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Arthur Morrison's Authorial Distance in *A Child of the Jago*

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Abstract: Arthur Morrison's *A Child of the Jago* (1896) is a critically acclaimed novel depicting a starkly realistic picture of life on the darkest periphery of the city of London—the late 19th-century East End slums. It is true that with this novel's subject motivating the empathy of the middle-class readers, amelioration of the wretched conditions of the slum attracted their growing interest, but it is interesting to read the distance Morrison—and the “respectable” bourgeoisie he belonged to—maintained from the “residuum,” or what they perceived as the lowest stratum of society, in the graphic imagery of such negative elements as abject poverty, crimes, and violence. Although the *Jago* is essentially composed of the same social structure as the middle-class world in terms of values, the middle-class world tries to reject the *Jago* as inverted and aberrational. With its searing portrayal of the *Jago*'s inhabitants as a purely degenerate species, the novel strongly exhibits revulsion toward their deformed bodies and dirt. However, this adverse rendition of life in the *Jago* reflects late 19th-century London's middle-class anxiety about the dangerous power such as violence and “rat-like fertility” potentially contained within the urban poor. Such ambivalence in Morrison's attitude toward the inhabitants of the *Jago* betrays the emotional turmoil raging within him, disallowing him from suppressing his mortal fear of them.

Keywords: Arthur Morrison, *A Child of the Jago*, East End, class, poverty, slum

Introduction

It was Arthur Morrison (1863-1945) who defined the slum novel of the 1890s, as P. J. Keating mentions that “it was left to Arthur Morrison...to establish the tone of slum fiction in the nineties” (“Fact and Fiction in the East End” 597). Under Morrison's influence, many English novelists began advocating realism in fiction with George Gissing stating that “[n]ovelists of today desire above everything to be recognized as sincere in their picturing life” (71). In the sketch of the “Whitechapel” (24 April, 1889) in the *Palace Journal*, an organ of the People's Palace, opened in 1887 to provide cultural activities to the people of East London, Morrison mentions that the whole East End is mistakenly identified as a slum owing to two conventional descriptions, those of Horrible London and Outcast

London (1st par.), and that an author ought to instead discharge his obligations of focusing on traditional industries and street merchants and presenting objective facts as they are. According to Morrison, sentimentality in the written word ought to be shunned because of its moral reflection. To realize this aim, the author ought to write from *within* an object, i.e., make internal what is essentially external. Morrison criticized writers adopting an outsider's gaze and keeping a distance from problems related to the object. However, his views on the subject resulted in a pitched battle between him and the prominent literary critic H. D. Traill. Traill accused him of exaggerating the violence and squalor of slum life in *A Child of the Jago* (1896; henceforth shortened to *Jago*). According to Traill, depictions by Morrison were "unreal and phantasmagoric" ("The New Realism" 69), as if written by a man "who has just awakened from the dream of a prolonged sojourn in some fairyland of horror" (66). He went on to say that Morrison's methods could not be exactly "the methods which the realist professes to employ" (67). He regarded the realism of *Jago* as a sham that had sacrificed art for a false and exaggerated experiment with naturalism. Hitting back, Morrison argued that such critics produced evaluative criteria, "inspired by the completest ignorance of the life of which I have written" ("What Is a Realist?" 326). To substantiate his stance, he went on to establish familiarity with his subjects: "For a good few years I have lived in the East End of London, and have been, not an occasional visitor, but a familiar and equal friend in the house of the East-Enders in all his degrees" (330).

