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Finch, Jason

Published in:
Critical Essays on Arthur Morrison and the East End

Published: 26/07/2022

Document Version
Accepted author manuscript

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Link to publication

Please cite the original version:
Finch, J. (2022). Essex and the Metropolitan Periphery in *To London Town*, *Cunning Murrell*, and "A Wizard of Yesterday". In D. Maltz (Ed.), *Critical Essays on Arthur Morrison and the East End* (pp. 220-242). Routledge.
https://urn.fi/URN:NBN:fi-fe202402015143

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Chapter 11

Essex and the Metropolitan Periphery in *To London Town*, *Cunning Murrell*, and "A Wizard of Yesterday"

Jason Finch

Arthur Morrison's reputation entwines him with the lowest social levels of 1890s London and with the topographic specifics of the city's eastern sector. V.S. Pritchett applied the label "an East End novelist" to Morrison in 1944 and it has stuck.[1] Newer research emphasizes the specificity of different East End districts in Morrison's writing.[2] But Morrison was, equally, a writer of London's hinterland. He needs rereading in a way that integrates London with its socio-geographic contexts.

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[1] V.S. Pritchett, "An East End Novelist" [1944], in V.S. Pritchett, *The Living Novel* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1946), 152-58.

[2] E.g. Diana Maltz, "Arthur Morrison, Criminality, and Late-Victorian Maritime Subculture," *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 13 (2011). DOI: http://doi.org/10.16995/ntn.624. Highlighting Morrison's "consciousness of neighborhood presentation," his "awareness of the subcultural idiosyncrasies of individual city districts," Maltz reads *The Hole in the Wall* (1902) in a way based on sub-East-End locality as the writer's "Wapping novel." As she points out, to do so underlines "the importance of local specificity, and the danger of too easily obscuring these districts under the label 'East End.'" Such micro-geographical nuancing valuably supplements the tracing of acts of boundary crossing which is the work of the present chapter.

Writing helped Morrison become not just a professional but a wealthy man with a lifestyle resembling a member of the gentry. As such, comparisons are available not just between him and writers such as Israel Zangwill, Walter Besant, and Margaret Harkness, who described impoverished inner London during the 1880s and 1890s, but with others who thematized gentry lives: George Meredith, Mary Augusta Ward, and members of the Bloomsbury Group, for instance. Equally, Morrison's determination to reach a large audience by writing in the genre of crime fiction links him to Arthur Conan Doyle and Agatha Christie. Such comparisons place him beyond the East End, in a wider geographical orbit: that connecting central London with salubrious, semi-rural residential areas across its borders but well within reach by rail. Counties ringing London such as Essex, Hertfordshire and Surrey gained commuter towns and, in some cases, saw huge growths of middle- and working-class housing between the 1860s and the First World War. Morrison belongs in this ring as a resident who several times moved onwards, avoiding day trippers and the spread of houses.

London in the period when Morrison was writing needs to be comprehended not apart from but in relation to its immediate surroundings, namely rural and suburbanizing southern England. The city and the lands around it had a mutually transformative effect. This chapter reassesses Morrison using such an approach. The focus is on two under-researched novels, *To London Town* (1899) and *Cunning Murrell* (1900), the latter considered together with a piece of journalism by Morrison which explored the same subject material. Morrison was raised in immediate proximity to the Port of London. Through the London docks, the works of East Asian art Morrison collected reached the imperial metropolis. Essex, where Morrison lived for forty years, between the early 1890s and the early 1930s, lies north of the River Thames immediately east of London. Since Morrison's death in 1945, this county's image has often connected it to the figure of the East Ender made good, whether sports star, businessperson,

criminal, or media celebrity. It has also become home to a large 'overspill' population of people descended from earlier working-class residents of inner East London and even received a high proportion of the city's waste, making it, in the words of one commentator, "a receptacle for what genteel London finds too dirty."[3] Specifically, Morrison lived in and around Epping Forest, a portion of the much larger ancient Forest of Waltham, which was protected by Act of Parliament in 1878, today on the northeastern edge of Greater London.

From the 1850s onwards, commuter railway lines operated after 1862 by the Great Eastern Railway (GER) began to connect the surroundings of Epping Forest with central London.[4] Resident at Loughton, Essex, in the mid-1890s, Morrison received there and interviewed people ("including the man who had dropped the fire-grate onto a policeman in Orange Court") who themselves lived in central London near the GER terminus at Liverpool Street station, "in order to note down their sayings and mannerisms."[5] These he used as material in creating "Jago rats," East End underclass characters featured in *A Child of the*

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[3] Tim Burrow, "The Only Grave is Essex: How the County Became London's Dumping Ground," *Guardian*, 25 October 2016, www.theguardian.com/cities/2016/oct/25/london-dumping-ground-essex-skeleton-crossrail-closet.

