in glimpses. Further, for all that he condemns Blue Gate, Morrison does not attribute sin to that enclave alone. By night, Stephen's new neighbourhood teems with many of the same *Jago*-like depravities: carousing mobs on the streets, drunken revellers in the pub, homicide, 'chiving' (stabbing), blackmail, and the trafficking of watches and other stolen goods. Walking along Wapping's docks in daylight for the first time, Stephen Kemp intuites the district's degradation by the shady look of its loiterers.

We met sailors, some with parrots and accordions, and many with un-decided legs; and we saw more of the hang-dog fellows who were not sailors, though they dressed in the same way, and got an inactive living out of sailors, somehow. They leaned on posts, they lurked in foul entries, they sat on sills, smoking; and often one would accost and hang to a passing sailor, with a grinning, trumped-up cordiality that offended and repelled me, child as I was. (*HW*, p. 22)

These unnamed 'fellows who were not sailors, though [...] dressed in the same way' are a staple in the life of the place, habitually fleecing drunken seamen on leave.<sup>47</sup> Elsewhere,

Morrison adds, ‘horrible draggled women pawed [the men] over for whatever their pockets might yield, and murderous ruffians were ready at hand whenever a knock on the head could solve a difficulty’ (*HW*, p. 16). This is, of course, a variant on the ‘cosh-carrying’ in *A Child of the Jago*, now directed specifically at seamen. Thomas Beames recorded a less violent method in his *The Rookeries of London* (1852):

Women of the town were in league with these men; we were informed that they acted as so many decoys, and when the conversation between the sailor and the prostitute had been carried on to a certain point, the man, with whom she was in league, would come up and abuse the sailor for speaking to his wife; and, after a great deal of acting, the sailor would give a sum of money to be quit of a disagreeable charge.<sup>48</sup>

More than once in *The Hole in the Wall*, drunken sailors stumble dizzily into the hands of such men and women. During Stephen’s first night in Wapping, his grandfather’s pub is noisily visited by two ‘sun-browed sailors, shouting and jovial, but the rest, men and women, sober and villainous in their mock jollity, were land-sharks plain to see’ (*HW*, p. 34). Morrison repeats this scenario in greater detail in another chapter. After getting the shipowner Marr drunk with the assistance of his accomplices Musky Mag and Bill Stagg, Dan Ogle strikes, kills, and robs him. In a classic move, he and Bill Stagg dispose of Marr’s body by propping it up and walking it between them, staggering and singing as if drunk themselves, and shoving it off the pier into the water (*HW*, p. 39).

## V

### The Trope of the ‘Rolled’ Sailor in Dockland Fictions:

#### W. W. Jacobs and Walter Besant

If we think of Morrison not merely as an East End writer, but, in this case, as a dockland novelist, then it is possible to situate him in a context beyond Henry Nevinson, Rudyard Kipling, and other realists of the Cockney School. In this regard, we might consider his alliances with the author W. W. Jacobs, who was not only Poplar-born and raised near the docks, but who also retired to the same Loughton suburb as Morrison after achieving popular success. In his sea stories and novellas, Jacobs, writing in a Cockney voice, establishes a clear subculture of captains and their mates, who divide their lives between the ship and shore. According to Glenn S. Burne, unlike H. M. Tomlinson (another Wapping-born writer noted for his fictional sea adventures), Jacobs



wrote almost nothing about life at sea, romance or otherwise. He depicts many ship's officers and sailors — all while the ships are in port — along with retired captains in their seaside cottages; beached sailors in dreary boardinghouses; dockworkers and barmaids; greedy landlords; conniving businessmen and their ambitious junior partners; flirtatious widows; earnest suitors pursuing pretty, pert, and often clever young women; and hard-drinking labourers and their nagging wives.<sup>49</sup>

In terms of tone, Jacobs's comic tales are a far cry from the grim brutality and dark irony in Morrison's short story collection *Tales of Mean Streets* (although Morrison's later stories in *Divers Vanities* (1905) adopt such humour and farce, even as they move away from the dockland landscape). Jacobs's nautical stories also depart from the desperation and fury impelling characters in *The Hole in the Wall*. Whereas Morrison's Captain Nat struggles to protect Marr's fortune and steel himself against the murderous exploits of Dan and Blind George, Jacobs's sea captains face nothing life-threatening. They are more intent on diverting rebellious daughters from eloping into ill-advised marriages — and are invariably outwitted by them.