At the same time, however, Morrison presented himself as an external observer of life at the East End. Indeed, he carefully fabricated autobiographical statements. He claimed to have been born in Kent, the son of a "professional man." and educated at private schools, i.e., born and bred as a member of the middle class. In reality, as revealed in Keating's meticulous research of Morrison's life and times in the 1960s, he was the son of an engine fitter from Poplar, although it is likely that the family eventually moved out. It turned out that he had been from the "respectable" working class ("Biographical Study" 11), a fact he concealed at all costs. It is, thus, natural that such an attitude distinguished him from the *Jago*, whose inhabitants belonged to a stratum far lower than Poplar's. In effect, the *Jago*'s model—the notorious section known as the Old Nichol of Shoreditch—is painted black in the social researcher and reformer Charles Booth's color-coding map because the area housed "occasional labourers, loafers, and semi-criminals" (Booth 33-34). Even "What Is a Realist?" contains a passage with an emphasis on Morrison's own authorial distance from the *Jago*, which means that he approached the

Jago as an outsider. "It was my fate," he wrote, "to encounter a place in Shoreditch, where children were born and reared in circumstances that gave those children no reasonable chance of living decent lives: where they were born fore-damned to a criminal or semi-criminal career" (328). Thus, it is highly probable that this authorial distance might have distorted his purportedly objective view of the Jago.

To confirm this hypothesis, it is very useful to examine the descriptions of violence in *Jago*. They are particularly noteworthy, for as one of the characteristics of Morrison's East End, "violence," as are "monotony" and "respectability," is important (Keating, *The Working Classes* 173). Even in Morrison's first collection of working-class stories, *Tales of Mean Streets* (1894; henceforth shortened to *Mean Streets*), which deals with not slum inhabitants but ordinary working-class people, violence is placed at the center of one of the stories. It is true that though "Lizerunt" is the only story in the collection of thirteen to feature violence, Morrison accepted violence as one part of working-class life (a minor, though important, feature). In fact, he was determined to portray it with the same honesty and frankness that are so characteristic of his studies of "monotony" and stultifying "respectability." In "Lizerunt," the central situation revolves around the rapid transition of a happy, carefree courtship of Lizer, a young working girl, to a degrading marriage that culminates in enforced prostitution. Her husband Billy Chope's violence dominates the whole story. The narrator, too, shows no signs of compassion for the protagonist's disastrous fate. In fact, the narrator seems to regard Lizer's fate as a natural consequence of her own foolish deeds. In "To Bow Bridge," another story from the collection, the coarse, drunken, noisy, though non-violent, behavior of the crowd during a bus journey late at night is described with repugnance by the narrator, who is portrayed as one of the few "respectable" working-class people in the bus. *Jago*, specifically, fully explores both the themes of domestic violence, as depicted in "Lizerunt," and the possibility of the predominantly dreary and dull world of the working class suddenly exploding and collapsing into physical violence, as depicted in "To Bow Bridge."

In fact, broader society's interest in the worst side of the life of the slums grew owing to this novel. Keating writes, "It is...a mark of his [Morrison's] considerable sociological good sense that in each of these works ["Lizerunt," *Jago*, and *The Hole in the Wall* (1920)] there is a special reason why violence should be treated so prominently," and also goes on to reason that this is because "*Jago* describes life in a criminal ghetto" (*Working-class Stories* xiii-xiv). He identifies Morrison's attitude toward the poor as careful and impartial, but it is doubtful whether this is the only reason for Morrison's depiction of

excessive violence in the novel. The same doubt surfaces apropos *Mean Streets*. Truly, a majority of this collection of stories deals with the theme of respectability being the only viable means of escape from association with the twin evils of violence and social pity, and is indicative of “the depth of Morrison’s pessimism” (*The Working Classes* 176) toward all such strivings being pointless or self-defeating. However, this does not seem to be the only reason why he described and studied ordinary working-class frustration so deeply. What he probably feared was that even the “respectable” workers might latently conceal in their personalities the same uncontrollable violence as that of Billy’s. He feared that, in the unforeseeable future, they might behave so violently as to threaten the middle and upper classes, as the inhabitants of the Jago did. He could not expunge such a fear from his mind even though, or because, he had become a successful middle-class man who had broken away from his East End past. Thus, Morrison bitterly and disdainfully portrayed the ordinary working people with a desire for a rise in class and “respectable” life as overambitious and wanted them to remain confined within their own bounds. In this manner, he tried to keep a distance from them. If so, it would be quite natural for him to segregate himself from slum inhabitants. This paper aims at exploring Morrison’s authorial distance from the inhabitants of the Jago, highlighting his view as an outsider.