[4] A branch terminating at Loughton was opened in 1856 by the Eastern Counties Railway, which merged with rivals in 1862 to form the GER; another line terminating at Chingford was completed in 1878.

[5] Sarah Wise, *The Blackest Streets: The Life and Death of a Victorian Slum* (London: Bodley Head, 2008), 226.

Jago (1896).[6] Morrison's own moves across the boundaries of London took him from Loughton to a grander Epping Forest house, before he returned to central London after the First World War, and then spent his last years in more fashionable Buckinghamshire.[7] Where the city stopped, and where it would stop in the future, was at stake for Londoners such as Morrison, who sought to use the literary business as a means of escaping confinement in the vast, plebeian interior of London.

The City, the Slums, and the River: Morrison's Imaginative Places and Existing Views of Him

Criticism foregrounding the place contexts of a work of literature has become both popular and sophisticated in the twenty-first century. Gone are the days when simple originals for, say, "The Inns and Taverns of 'Pickwick'" were outlined for readers of Charles Dickens.[8] Among new literary geographers, Neal Alexander has redefined literary "senses of

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[6] Arthur Morrison, *A Child of the Jago*, ed. Diana Maltz (Peterborough, ONT.: Broadview Press, 2013), 172. Such people, Morrison claimed in the preface to that novel, were "fore-damned to a criminal or semi-criminal career" (58).

[7] See Stan Newens, *Arthur Morrison: The Novelist of Realism in East London and Essex* (Loughton: Alderton Press, 2008). Morrison lived at 'Eastwood,' later 3, The Drive, Chingford, from 1892-96, then at Salcombe House on the High Road of Loughton from 1896 until 1914, then until its sale in 1931 at Arabin House, "a large, luxurious property set in its own grounds at High Beach in Epping Forest" (Newens, *Arthur Morrison*, 25).

[8] Bertram Waldrom Matz, *The Inns and Taverns of 'Pickwick', with Some Observations on Their Other Associations, Etc*. (London: Cecil Palmer, 1921). Efforts to assist readers of

place" by combining the secular theology of being "in place" or dwelling proposed during the 1970s by humanistic geographers such as Yi-Fu Tuan and Edward Relph with notions of embodiment and contest.[9] The places described and explored in literary texts themselves have multiple layers of meaning which overlay one another and overlap. The "geocriticism" of Bertrand Westphal works to uncover such layers via a method analogous with archaeology, analyzing space as "a layered product which bears traces of time."[10] My own contribution to the field, Deep Locational Criticism, juxtaposes Westphal's stratigraphic analysis with attention to the spatial arrangements found within texts, and to the experience of visiting the places described in texts.[11]

Deep Locational Criticism examines the combination of observable reality and mental conception in what it calls imaginative places. The method juxtaposes what can be gathered about what has been where when (and why) through research methods including those of

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fiction by tracing the originals of scenes they know continues in the twenty-first century, for example: *Literary Landscapes: Charting the Real-Life Settings of the World's Favourite Fiction*, ed. John Sutherland (London: Modern Books, 2018).

[9] Neal Alexander, "Senses of Place," in *The Routledge Handbook of Literature and Space*, ed. Robert T. Tally, Jr. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 39-49.

[10] Francesco Marilungo, "The Capital of Otherness: A Geocritical Exploration of Diyarbakır, Turkey," in *Literary Second Cities*, eds. Jason Finch, Lieven Ameel, and Markku Salmela (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 131-50. Bertrand Westphal, *Geocriticism: Real and Fictional Spaces*, trans. Robert T. Tally, Jr. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

[11] Jason Finch, *Deep Locational Criticism: Imaginative Place in Literary Research and Teaching* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2016).

various sub-disciplines of history and spatial analysis, with what can be gathered about people's understandings, experiences, projections, imaginations, and memories of those places. One reason why, since the 1960s, Morrison has seemed worth reading is that he says something special about – and so in a sense preserves – a particular imaginative place, the East End of the 1890s and in particular its lowest levels, the 'slum.'[12] In this juxtaposition of places themselves and their depiction in texts, in the application of imaginative place as a concept, Deep Locational Criticism is able to look both phenomenologically at place (in other words, via individual experience of it) and take in a multiplicity of views stretching across a historical *longue durée*.[13] Investigations of imaginative place apprehend massively multiple assemblages of human locational consciousness, at first in sketch-like form, then gradually with more precision and detail.