A typical Jacobs plot involves a farcical muddle over identity, as skippers are compelled to swap clothes or don women's clothes. One grizzled old captain is persuaded to shave his beard and dye his hair, with the unforeseen outcome that his family does not recognize him.<sup>50</sup> In another tale, a group of sailors temporarily adopt a lost black dog in the hope of getting a reward from its owner, but none of them are prepared for the difficulty of hiding it from the landlady or the costs of having someone else house it during the day. They end up bamboozled by a sharper sailor who switches the dog's collar and leaves them with an unruly black dog in its stead.<sup>51</sup> The reviewers of Jacobs's work celebrate it for its fun and its capacity for cheering the reader up.<sup>52</sup>

Yet if we read between the lines, we might see the dark criminal subculture from *The Hole in the Wall* present, though with the lines softened. In *The Hole in the Wall*, Morrison writes, 'the sailor once brought to anchor in Blue Gate was lucky to get out with clothes to cover him — lucky if he saved more than his life. Yet sailors were there in plenty, hilarious, shouting, drunk and drugged' (*HW*, p. 16). In two of Jacobs's stories, ship captains awaken on shore after a bender stripped of their money and clothes, and are helpless until someone can purchase or steal garb for them. In 'After the Inquest', the captain confesses:

I — I've been a bit queer in the stomach, an' I took a little drink to correct it. Foolish like, I took the wrong drink, and it must have got into my head. [...]

Arter that [...] I remember no more distinctly until this morning, when I found myself sitting on a step down Poplar way and shiverin', with the morning newspaper and a crowd around me'.

On being asked about the newspaper, he replies curtly, 'Decency. I was wrapped up in it. [...] Where I came from or how I got there I don't know more than Adam'.<sup>53</sup> But we know, or can surmise, that the old man has been 'rolled' for his money, and possibly drugged, if not simply encouraged to drink beyond his capacity. The skipper in the story 'In Borrowed Plumes' sends a frantic note to his nephew about his entrapment ashore, begging him to swipe the mate's spare suit because 'I lorst my cloes at cribage larst night'.<sup>54</sup> Jacobs does not highlight the possibility that rings of thieves and gamblers regularly play on inebriated or callow seamen. In each case, the captain's own overindulgence is at fault. Further, the perpetrators are often his friends, conspiring in a light-hearted joke against him. In other words, rather than dramatizing a criminal underworld, Jacobs shows a family of pranksters. Overall, he draws a much more amiable picture of dock life than Morrison. His Wapping merges Morrison's geographical wharves above the river with Nevinson's cheerful Cockney community south of it.

Those who made a living thieving from sailors were variously called 'land-sharks', 'skimmers', and (somewhat erroneously) 'crimps'. Crimps actually procured sailors for sea captains. Some crimps did run lodging houses, and some drugged and robbed seamen as a means of coercing them into another journey. As Thomas Beames explained in 1852, 'crimps' houses [...] are places where the seafaring men lodge when on shore, where they are fleeced and preyed upon by designing knaves; where, when they come home intoxicated, they are robbed of large sums of money'.<sup>55</sup> In contrast to the benign shenanigans in Jacobs's stories, crimping constitutes a comprehensive, regular business in the fiction of Portsmouth-born novelist Walter Besant. In his *The World Went Very Well Then* (1887), set in mid-eighteenth-century Deptford, the rogue Jonathan Rayment runs six crimps' houses across London, inveigling young men into serving the East India Company and holding them, drugged and even chained, in such houses until their ships sail. Rayment employs six brawny men to overpower, strip, and drug his recruits. In the novel, the protagonist, Jack Easterbrook, is entrapped in one of Rayment's houses through the machinations of his romantic rival, Aaron Fletcher, who has negotiated for his abduction. The crimp's men kidnap Jack reluctantly, aware from his uniform that he is a lieutenant in the Royal Navy. They would sooner kill him and dispose of his body than risk hanging for

kidnapping an officer. When Jack attempts escape, he lacks the strength to dress himself, having been wounded in the head. Once again, we encounter the trope of the stripped seaman and his quandary over his shameful predicament.

That he was stripped naked would have mattered little; he had a blanket, and the fellows had not taken off his shoes, so that had he gotten out into the street, he would have appeared bareheaded, wrapped around the body with a rug, like a savage, yet, as to his feet, dressed in white silk stockings and silver buckled shoes. Sailors have been turned out into the street in even worse plight than this, and certainly one would rather escape naked than not at all.<sup>56</sup>

Jack luckily finds release through a former curate who has been blackmailed into serving as the crimp's cook and servant.