1. The Jago as an Inverted World

Throughout the 19th century, the English middle class formed various stereotypes and harbored a prejudiced view of the poor and those living in slums. They felt the poor had only themselves to blame for their poverty, harsh sufferings, biological degeneration, and moral corruption. A demarcation was drawn, socially, between middle-class respectability and the brutality of a slum life. However, at the same time, the middle class took notice of the dangerous possibility of degeneration spreading across the line of demarcation. The discussion of why the slums came into being in the first place was supplanted by the threat of violent transgression by the poor—only to amplify middle-class ignorance and fear.

Moreover, it is clear that the middle class differentiated between “respectable” workers and the poor, such as casual laborers. While they did bring the former over to their world and within its value system through cultural enlightenment based on paternalistic philanthropy, as tried by Walter Besant in *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* (1882) and

the People's Palace, they attempted to place the latter under surveillance and forms of control as the alien Other because the poor purportedly deviated from normalcy. As clearly demonstrated by the fact that William Booth, the founder and leader of the Salvation Army, named his book *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (1890) after the explorer Henry Stanley's *In Darkest Africa, or the Quest, Rescue, and Retreat of Emin Pasha, Governor of Equatoria* (1890), likening slum inhabitants to "savage Africans," their living quarters were regarded as heterogeneous space plagued by diseases, savageries, and immoralities that could pollute a socially healthy body. In this manner, the middle class aimed at obtaining a method of solving the slum question without having to face the ugly realities of the slums. That is to say, they saw the slum problem only from the superficial perspective of public hygiene and advocated comprehensive slum clearance so that they might force the evicted inhabitants into new working-class tenements where they could be easily controlled.¹⁾

The story of *Jago* itself is developed primarily around Dicky Perrot (a child of the Jago). He grows up in the Old Jago and learns the ways of the place. He gets a chance to escape and become part of the "respectable" working class through the "good" influence of Father Sturt (the fictive representation of Arthur Osborne Jay, vicar of the Holy Trinity, Shoreditch), but is sucked back into a life of theft and strife by the invisible hand of the Jago, the secret protagonist of the novel. Eventually, Dicky is murdered by another character seeking revenge.

The ideology underlying such a development of events in the novel reflects a binary opposition in society between "normal" codes of the rich and "abnormal" practices of the poor.²⁾ It is true that Morrison supported the idea of environmental determinism—he did not advocate the idea, which had been prominent in society at the time, that the cause of poverty was the moral degeneracy of the poor themselves. Nevertheless, this novel's most important ideological objective is to disassociate West End's prosperity and East End's poverty by substituting effects for causes. On the one hand, the novel suggests both poverty and degeneration are the result of social and material inequality created by capitalistic exploitation. Furthermore, employing naturalistic methods, Morrison intends to awaken the reader's compassion by sentimentally exhibiting Dicky's essential goodness and kindness for his mother and sister (Tanaka 116-17). Yet, on the other hand, Morrison delineates distinctions between the two social realms through the spectacle of deviancy. Behind this attitude is reflected Morrison's fear that the poor and the lowest stratum of the working class, whom he regards as criminals and deviants, might corrupt

not only the “respectable” working class bordering them geographically but also middle-class and upper-class people.³⁾

In order to reinforce this difference, at the very outset, the Jago, “the blackest pit in London” (2), is described as putrid and foul—the environment of the grotesque:

It was past the mid of summer night in the Old Jago. The narrow street was all the blacker for the lurid sky; for there was a fire in a farther part of Shoreditch, and the welkin was an infernal coppery glare. Below, the hot, heavy air lay a rank oppression of contorted forms of those who made for sleep on the pavement: and in it, and through it all, there rose from the foul earth and the grimed walls a close, mingled stink—the odour of the Jago. (1)