The practice of "repeated returns" proposed in Deep Locational Criticism involves a personal deepening of knowledge about a particular complex of imaginative places perhaps analogous to the development of muscle memory in a cyclist or musician.[14] In this chapter, the complex includes London and its component and surrounding imaginative places in nineteenth- and twentieth-century manifestations. Deep Locational Criticism thus mediates between individuals' perceptions of place and massive assemblages of place experience that

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[12] P.J. Keating claims, "More than any other author it is Arthur Morrison who establishes the tone of slum fiction in the nineties." *The Working Classes in Victorian Fiction*, revised edition (London: Routledge Kegan Paul, 1979), 167.

[13] See Eric Prieto, "Phenomenology, Place, and the Spatial Turn," in Tally, *Literature and Space*, 60-69.

[14] On repeated returns, see Finch, *Deep Locational Criticism*, 101-02, 212.

are far beyond the grasp of the individual. This aligns it with examinations of "deep time," including efforts in the field of new modernism studies to juxtapose massively different temporal scale levels, for example by Charles M. Tung.[15] The approach becomes, in a development of Tung's terminology, a means of grasping deep space or inhuman space within scalar levels that humans can comprehend, a dislodgement from apparent context into the context of the world at large as much as it is an act of contextualization. Tung shows how a study of "[l]ong-range modernism across the long twentieth century" reconfigures time through refusing it "the intelligibility granted by narrative" such that it "splinters into a number of discordant and clashing levels of scale."[16] P.J. Keating in the 1970s observed that Morrison at once takes on and renounces the task of representing the East End of London as a whole, presenting its component parts but also denying that these make any meaningful spatial whole.[17] The present chapter takes this as a key to Morrison's work beyond the boundaries of London. Looked at with a Deep Locational eye, the imaginative places of *To London Town* and *Cunning Murrell* are indeed multiple: London, Essex, the East End of London, the waterside portions of the East End, Epping Forest, the River Thames as a whole including its northern and southern shores, Hadleigh, Leigh, Canvey Island, Poplar,

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[15] Wai-Chee Dimock, *Through Other Continents: American Literature across Deep Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Charles M. Tung, "Baddest Modernisms: The Scales and Limits of Inhuman Time," *Modernism/modernity* 23, no. 3 (September 2016): 515-38.

[16] Tung, "Baddest Modernisms," 533-34.

[17] Keating, *Working Classes*, 171.

Blackwall, Loughton. And this is to mention only those that figure in more detail in the two novels.

Critical studies of Morrison, a high proportion focusing on *A Child of the Jago*, have often dwelled on the imaginative place complex of the East End. Keywords and concepts in the scholarship indicate this: “stark reality” and literary realism; “ethnography”; “criminality”; naturalism and social class; “the streets”; charity and the “tales of the city” it uncovers; the slum and “the slums.”[18] Morrison can seem a writer representative of inner

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[18] Roger Henkle, “Morrison, Gissing, and the Stark Reality,” *Novel* 25, no. 3 (Spring 1992): 302-20; Eliza Cubitt, “Arthur Morrison, the ‘Jago,’ and the Realist Representation of Place” (PhD diss., University College London, 2015); John L. Kijinski, “Ethnography in the East End: Native Customs and Colonial Solutions in *A Child of the Jago*,” *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920* 37, no. 4 (1994): 490-501; Richard Benvenuto, “The Criminal and the Community: Defining Tragic Structure in *A Child of the Jago*,” *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920* 31, no. 2 (1988): 153-61; Maltz, “Criminality”; Keating, *Working Classes*; John Greenfield, “Ideological Naturalism and Representation of Class in *A Child of the Jago*,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 29, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 89-102; Sarah C. Alexander, “The Residuum, Victorian Naturalism, and the Entropic Narrative,” *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 35, no. 2 (May 2013): 99-120; Wise, *Blackest Streets*; Eliza Cubitt, “‘The Screaming Streets’: Voices and the Space of Gossip in *Tales of Mean Streets* (1894) and *Liza of Lambeth* (1897),” *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* (2014): www.19.bbk.ac.uk/articles/10.16995/ntn.682/; Adrian Hunter, “Arthur Morrison and the Tyranny of Sentimental Charity,” *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920* 56, no. 3 (2013): 292-312; Matthew K. McKean, “Rethinking Late-Victorian Slum Fiction: The Crowd

London, himself from "the lower strata of society," who underwent in adulthood an early "embourgeoisement" making a spatial move outside the city necessary.[19] The area to which Morrison moved in 1892, before he turned thirty, was not then London itself but part of the still semi-rural countryside surrounding the metropolis. In the terms of the era, this was not suburbia but something beyond suburbia, looking outwards from the inner city. Ged Pope classes Morrison among "East End" writers in contradistinction to those of the outer London "lower middle classes" let along those concerned with "grander" suburbs.[20] But to establish a binary opposition between "East End" and "suburb" is to ignore the considerable extent to which the inner London proletariat was drawn from people who had until recently been part of the rural peasantry in the counties surrounding the capital, as well as the extent to which suburbanites were often escapees from smokier inner districts. Among Morrison's novels it is surely not only for aesthetic reasons that *To London Town* and *Cunning Murrell* continue to be neglected: thinking locationally, they are hard to assimilate within Morrison studies characterized by their tight spatial focus on the most urban portions of inner London.[21] As

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and Imperialism at Home," *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920* 54, no. 1 (2011): 28-55; Audrey Murfin, "Flashes from the Slums: Aesthetics and Social Justice in Arthur Morrison," *The Literary London Journal* 11, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 4-21.