Jack's retaliation after gaining freedom is to have the crimps' men seized by the legitimate Press Gang and forced to serve as sailors. Such a punishment is ironic, given that the men have customarily posed as seamen as a means of decoying their victims:

They wore sailors' clothes — namely, slops or petticoats, short jackets, and hats turned up straight on all three sides; and their hair was long and hung about their necks. It was indeed their business on the Tower Hill, and in the neighbourhood of Ratcliffe, Shadwell, and Wapping, to pretend to be honest sailors, and therefore to wear their dress.<sup>57</sup>

These are, as we recall from Stephen Kemp, the shady 'fellows who were not sailors, though they dressed in the same way' (*HW*, p. 22). Through his use of the figure of the crimp, Morrison alludes to a novelistic tradition in which they invariably feature as villains.

## VI

### Conclusion: Expanding the Sinister Centre

Shade and shadiness pervade *The Hole in the Wall*. Much of the book is dark — not simply dark in its story line or its seriousness as a novel, but presented through shadow. One would expect this of Blue Gate, and Morrison satisfies this anticipation.

Blue Gate gave its part to the night's noises, and more; for a sudden burst of loud screams — a woman's — rent the air from its innermost deeps; screams which affected the pale man not at all, nor any other passenger; for it might be murder or it might be drink, or sudden rage or fear, or a quarrel; and whatever it might be was common enough in Blue Gate. (*HW*, p. 37)

But again, Blue Gate has no single claim on the novel's menacing blackness. After closing hours, the very streets outside Captain Nat's pub are suffused with a darkness that shrouds a savagery one can only hear:

The night was dark, and the streets. The lamps were few and feeble, and angles, alleys and entries were shapes of blackness that seemed more solid than the walls about them. But instead of the silence that consorts with gloom, the air was racked with human sounds; sounds of quarrels, scuffles, and brawls, far and near, breaking out fitfully among the general buzz and whoop of discordant singing that came from all Wapping and Ratcliffe where revellers rolled into the open. (*HW*, p. 36)

The whoops and brawls are not confined to Blue Gate, nor, for all of Morrison's overt gestures, is Blue Gate ultimately the real heart of darkness of the novel. The most murky and gothic region is the unincorporated area where Dan Ogle hides following his murder and where Musky Mag must go to meet him. Late at night, she leaves Blue Gate and travels east, approaching Limehouse Basin, but again veering away, initially towards the East India Dock gates, before turning off behind a string of cottages (*HW*, p. 118). Groping in the dark, she enters a kind of no-man's-land of meadows and marshes, pre-industrial and out of time (*HW*, p. 118). Although Morrison frames the scene with some anchoring signifiers, such as the Accident Hospital on her periphery and Abbey Marsh in the distance, in this interim Mag must feel her away in the blackness through ditches, stumbling into rat-infested pools. There are no roads here. When she emerges onto firmer ground and a real street, she has entered the world of the limey man; even the path is blotched white where lime has fallen and been ground into the earth (*HW*, p. 118). She has returned to the criminals' civilization, but it is a creepily unpopulated one. Morrison's reference to lime anticipates the final attack by the fiddler Blind George, who, furious at Dan's betrayal, blinds him with quicklime so he can 'fight [him] level' (*HW*, p. 150).

We might conclude on the basis of this that Morrison has effectively diffused violence beyond Blue Gate, showing that, although Dan Ogle and his friends conspire there, criminality is actually transient. It is embodied best in Blind George, the repugnant itinerant fiddler who wanders from street to street, cadging pennies for his sea chanties. In fact, when Viney is seeking Blind George for information about the missing wallet, Captain Nat can only say honestly, 'he's all over the neighbourhood. Try the Highway; I can't give you nearer than that' (*HW*, p. 75). It is Blind George who, regardless of his

disability, manages to pick his way through the marshes to find his nemesis Dan Ogle and blind him.