The emphasis on “the odour of the Jago” is significant. It was the odor of slums in the 19th century that became particularly symbolic of the middle class’s social anxieties, fears, and prejudices concerning the working classes and the poor. Because odor was difficult to control and regulate, it became emblematic of the limitations of containment policies designed to control the downtrodden of society. The spreading of odor, as depicted in Charles Dickens’ *Bleak House* (1852-53), naturally caused a scare regarding the danger of disease and contagion. At the same time, the concern with slum odor allowed for a powerful differentiation between the classes. In Victorian culture, cleanliness was connected with respectability, health, and virtue; bad odor was associated with disease, degeneration, and social depravity. Drawing on this middle-class perception, Morrison describes the Jago as a sort of sewer.

Beyond the purview of surveillance and control wielded by “normal” society, the Jago produces the social deviant and the incorrigible criminal: it has its own social devices. Of particular importance, in this regard, is the process of earning a living. If the ability to make an honest living is a mark of respectability, then the inhabitants of the Jago are utterly removed from “respectable” living because their primary “industry” is thievery. The Jago’s unproductivity is almost considered to parody the productivity of the commercial and capitalistic outer world. Morrison is careful not to connect thievery with the problem of unemployment, but rather shows us that the criminality of the Jago results mainly from inherent laziness or the desire for immediate material gratification. Thieves are stratified into various levels, each invested with a social status. At the highest level is the “High Mob” (111), a gang that makes money through corrupt associations with

“respectable” society and through various criminal acts delegated to underlings. Those of the High Mob who represent economic success are respected by slum inhabitants. When watching the gathering of members of the High Mob in the Bag of Nails (the pub), Old Beverage tells Dicky:

“Right. Now, Dicky Perrot, you Jago whelp, look at them—look hard. Some day, if you’re clever—cleverer than anyone in the Jago now—if you’re only scoundrel enough, and brazen enough, and lucky enough—one of a thousand—maybe you’ll be like them: bursting with high living, drunk when you like, red and pimply. There it is—that’s your aim in life—there’s your pattern. Learn to read and write, learn all you can, learn cunning, spare nobody and stop at nothing, and perhaps—” (112-13)

It is significant that in the slum world, being “drunk,” “red,” and “pimply” is emblematic of success, according to the distorted emphasis the inhabitants of the slum place upon indulgence and physical excess, i.e., the grotesque, which, in turn, is utterly opposed to middle-class values. As Peter Stallybrass and Allon White illustrate (22-23), the grotesque body is “the marginal, the low and the outside from the perspective of a classical body situated as high, inside and central by virtue of its very exclusions” and is emphasized as “a mobile, split, multiple self.” It has, as its discursive norms, “impurity..., heterogeneity, masking, protuberant distension, disproportion, exorbitancy, clamour, decentred or eccentric arrangements, a focus upon gaps, orifices and symbolic filth..., physical needs and pleasures of the ‘lower bodily stratum,’ materiality and parody” (23). In this way, the grotesque body stands in opposition to the individualistic bourgeois conception of the body, which finds its image and legitimation in the classical.⁴⁾

In this area, completely unrelated to respectability and, in fact, attracted to criminality, charitable work hardly has any “agreeable” effects. Although the “East End Elevation Mission and Pansophical Institute” (18) tries to provide alternate way of life to the slum inhabitants, the organization is only exposed to Morrison’s severe satire as the place where “a number of decently-dressed and mannerly young men passed many evenings...in harmless pleasures, and often with an agreeable illusion of intellectual advance” (20). Its only valuable contribution to the Jago is in giving Dicky a rare opportunity to rob a self-gratified bishop of his golden watch. Although middle-class values may be readily accepted as a higher ideal for “respectable” laborers to strive forward, they find no takers in the people of the lowest stratum. In contrast, Father Sturt is held in high esteem

by the narrator because he positively tries to blend with the local slum community. His devoted activities form a striking contrast with an erroneous and perfunctory sentiment of charity, as depicted in the bishop's speech. However, Father Sturt's attempts to find Dicky a regular job and help him escape from the Jago are frustrated. It demonstrates not only how wily and full of tricks the fence Aeron Weech is but the Jago's extraordinary power, which is a force Father Sturt has to reckon with.