[19] Henkle, "Stark Reality," abstract, 302.

[20] Ged Pope, *Reading London's Suburbs: From Charles Dickens to Zadie Smith* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), 52-53.

[21] Keating considers that "in artistic terms, *To London Town* is a complete failure" (*Working Classes*, 172); Cubitt usefully rehabilitates the novel by calling attention to its account of gendered domestic reading habits ("Realist Representation," 269-76).

Eliza Cubitt points out, the “London-centricity” of existing Morrison studies needs challenging.[22]

While Morrison himself seems hardly to have left South East England, scholars have sensed the presence in his writing of distant locales that were connected to London through the docks of the Thames. John L. Kijinski, for example, reads Morrison as a quasi-anthropologist recording “living subjects” — “natives” who are surprisingly human but who live within a series of cultural structures that fall outside late-Victorian norms, while Jessica Maynard compares his technique in *A Child of the Jago* with themes in Japanese art (his collection of which made him richer than writing did).[23] Yet Morrison has not so far been appreciated as an exurban writer, in two senses. He was both a writer of the exurbs, the zone beyond the suburbs, and also a formerly urban (or in other words ex-urban) writer.

Morrison and London’s Outer Rings

It was in relation to London that the urban historian H.J. Dyos distinguished Morrison from earlier Victorian writers in 1966. For Dyos, the two were “poles apart,” the “complete authenticity” with which Morrison (both “topographically and emotionally”) located his works in the East End contrasting utterly with the “sheer sentimentalism” of predecessors

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[22] Cubitt, “Realist Representatio,” 286.

[23] Kijinski, “Ethnography,” 491-92; Jessica Maynard, “Arthur Morrison, the Floating World and the Pictorial Method in *A Child of the Jago*: Painters of the East,” *English Literature in Transition, 1880–1920* 51, no. 1 (2008): 44-56.

including not just Dickens but George Gissing.[24] Challenges have emerged to this twentieth-century claim that, particularly in his creation of the Jago as a fictional area very closely resembling down to its street layout the real-life Old Nichol slum in Bethnal Green, Morrison conveyed the reality of East End poverty. On Sarah Wise's argument, Morrison largely acted as a mouthpiece for the Reverend Arthur Osborne Jay, Rector of Holy Trinity, Shoreditch, whose work in the Old Nichol is praised in the novel.[25] Viewed as an escapee from inner London still trading on his background close to the slums whilst living in an exurban ring when he wrote *A Child of the Jago*, Morrison alters, especially when observed through the lens of Deep Locational Criticism. Recasting Morrison as a writer of London's concentric rings, the region that would begin in the last years of his life as 'Greater London,' changes both him and the metropolitan region to which he belonged.[26]

In reconfiguring Morrison thus, consider Epping Forest. Cubitt again stands out among recent Morrison scholars for her sensitivity to the role of this area in his oeuvre, chiefly in *To London Town*, but also in earlier journalistic sketches.[27] On the whole, however, while there have been numerous articles about Morrison's East End, Essex Morrison has

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[24] H.J. Dyos, "The Slums of Victorian London," [1966], in *Exploring the Urban Past: Essays in Urban History by H.J. Dyos*, eds. David Cannadine and David Reeder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 139.

[25] Wise, *Blackest Streets*, 231-33. Wise paraphrases the public dispute between Morrison and the critic H.D. Traill over the accuracy (or lack of accuracy) of the slum descriptions found in *A Child of the Jago*.

[26] Patrick Abercrombie, *Greater London Plan 1944* (London: HMSO, 1945).

[27] Cubitt, "Realist Representation," 68-69, 192-93, 271-72.

remained the preserve of antiquarians and amateurs. Well before the Morrison revival sparked by 1960s urban historians' interest, Morrison appeared – very much *en passant* – in a study of the forest's "Literary and Historical Associations."[28] As in Epping Forest so too 35 miles to the east, where the Thames estuary meets the Essex coast at Hadleigh, the geographical setting for *Cunning Murrell*. Essex-based local historians and students of English folk customs including magic have paid more attention to the novel than Morrison scholars have.[29] Important to such investigations is "A Wizard of Yesterday," the article about the non-fictional folk healer James "Cunning" Murrell (1785–1860) published by

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[28] William Addison, *Epping Forest: Its Literary and Historical Associations* (London: Dent, 1945), 227. Addison thinks Morrison only worthy of a mention as a sometime friend of his fellow writer on plebeian topics W.W. Jacobs, who also made his home in the forest once his literary career was established. Despite the author's links to the *History Workshop Journal* group, Newens's book on Morrison and Epping Forest (*Novelist of Realism*) seems the work of an enthusiastic amateur.