In Morrison's *A Child of the Jago*, the Jago's thieves, when possible, claim those within the locale as prey, stealing Roper's tools from his home and coshing strangers who have naively wandered into the neighbourhood (pp. 35, 3–4). In the past, they have burned the tenement doors for firewood (p. 4). Given the Jago's limited resources, the Jagos must venture beyond the posties — but generally, they rarely go far afield for their loot. There are exceptions, of course, such as Dicky's acquisition of the bishop's watch three-quarters of a mile east away at the East End Elevation Mission and Pansophical Institute, and his discovery of the sovereign left behind by a pogue-hunter at St Paul's (pp. 13, 106). Because Meakin Street shopkeepers are wary of thieves, the Jagos head to Shoreditch High Street and perhaps south to Norton Folgate, where Dicky listlessly 'prowls' after losing his job at Grinder's (p. 96). Josh steals tobacco in Brick Lane and hurries back to sell it to Weech (p. 70). If Weech's shop manages to be impervious to theft when all other businesses in the Jago — Mother Gapp's pub, the wagons carrying tobacco — are victim to plunder, by the end of the story, Bill Rann and Josh Perrott do attempt to rob it (p. 138). Morrison tells us repeatedly that the Jago rats are cunning but not exactly astute. They know what they know, and burrow into their familiar nests, shored up by habit. Significantly, it is when Josh heads to Canonbury that he is out of his element and commits his gravest, most uninformed error of robbing a High Mobsman (pp. 108–10).<sup>58</sup>

Yet arguably, there is an irony here, for the Mogul living in his suburban enclave proves that criminality is not confined to the Jago. (In his general protest against the novel, Traill had ignored or missed the High Mobsmen's complicity from a distance.) They arrive in the Jago by carriages to set the stakes for Josh's fight (p. 51). Morrison seems to say that if there is a divide, it is between successful thieves who can play at respectability, and shoddy, desperate ones who plunder less systematically and at their own personal risk. The high intensity of the delinquent life in the Jago exists because the inhabitants are pawns, less intelligent, less connected, and less capable of planning and manipulation than the canny Mobsmen.

Perhaps we see a parallel in *The Hole in the Wall*. Here criminality is literally global, because capitalists like Marr and Viney knowingly neglect the condition of their ships, over-insure them, under-provision them, and send them out to sea, endangering the lives of the crew for maximum profits. Though Marr may not perceive it, it makes sense

that he would hide among Blue Gate's lowest. As a shipowner he may have worked just within the parameters of the law, but he has been a corporate criminal, even before embezzling from his partner. Dan Ogle's violent murder of Marr is merely equivalent to Marr's earlier sacrifice of Stephen's father, first mate of the *Juno*. In *The Hole in the Wall*, then, Morrison highlights the slippage between local and wider corruption more vividly, less offhandedly, than in *A Child of the Jago*. His project in *The Hole in the Wall* is not to scrutinize a fevered, phantasmagoric mass of delinquency simmering within the confines of Blue Gate: this zone has no symbolic posties railing it off. Instead, he blurs Blue Gate's criminality, extending it into Wapping, the marshlands, and beyond, and with this geographical diffusion, qualifies the concentrated luridness we saw in the Jago.

That Morrison employs a different technique here than *A Child in the Jago* not only hints at his receptivity to critiques like Traill's essay; it also conveys his consciousness of neighbourhood presentation in each novel. Significantly, it brings us back to Morrison's awareness of the subcultural idiosyncrasies of individual city districts. Morrison's Wapping novel is therefore instructive for those of us who work on late-Victorian London in literature and history, reminding us of the importance of local specificity, and the danger of too hastily obscuring these districts under the umbrella term 'East End'.

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<sup>1</sup> P. J. Keating, *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971).

<sup>2</sup> Arthur Morrison, *A Child of the Jago* (Chicago: Academy Chicago, 1995), pp. 17, 24, 31. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

<sup>3</sup> See Stan Newens, *Arthur Morrison: The Novelist of Realism in East London and Essex* (Loughton: Alderton Press, 2008), p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> P. J. Keating, 'Biographical Forward', *A Child of the Jago*, ed. by P. J. Keating (London: Panther Books, 1971), p. 11. See also Newens, *Arthur Morrison*, p. 17.

<sup>5</sup> Arthur Morrison, 'What is a Realist?', *New Review*, 16 (March 1897), p. 328.

<sup>6</sup> Arthur Osborne Jay, *St. James's Gazette*, 8 December 1896. Jay's response is quoted in *Literary Era*, 4.1 (January 1897), p. 2.

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<sup>7</sup> 'The Methods of Mr. Morrison', *Academy*, 12 December 1896, p. 531.