While the main source of income in the Jago comes from criminal acts, the primary source of entertainment is found in drunkenness and brutal violence. Throughout the narrative, there are descriptions of far-away screams and shrieks, and the clannish struggles between the Ranns and the Learys, likened to the Montagues and the Capulets, are represented as mere, albeit deadly, fun. The aberrant Jago even takes pride in combat and brutality. Violent scuffles between women are especially emphasized. The combat between Josh Perrott and Billy Leary though hard is organized and manly, whereas the women's fights are grossly barbaric and horrifying.

Down the middle of Old Jago Street came Sally Green: red faced, stripped to the waist, dancing, hoarse and triumphant. Nail-scores wide as the finger striped her back, her face, and her throat, and she had a black eye; but in one great hand she dangled a long bunch of clotted hair, as she whooped defiance to the Jago. (44-45)

Sally, who exults in her victory, bearing a trophy rent from her opponent Norah Walsh's scalp, forms a sharp contrast with the image of the "pure woman" idealized by the middle class. This shows how the prestige values of the female within the Jago are different from the middle-class woman's. The woman of the Jago is similar to Mrs. Jennings, the wife of a "poor stick" Bob Jennings in *Mean Streets*. On Mrs. Jennings is superimposed the image of Medusa, visualized as the primitive woman who preyed on men.

Mrs. Jennings at this time was what is called rather a fine woman: a woman of large scale and full development; whose slatternly habit left her coarse black hair to tumble in *snake-locks* about her face and shoulders half the day; who, clad in half-hooked clothes, bore herself notoriously and unabashed in her fullness; and of whom ill things were said regarding the lodger. (244; my italics)

Her sexual menace is not only repeatedly depicted but is also connected with savagery in

the description of a victorious Sally. As a result, Sally becomes emblematic of the dangerous and intractably "Darkest England." Although philanthropists try to place lower-class women at the center of ethics for their own class, in these stories it is the female, rather than the male, who represents the slum's potential explosiveness.

When not beating each other, the inhabitants are watchful for those who do not quite fit in. Outcasts in the Jago are generally those who seek to maintain a slight semblance of middle-class respectability. Dicky's mother, Hannah, despite bearing a few qualities that are inherent in the women of the Jago, such as slatternliness, feels superior to the Jago. Reprimanding her son for using criminal slang, Hannah says, "We ain't that sort o' people, Dicky, you ought to know. I was alwis kep' respectable an' straight all my life, I'm sure, an'—" (12). For this reason, and because her husband does not beat her with a poker, she is partially outcast. Even more scandalous, by the Jago's standards, than Hannah are the Ropes. They represent "a matter of scandalous arrogance, impudently subversive of Jago custom and precedent" (70), i.e., stereotypical middle-class values such as cleanliness, the dislike of gossip, abstinence and the pursuit of "respectable" work.

The negative image of the people and environment of the Jago raises the question: What produces the Jago? Morrison seems to suggest that the Jago alone produces itself. Based on this, the novel not only justifies the necessity of control and eradication of the slum but averts its glance from a tense relationship between middle-class (West End) prosperity and working-class (East End) poverty. Feelings such as moral anger, repulsion, and a sense of superiority that the reader bears toward the Jago are deliberately aroused by the ideological strategy of the narrative. The fact that the Jago's miserable situation is one of the inevitable by-products of rigorous social and economic structures is pushed away.