[29] Eric Maple, "Cunning Murrell: A Study of a Nineteenth-Century Cunning Man in Hadleigh, Essex," *Folklore* 71, no. 1 (1960): 37-43; Ralph Merrifield, *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1987), 179; Robert Hallmann, "James 'Cunning' Murrell (1785-1860), Hadleigh's White Witch – How Should We Remember Him?," Hadleigh & Thundersley Community Archive, 2 April 2011, www.hadleighhistory.org.uk/content/main-subjects/places/place/james-cunning-murrell-1785-1860.

Morrison in the *Strand Magazine* in 1900, the year the novel also came out.[30] Just as Morrison's journalistic curiosity here brought him temporally out of the present into the pre-industrial past, as a creative professional, he was likewise moving spatially within and beyond London.

When still young, Morrison achieved financial success as a writer. Yet for decades he continued to rely on the vastly improved transport infrastructure of the metropolis to stay in touch with the London literary and artistic scene.

[INSERT FIG 11.1 HERE.]

Caption: Fig 11.1: Semi-detached pair of villas at The Drive, Chingford, London E4. Arthur and Eliza Morrison lived in Number 3, the right-hand house. Photo (October 2018): Jason Finch. Image courtesy of the private collection of Jason Finch.

The high-gabled semi-detached villa which was new when he moved in with his wife Eliza at The Drive, Chingford, shortly after their marriage is still extravagant with vernacular detail of a sort that was modish in 1890s suburbs.[31] Like the house they moved to later in the 1890s on the High Street, Loughton, The Drive was a short walk from a GER line connecting Morrison

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[30] Arthur Morrison, "A Wizard of Yesterday," *Strand Magazine* 20, no. 118 (October 1900): 433-42.

[31] Jason Finch, "Arthur Morrison, Essex Man" (an album of photographs taken at the British Library, London, and in Epping Forest, 12–15 October 2018), www.flickr.com/photos/jasonfinch1970/albums/72157704792007924. Photographs DSC_3156 to DSC_3208 in this album record a walk linking Morrison's three residences in and around Epping Forest, taken on 14 October 2018.

with Liverpool Street Station and thus with both the City of London and the inner East End via trains which ran many times a day.[32] In the early 1910s they moved to Arabin House, deep in Epping Forest, by which time Morrison had bought a car with the £4,000 he made by selling his collection of Japanese art and so become less dependent on the railway to stay connected with London.[33] Despite spending their old age in the West End of London and in a part of Buckinghamshire favored by the rich, Arthur and Eliza, together with their son Guy who predeceased them, are buried in Epping Forest. Their tombstone in the churchyard of Holy Innocents Church lies surrounded by trees only two or three minutes' walk from Arabin House.[34] In Chapter XIX of *To London Town*, this is called "the high churchyard" and indeed Epping Forest ranged along an elevated gravelly ridge whose thin soils earlier made for poor agricultural land.

Today, the surroundings seem not airy but dank.[35]

[INSERT FIG 11.2 HERE]

Caption: Fig 11.2: Churchyard of Holy Innocents Church, High Beach, Epping Forest, Essex. Photo (October 2018): Jason Finch. Image courtesy of the private collection of Jason Finch.

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[32] A house with a blue plaque commemorating Morrison today occupies the site of Salcombe House, where the Morrisons were recorded living in both the UK Censuses of both 1901 and 1911 (Finch, "Essex Man," DSC_3204; Cubitt, "Realist Representation," 73, 79).

[33] Newens, *Novelist of Realism*, 24-25. The car is mentioned by Arnold Bennett in his diary (Cubitt, "Realist Representation," 78-79).

[34] Finch, "Essex Man," DSC_3182, DSC_3183, DSC_3184.

[35] Finch, "Essex Man," DSC_3188.