<sup>8</sup> See Pamela Fox, *Class Fictions: Shame and Resistance in the British Working-Class Novel, 1890–1945* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994): 'the excessive foreignness of the picture only succeeds in laying bare his actual connections to East End life' (p. 117). Fox also cites Gill Davies, who claims 'familiarity certainly breeds contempt, so far as Morrison is concerned. [...] His "escape" from the class and locality into which he was born [...] seems to have exacerbated his fear and hostility' (pp. 71–72). See also Davies's 'Foreign Bodies: Images of the London Working Class at the End of the Nineteenth Century', *Literature and History*, 14.1 (1988), 64–80.

<sup>9</sup> Arthur Morrison, 'A Conversion', in *Tales of Mean Streets* (Chicago: Academy Chicago, 1997), p. 141. This story uses the terms 'lob-crawling' and 'peter-claiming' to mean thieving from a shop's till and stealing parcels and bags from railway platforms.

<sup>10</sup> Born in the Nichol to a family of thieves and fences, Arthur Harding grew up to be a career criminal. In his old age, he provided an extensive oral history to the social historian Raphael Samuel. See *East End Underworld: Chapters in the Life of Arthur Harding* (Boston, MA: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981).

<sup>11</sup> Sarah Wise, *The Blackest Streets: The Life and Death of a Victorian Slum* (London: Random House, 2009), p. 231. Morrison mentions hosting the Nichol men at Loughton in 'The Children of the Jago: Slum Life at Close Quarters: A Talk with Mr. Arthur Morrison', *Daily News*, 12 December 1896, p. 6. An excerpt of this interview appears in Peter Miles's edition of *A Child of the Jago* (London: Dent, 1996), pp. 228–29.

<sup>12</sup> James Buzard, *Disorienting Fiction: The Autoethnographic Work of Nineteenth-Century British Novels* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), p. 10.

<sup>13</sup> Roger Henkle, 'Morrison, Gissing, and the Stark Reality', *Novel*, 25.3 (1992), 302–20 (p. 304). See also John Kijinsky, 'Ethnography in the East End: Native Customs and Colonial Solutions in *A Child of the Jago*', *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920*, 37.4 (1994), 490–501 (pp. 493–97).

<sup>14</sup> H. D. Traill, *The New Fiction, and Other Essays on Literary Subjects* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1897), p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> Traill, *The New Fiction*, p. 14.

<sup>16</sup> Henkle, 'Morrison, Gissing, and the Stark Reality', p. 306 (emphasis in original).

<sup>17</sup> Morrison, 'What is a Realist', p. 332.

<sup>18</sup> Traill, *The New Fiction*, pp. 25, 26.

<sup>19</sup> Wise, *The Blackest Streets*, pp. 192, 207–08.

<sup>20</sup> Perhaps most surprising to readers of Morrison's novel, the Nichol accommodated the respectable. Just as they would have frequented exhibitions at the Whitechapel Art Gallery and concerts at Toynbee Hall, middle-class men and women visited the Nichol to attend events such as the annual dinner of the Star Mutual Loan and Investment Society, which met above a pub on Half Nichol Street; a mission hall on Old Jago Street hosted meetings of the Gospel Temperance Society; district nurses and brothers in a religious order walked the Nichol streets unmolested and even without insult; finally, far from entering the slum only in groups of three (as Morrison claimed in his novel), at least five policemen resided *in* the Nichol (see Wise, *The Blackest Streets*, p. 100).

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<sup>21</sup> Wise, *The Blackest Streets*, pp. 58–59, 96–97.

<sup>22</sup> Wise, *The Blackest Streets*, p. 98.

<sup>23</sup> Wise, *The Blackest Streets*, p. 99.

<sup>24</sup> Kijinski, 'Ethnography in the East End', p. 493.

<sup>25</sup> Arthur Morrison, *The Hole in the Wall* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1982), p. 14. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

<sup>26</sup> This small detail reminds us again of how circumscribed and literally landlocked Dicky's world in *A Child of the Jago* is. Perhaps Morrison was not embellishing when he set the wharves beyond Dicky's physical reach. For one thing, the sense of turf was strongly understood and defended by locals. Near the end of *Jago*, when Dicky does venture further east to Mile End and Stepney and 'to the riverside' — the closest he will get to Stephen Kemp's habitat — 'the pirate boys of the neighbourhood [...] would tolerate no interlopers at the wharves' (p. 128).

<sup>27</sup> Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700–1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 11.

<sup>28</sup> Morrison, *HW*, p. 17.