2. Narrating a Fear of Degeneration

The very absence of adequate representation of actual historical factors behind the creation and functionality of the Jago ironically points to their centrality to it. Roger B. Henkel argues, "Swept up in the centrifugal vortex of its ignorance and self-violence, the Jago denizen cannot conceive of the alternative world....It is as if the two spheres—the urban slums and the social world about it—are sealed off from each other, psychologically, socially, and economically" (114). However, this argument is not very persuasive or

convincing. The Jago is not removed from late industrial civilization as Morrison would have us believe. Rather, it is an essential component of this industrial world in that it replicates the logic of “the social world about it” in the very values that appear to be antithetical to middle-class norms. If this is the case, then the novel becomes an unintentionally ironic allegory of capitalist society. This is made clear when the ideology dominating the actions of the Jago’s inhabitants is compared with the materialist ideology of larger society. The criminals of the Jago attempt to acquire cheap articles so that they may sell them at a higher rate and make a profit. This is in fact one of the basic principles of the market economy on which “normal” society is founded. Furthermore, the people of the Jago covet crude commodities, acting on the competitive principle at the core of capitalism. After Dicky steals a golden watch from the bishop, he generously gives it to his father Josh so that he can exchange it for money to feed his family. However, all he can get from Josh as a reward for his efforts is a beating and a lesson on the ways of the world that people do not give things away and that it is wise to get what you can without thinking of anyone else. Through the exploitative Weech, the Jago work ethic is enunciated:

“There’s no end o’ things to be found all over the place, an’ a sharp boy like you can find ‘em every day. If you don’t find ‘em, someone else will; there’s plenty on ‘em about on the look-out, an’ you got jist as much right as them.” (63-64)

As Dicky begins stealing and bringing the goods to Weech in exchange for money, he himself indulges in the pleasures money can buy. As a result, he “saw a new world of dazzling delight” (63). Of course, after Dicky discovers how to obtain wealth through his labor, he also learns that the cost of what he hopes to buy with the wealth is always greater than his earnings. Thus, he learns what it means to be in debt and has to keep stealing to get out of debt. In short, the work ethic, or thievery, in the Jago is driven by necessity and material desire, crudely mirroring the philosophy behind middle-class labor that, though disguised by various ideological and moral facades, is essentially the same as that of the Jago. If so, for the reader, then, it becomes difficult to keep distinguishing between the “normal” and the “abnormal.” All told, the spectacle of deviancy is just a fiction created by the dominant class, which constructs the Other to simplify the social cause of poverty and criminality.

Therefore, the negative narrative of the Jago reveals Morrison’s anxiety concerning

the urban poor and their structural relation to “normal” society. It is true that the narrative presents the inhabitants as purely residual and reactionary people with an outlook of antagonism toward the progress of time—a throwback to earlier models of the urban criminal subculture like the Wapping Mint or St. Giles. They are hopelessly anachronistic in an era of council housing, urban regeneration, and socialist parties. As its evidence, most inhabitants such as Dicky, Josh, and Weech, live and die in the small enclosed world of the Jago. However, the Jago itself incessantly gives birth to myriad semi-human figures. The autonomous subject, who dreams of leading a self-determined life, dies, and a de-individualized mass, of “human organisms without minds and without morals, preying on each other alive” (21), swarms. Toward the end of the novel, despite the progress of slum clearance, it is melodramatically mentioned that the inhabitants are like “rats” (273), with a strong propensity for reproduction, living filthily and ultimately resurrecting after being expelled: “The dispossessed Jagos had gone to infect the neighbourhoods across the border, and to crowd the people a little closer....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” (291-92). These lines from the text depict Morrison's despair at the possibility of broader society having to civilize the slum poor and his terrible warning to the middle class that they must keep breeding unless society takes radical measures to check the growth of slum population.