Visiting the spot and comparing the experience with Morrison's text points to the way that seemingly natural environments may undergo profound and long-lasting change even when they appear to be pure survivals of the pre-urban past, as Epping Forest does. The stated objective of the 1878 Epping Forest Act was "that Epping Forest might be preserved as an open space for the recreation and enjoyment of the public."[36] This Act of Parliament protected in perpetuity the 5,531 surviving acres of forest land which had been purchased in stages by the City of London Corporation between 1874 and 1878.[37] While long-established rights for local residents to pasture animals in the forest initially remained intact, the right which Loughton villagers had previously held to lop – to cut and use bushes and tree branches which were within reach of a person standing on the ground – was explicitly removed:

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[36] Epping Forest Act, 1878, www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/green-spaces/epping-forest/about-us/Documents/1878-Epping-Forest-Act.pdf, preamble. Oddly, perhaps, the Act formally announced the "Disafforestation" of Epping Forest. But this is to say that it removed royal ownership of the forest's deer and royal hunting rights which survived de jure from the days of the far larger Forest of Waltham of which Epping Forest is a relatively tiny remnant. On the "degradation" of the earlier Forest Law of England in the early modern period, and on the idea of the forest as the outer boundary of Western culture, see Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 70, ix.

[37] City of London, "The History of Epping Forest," accessed 8 January 2019, www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/green-spaces/epping-forest/heritage/Pages/history-of-Epping-Forest.aspx.

> The Conservators shall at all times as far as possible preserve the natural aspect of the Forest, and […] shall protect the timber and other trees, pollards, shrubs, underwood, heather, gorse, turf, and herbage growing on the Forest; and, subject to the provisions of this Act, shall prevent all persons from felling, cutting, lopping, or injuring the same, and from digging the gravel, clay, loam, and soil of the Forest.[38]

When Morrison wrote *To London Town*, the forest space was still in a decades-long transition. Earlier, it had been a zone that was used in structured ways for agriculture and extraction by locals holding customary rights (and was threatened by landowners seeking to enclose portions of it). During the second half of the nineteenth century, however, it was taking on a new identity as the "open space for the recreation and enjoyment of the public" envisaged by the Act.[39] The plot of the novel spans a period of about five years identifiable as immediately before to immediately after the Epping Forest Act's passage. In it, Morrison never mentions the official protection of the forest. Rather than nostalgia for the past, what the novel articulates is a new sense of the area as beautiful in the manner celebrated by nature-writing and desired by house buyers, but also as a contested space of leisure thanks to its position within ready day-tripping distance of East London.

According to a Gissing scholar, to approach that novelist without the skills of the biographer "is to read blindfolded."[40] Biographical scholarship of Morrison has to deal with

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[38] Epping Forest Act, 7. (3).

[39] Epping Forest Act, 7. (1).

[40] John Halperin, "How to Read Gissing," *English Literature in Transition, 1880 – 1920* 20, no. 4 (1977): 188-98, qtd in Tom Ue, "Remembering John Halperin," *Gissing Journal* 52, no. 4 (October 2018): 46-49.

the fact that he worked hard to conceal details of his own life. In Gissing's case it was relatives who destroyed evidence of shameful incidents in the writer's life which are nevertheless known about today. In Morrison's, the writer's acts of concealment and destruction of evidence went considerably further. He gave answers to census questions which were untrue, invented a university education for American interviewers, and instructed that all of his personal papers should be burned at his death.[41] His dealings in art were made possible by murky personal connections in the waterside East End, a cultural frontier point where Asian culture met British as nowhere else, sparking a mania for the consumption of chinoiserie (and *japonisme*).[42] Morrison, like Zangwill and later the author of *Limehouse Nights* Thomas Burke, made his way as a writer by transmitting a domestic, London-located but utterly alien in character, species of exotica. As a confident player in the game of opportunities, many on the frontiers of legality, offered by the Port of London, Morrison seems far removed from Gissing, who loathed his dealings with editors, publishers, and agents yet was a far more dedicated professional writer.

To London Town **and the Birth of Greater London**

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[41] Cubitt, "Realist Representation," 33, 75.

[42] Anne Witchard, ed., *British Modernism and Chinoiserie* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press,, 2015); Anne Witchard, *Thomas Burke's Dark Chinoiserie: Limehouse Nights and the Queer Spell of Chinatown* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009); Maynard, "Floating World"; Noboru Koyama, "Arthur Morrison (1863–1945): Writer, Novelist and Connoisseur Of Japanese Art," in *Britain and Japan: Biographical Portraits, Vol. VII*, ed. Hugh Cortazzi (Folkestone, UK: Global Oriental, 2010), 540-52.