<sup>29</sup> Morrison's father, George Richard Morrison, was an engine fitter. Following his death when Morrison was eight, the widow Jane Morrison ran her mother's haberdashery shop in Poplar. See Newens, *Arthur Morrison*, pp. 16–18.

<sup>30</sup> Newens, *Arthur Morrison*, p. 29. On Morrison and Japanese art, see Jessica Maynard, 'Arthur Morrison, the Floating World, and the Pictorial Method in *A Child of the Jago*', *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920*, 51.1 (2008), 44–56.

<sup>31</sup> Arthur Morrison, 'On Blackwall Pier', *Palace Journal*, 8 May 1889, pp. 1046–47; Arthur Morrison, *To London Town* (Chicago: Stone, 1899); Morrison, *HW*, p. 8.

<sup>32</sup> Morrison, *To London Town*, p. 115.

<sup>33</sup> Morrison, *To London Town*, pp. 136–39.

<sup>34</sup> Ellen Ross, "'Not the Sort That Would Sit on the Doorstep': Respectability in Pre-World War I London Neighborhoods', *International Labor and Working Class History*, 27 (Spring 1985), 39–59.

<sup>35</sup> Arthur Morrison, 'What is a Realist?', p. 330.

<sup>36</sup> H. M. Tomlinson, *London River* (New York: Knopf, 1921), p. 58.

<sup>37</sup> Morrison, *To London Town*, p. 79.

<sup>38</sup> Walter Besant, 'A Riverside Parish', in *As We Are and As We May Be* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1903), pp. 114–15 (emphasis in original).

<sup>39</sup> Besant, 'Riverside', pp. 115–16.

<sup>40</sup> Henry Nevinson, *Neighbours of Ours: Slum Stories of London* (New York: Holt, 1895), p. 102.

<sup>41</sup> Martha Leigh, *Memories of Wapping 1900–1960* (Stroud: History Press, 2008), p. 111.

<sup>42</sup> Grace Foakes, *My Part of the River* (London: Futura, 1988), p. 45.

<sup>43</sup> Gustave Doré and Blanchard Jerrold, *London, a Pilgrimage* (London: Anthem Press, 2006), p. 160.



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<sup>44</sup> Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*, 4 vols (London: Griffin, 1861), I, 231. Further references are given after quotations in the text.

<sup>45</sup> John Ashton, *Modern Street Ballads* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1888), p. 264.

<sup>46</sup> George R. Sims, 'Trips about Town. IV. Round St. George in the East', *Strand*, 29 (1905), p. 685.

<sup>47</sup> 'It is remarkable', Blanche Jerrold writes, 'that the poverty of the river side is unlike that of Drury Lane or Bethnal Green. The strings [*sic*] and arrows of outrageous fortune pierce a rollicking company by the water. Jack gives a constant jollity to the scene — and is the occasion of the interminable roistering apparent in the lines of low public-houses thronged with ragged, loud-voiced men and women. The pitched battle we witnessed outside a public-house at Dockhead one threatening night — is an incident that from time to time starts out of the level of the Ratcliffe Highwayman's careless and vicious life of want and drink' (Doré and Jerrold, *London*, p. 33).

<sup>48</sup> Thomas Beames, *The Rookeries of London: Past, Present, and Prospective* (London: Bosworth, 1852), p. 99.

<sup>49</sup> Glenn S. Burne, 'W. W. Jacobs', in *Dictionary of Literary Biography* (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale, 1978–), CXXXV, 197.

<sup>50</sup> W. W. Jacobs, *Night Watches* (New York: Scribner's, 1914), pp. 105–29.

<sup>51</sup> Jacobs, *Night Watches*, pp. 53–76.

<sup>52</sup> For instance, see *Literary World*, 30 (21 January 1899), p. 22. See also ads for Jacobs's work at the end of his *Short Cruises* (New York: Scribner's, 1907).

<sup>53</sup> W. W. Jacobs, *Many Cargoes* (New York: Stokes, 1897), p. 131.

<sup>54</sup> Jacobs, *Many Cargoes*, p. 79.

<sup>55</sup> Beames, *Rookeries of London*, p. 100.

<sup>56</sup> Walter Besant, *The World Went Very Well Then* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1887), pp. 158–59.

<sup>57</sup> Besant, *World*, p. 150.

<sup>58</sup> Josh's confrontation of Weech in Weech's home is clumsy and damning, but intentioned.