Morrison's novel reflects and responds to the late 19th-century obsession with urban degeneration allegedly spreading from the slums throughout society. Indeed, in 1896, in a discussion with H. G. Wells on *Jago*, Morrison stressed the physical degeneration of the slum population and suggested the logic of the camp and eugenics as a solution:

It is monstrous that the weak should be destroyed by the strong, but still more so that the strong should be destroyed by the weak....Why not confine them as lunatics are confined? Let the weed die out, and then proceed to raise the raisable. That is why I killed Dicky Perrott. He could not escape from his environment, and had he lived, would have become perforce, as bad as his surroundings. (“The Children of the Jago” 6)

This separation of “the weed” from “the raisable” corresponds with Edwin Chadwick's distinction between pauperism and poverty. Chadwick was the most radical sanitary reformer of the Victorian age and differentiated poverty, which he saw as an economic and political condition, from pauperism, which he saw as a moral one associated with

criminality, prostitution, and depravity. The novel develops a form of social planning that sieves the valuable from the worthless lives. In that respect, Morrison's worldview is very much in line with the new science of eugenics. Dicky's early death, while regarded as his just deserts, is designed by the author to impede the diffusion of dysgenic exemplars.

Morrison vacillates between bold rejection and immature fear of the slum population. Although he tries to sever a relationship with them rationally, by applying the logic of Darwinian thinking, he cannot overcome his fear of them so easily. This inner conflict brings the image of Morrison as a member of the middle class to the fore.

Conclusion

If the purpose of *Jago* is to describe the poor sensationally, then it surely accomplishes this. However, whether the novel is truly realistic is doubtful. G. K. Chesterton, a contemporary of Morrison, severely criticized his description of slum life as counterfeit and mentioned, "The kind of man who could really express the pleasures of the poor would be also the kind of man who could share them. In short, these books are not a record of psychology of poverty. They are a record of the psychology of wealth and culture when brought in contact with poverty" (123). This was a problem not only concerning *Jago* but common to all slum novels claiming to propound realism. The men who wrote slum fiction and the men who read it were men of the middle classes or the upper classes. Hence, the fact that slum life was the life as the refined man saw it proved that it could not be the life as the unrefined man *lived* it. The slum novelist succeeded in making an impact by the fact that some details were strange to the reader, but those details, by the nature of the case, were not strange in themselves. Furthermore, because he wrote in accordance with his own ideology and values, his way of grasping reality was more or less contorted, and it is highly possible that he managed to direct his attention exclusively to sensational aspects such as starvation and violence while overlooking the better sides of slum life. Therefore, at the beginning of *Jago*, the slum is dark and hot, is filled with oppressed air, and gives off a horrible stink. There is no study of the contrast between light and shade in the inhabitants' lives. All are depicted from a singular point of view with human emotions bleached out. All said, Morrison's London is hardly different from both the dreadful London and the outcast London that he denounces.

Another reason why the slum is described so dreadfully is related to Morrison's and

the middle classes' fear of the urban poor. The act of writing a novel dealing with the lumpenproletariat first aimed at turning the reader's eye to their wretched situation, evoked his/her sympathy, and accelerated charitable undertaking. At the same time, it schemed to strike terror and disgust in his/her heart. Both the author and the reader were secretly attracted to the repulsive chaos resonant with the Other within themselves, but harbored a fear of (and detestation for) it all the more and thus would firmly reject it.⁵⁾ They tried to regard the poor as a degenerate and nearly extinct species and negate their existence. However, the slums and their inhabitants were merely put out of the way of middle-class and upper-class eyes—they did not cease to exist. The oppressed might come to life again, cross the boundary, and make their appearance in the shape of terrible riots such as Bloody Sunday (1887), the Match Girls' Strike (1888), and the Dock Strike (1889). Notwithstanding efforts society made to rehabilitate the poor, its misgivings that every measure might come to naught could not be dismissed. From the *fin de siècle* to the beginning of the 20th century, many social reformers like Charles Booth began to argue seriously that the poor had no redeeming features and should be forcibly migrated to labor colonies by state power. While positively engaged in charitable work, without compunction they advocated an inhumane policy toward the poor, thus strongly reflecting the middle and upper classes' anxieties and biases.