While *Cunning Murrell* is spatially positioned many miles outside the outer perimeter of the London covered by Charles Booth's 1890s poverty maps, *To London Town* largely unfolds at Blackwall, on the Thames near the eastern extremity of that London of gold, red, blue and black streets.[43] Blackwall is part of the maritime East End, rechristened 'Docklands' in the 1980s, as is Wapping, the setting for Morrison's *The Hole in the Wall* (1902). Both are to the east of the City of London but have never been in Essex, the historical boundary between that county and Middlesex, London's county, being the River Lea, a tributary which enters the Thames a little way east of Blackwall at Bow Creek. Zooming out from the London of Booth in the manner of an aeroplane ascending into the clouds works to integrate the built-up area with its surroundings rather than to divide them.[44] The plot of *To London Town*, in line with such a spatial move, concerns the increasing oneness of Epping Forest, Blackwall, the inner East End and the many districts in between, more than it emphasizes the division between rural and urban. Implicit earlier in the novel, such a networked view of outer East London and the lands beyond it becomes explicit in the account given by the honorable workman Long Hicks of his search for the first wife of the unpleasant ne'er do well Henry Butson. The latter has bigamously married Nan May, mother of the protagonist Johnny, while Butson's first wife is still living elsewhere in the East End. A sense appears of the East End as a world in itself containing numerous communities separate from one another

[43] London School of Economics and Political Science, "Maps" (2016), in *Charles Booth's London: Poverty Maps and Online Archives*, https://booth.lse.ac.uk/map.

[44] On zooming as a technique in spatial literary criticism as part of a poetics of scale, within which different levels of magnitude and distances come into relations with one another, see Finch, *Deep Locational Criticism*, 36-37, 219.

into which it is possible to disappear but within which the force of orality and memory of both family and neighbors remains strong.

> Cousin in the workus thinks the sister's dead too, but tells me to go an' ask at a newspaper shop in Bromley. Newspaper shop's shut up—people gone. Find the man as moved 'em an' 'e sends me to Bow—another newspaper shop. People there send me right back to Poplar; party o' the name o' Bushell. Party o' the name o' Bushell very friendly an' sends me to Old Ford; then I went to Bow again, an' so I dodged about, up an' down, till I run across Mrs. Butson up on 'Omerton Marshes, keepin' a laundry- That was to-day, that was.[45]

Whatever the debates over the authenticity or fantastic exaggeration of *A Child of the Jago*, such a narrative demonstrates that Morrison, deeply and intimately, knew East Enders' manner of perceiving their material conditions and could reproduce it in writing. If *To London Town* overall models a new spatial unity connecting East London and Essex, Morrison conceals this outcome in the early chapters of the novel with their Epping Forest setting. In that opening, a rich vein of description in a nature-writing mode derived from Romanticism clashes with the harsh voices and ugly manners of plebeian Londoners entering the forest for leisure on a Sunday.

Morrison warned readers in the novel's preface not to expect that *To London Town* will join the earlier *Tales of Mean Streets* and *A Child of the Jago* to make up "a complete picture of life in the eastern parts of London."[46] In other words, he rejected the notion contained in the classical realist or naturalist plan for a series of novels or *roman-fleuve* of a

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[45] Arthur Morrison, *To London Town* (London: Methuen, 1899), 290-91.

[46] Morrison, *To London Town*, vii.

Balzac or Zola: that literary fiction could provide an alternative to the social survey *à la* Booth as a complete or scientific account of the city. Instead, Morrison claims, readers will by reading his three books get the chance to see three "complementary" views, perhaps on the model of a picture gallery. Complementing the perspective on the grinding dullness of the working-class expanses of the East End given in *Tales of Mean Streets* and of the wild slums at the city's very lowest social level in *A Child of the Jago* will be *To London Town*. The later novel depicts a waterside district that, crucially, is not just filled with crime and labor, but is also picturesque, together with other views: of the beauties of the forest as visited and desired by Londoners; of migration to London by recently-rural people such as the Mays. In this "realist romance," to quote Cubitt, Morrison "reimagines East Enders as migrants from Epping Forest who have both the entrepreneurial spirit and the imagination to survive in the city."[47]

The earliest chapters of *To London Town* show the impact of the capital on Epping Forest through the story of old Mr. May, Johnny's grandfather. He is a freehold cottager and postman in the forest. Part of his livelihood comes from the sale of insect specimens which he gathers in Epping Forest. As such he is threatened by the spread of London, "the great smoky province that lay to the south-west," but, equally, makes his living from it.[48] As a postman, he shares a status as representative of central government authority with the "coastguardsmen" of *Cunning Murrell* who find themselves at odds with fellow villagers engaged in

[47] Cubitt, "Realist Representation," 269.