Notes

- 1) Dr. Thomas Bernardo, (in)famous for his work on children in slums, planned to transport the indigent to "healthy" environments such as agricultural Canada and the United States. For more on Bernardo, see William J. Fisherman's *East End 1888: A Year in a London Borough among the Labouring Poor*.
- 2) Charles Booth perceives the "residuum" as a wicked mirror-image of "respectable" Victorian classes subscribing to values opposite those of the "residuum's": "Improvement in our eyes is destruction in theirs....[T]heir instinct of self-preservation seeks some undisturbed sanctuary where they can still herd together, and, secured by the mutual protection of each other's character for evil, keep respectability at bay" (174). Whether Morrison had actually read Booth's study or was simply influenced by a general acceptance of Booth's views is not clear, but Morrison's description of the inverted code of the Jago is consistent with the inversion of values that Booth regards as an identifying characteristic of the "residuum."
- 3) The journalist Clarence Rook tried to emulate Morrison in his book *The Hooligan Nights* (1899) centered on a young criminal named Alf. What set Rook apart from Morrison was that Rook seemed prepared to answer some of the same objections to his "realism" by stressing that his work was a first-hand account of Alf's life from the slums of South London. Rook also paints a picture of a slum career with a strong element of romance to it, essentially a long way from Dicky's existence.

A similar romanticism creeps into another Morrison-inspired novel: W. Somerset Maugham's early work, *Liza of Lambeth* (1897). Maugham, who observed many of the conditions of Lambeth's poverty during his years there as a medical student and clerk to physicians, shared some of Morrison's pessimism about the bridging of social spheres; Liza's death symbolizes the futility of it all. However, the tenor of *Liza of Lambeth* differs greatly from that of "Lizerunt." Just as Alf's *joie de vivre* absolves us of the depressing fatality of poverty and petty criminality, so can we find solace in Liza's sharing the same desires as any lower middle-class girl. The fact that she cannot rise above her blighted circumstances may make her, in an odd way, more identifiable to the reader because she enacts the myth that the lower classes share middle-class traits and are resigned to display them in even the most unpromising circumstances.

Rook's and Maugham's novels belong to the genre of late 19th-century literature that Keating categorizes as the "cockney school of novel." These novels generally dealt with the urban lower working class, and only occasionally with the slum poor, but they proved to have a greater influence on the nature of the fiction on the lower class than Morrison's graphic descriptions did largely because they provided a means of constructing lower-class life with formulas recognizable to the upper strata. Keating writes as follows:

Because of his [the cockney's] determination to remain free he developed the ability to take whatever life has to offer without complaint; take it wittily, cheerfully or philosophically. Such a man is of inestimable use to a democratic society. So long as his wit, drunkenness, violence, sentimentality and love of freedom are expressed in individual terms, he is socially harmless; so long as these qualities are viewed from a distance he is even attractive and picturesque. (*Working Classes* 221)

While Morrison separates the redeemable workers from the "residuum," the cockney novel concentrates on reiterating the redeemable nature of the working class. As the cultural programs by Besant and Toynbee Hall, established by Samuel Barnett as a university settlement in 1884, sought to absorb popular working-class culture and transform it into a more refined expression, so the cockney school made use of the rawer versions of the same culture to achieve the same ideological objectives.

- 4) In fact, the inhabitants of the Jago have deformed bodies. Dicky and his father Josh are abnormally short in stature and nobody has a well-proportioned body. These descriptions are closely connected with the *fin-de-siècle* controversy about evolution and degeneration. In Daniel Pick's study, the degenerate is another name for the grotesque. The phenomenon of degeneration represented in the images of Eloi and Morlock in H. G. Wells' *Time Machine* (1895) might be recalled in this context. Likewise, Morrison's sense of the grotesque is wholly negative and can be understood as both physical and social aberrations that transgress the boundaries of dominant culture and society.
- 5) The repulsion to and fascination with the East End of the later period of the 19th century was not a new phenomenon. An ongoing concern with slum life and conditions of the poor was described in many literary and social texts through the 19th century. Chadwick's *Report on an Inquiry into the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* (1842) was a best-seller, as was the journalist Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861-62).

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