[48] Morrison, *To London Town*, 25. On the same page, an evocative passage states that "[t]he old man had once taken the Emperor Moth at Stratford, in a place now covered with a row of grimy little houses; now the Emperor was none too easy to find in the thickest of woodland."

smuggling.[49] Going about his insect-collecting work, Mr. May is mocked by a party of "beanfeasters," lower-working-class cockney Londoners belonging to the class of unrespectable street traders described snootily by Butson, a more pretentious cockney, as "that coster crowd in vans."[50] Morrison skilfully contrasts the harsh cries of the beanfeasters and the sneers of the other visiting Londoners, Butson and an uncle (ungrateful visitors welcomed to the cottage of the Mays) with different literary strands.[51] There is the romance reading undertaken by Mr. May's granddaughter Bessy, who is introduced on the first page of the novel as "a crippled child" walking beside him, through which Morrison models what Cubitt calls a practice of "friendly reading" to contrast with the world of violence in the Jago.[52] And there is the richly Romantic tone Morrison adopts in his narrating voice's descriptions of Epping Forest, subtly alliterative:

> Far away beyond the heaving greenwoods distant clouds floated flat on the upper air, and a richer gold grew over the hills as the day went westward.[53]
>
> The western hillsides grew more glorious, and the sunlight, peeping under heavy boughs, flung along the sward, gilt the tree-boles whose shadows veined in, and lit nooks under bushes where the wake-robin raised its scarlet mace of berries.[54]

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[49] Arthur Morrison, *Cunning Murrell* (London: Methuen, 1900), 35.

[50] Morrison, *To London Town*, 6, 10.

[51] Morrison, *To London Town*, 18.

[52] Morrison, *To London Town*, 1; Cubitt, "Realist Representation," 269-76, 275.

[53] Morrison, *To London Town*, 1.

[54] Morrison, *To London Town*, 4.

The tone recurs on occasion later in the book. Exiled to London following old Mr. May's sudden death after a panicking poacher has knocked him into a pit (delirious, his last words are cries of "London's coming, fast"), the surviving Mays later manage two brief returns to the Forest.[55] Such passages read as expressing the desire for rural England of a suburbanite (Morrison) newly liberated from the smoky inner city with its noise and absence of foliage. In tandem with the physical spread of London across a far larger area than previously, powered by the expansion of the suburban railway network, the 1890s saw country writing of a comparable sort reach a large audience.[56] Contrasting with his grandfather, Johnny has desired the city from his forest vantage point, seeing it in childhood as "a far and wondrous place whereto he could never obtain," and so their displacement is for him a blessing in disguise.[57]

The dispossessed trio of Nan May and her children Johnny and Bessy are plunged into Blackwall, a portion of the riverside East End with its own picturesque characters and associations. These are contained in the area's vividly painted front doors, which give the

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[55] Morrison, *To London Town*, 50, 310-11. There are perhaps echoes of Mr. May's dying words and the sentiments behind them when Helen Schlegel in the last chapter of Forster's *Howards End* points out the "red rust" of the city visible across meadows from many miles north of it, saying "London's creeping" (E.M. Forster, *Howards End* [1910], ed. Oliver Stallybrass [London: Penguin, 1983], 329).

[56] E.g. C.J. Cornish*, Wild England of To-Day and the Wild Life in It* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1895).

[57] Morrison, *To London Town*, 38.

area “a subtle flavour of ship’s stores.”[58] Arriving in Blackwall, a key stopping point ever since the sixteenth century for ships not wanting to round the Isle of Dogs, Johnny is transfixed by an “old, old house” about which “later he heard the tradition that Sir Walter Raleigh himself had lived there.”[59] According to a historian, the original for this building had been demolished “by 1881” and in the 1890s the entire waterside street at Blackwall disappeared, replaced by approaches to the new Blackwall Tunnel under the Thames.[60] Like the Jago, then, the village-like waterside Blackwall of *To London Town* is a recently-vanished portion of the East End which had its own special character, now eliminated. The comparison indicates that, perhaps rather than over-emphasizing the degeneration narratives that had been modish earlier in the 1890s, a reading of Morrison should highlight his fondness for disappearing older corners of the city, reinterpreted as not shamefully outdated but picturesque. This would align him with members of the London Topographical Society, founded in 1896, such as C.R. Ashbee and Laurence Gomme, or writers such as Roland Paul (*Vanishing London*, 1894), Philip Norman (*London Vanished and Vanishing*, 1905), and Henry B. Wheatley, whose descriptions in *Reliques of Old London: Suburbs North of the Thames* (1896) accompanied lithographic illustrations by Thomas Robert Way.[61]

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[58] Morrison, *To London Town*, 73.

[59] Morrison, *To London Town*, 83.

[60] Hermione Hobhouse, ed., *Survey of London: Volumes 43 and 44, Poplar, Blackwall and Isle of Dogs* (1994), British History Online, https://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vols43-4/pp548-552 (“Old Blackwall”), paragraph 18.

[61] Hermione Hobhouse, *London Survey’d: The Work of the Survey of London 1894-1994* (Swindon: Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, 1994), 2-5.

Johnny is fourteen when the Mays move to London. If he is imagined to have been born about when Morrison was (1863), his sighting of the house supposed to have been Raleigh's can be placed temporally in about 1877. This time setting is considerably closer to the time of publication than is that of *Cunning Murrell*, but still makes *To London Town* into a novel of recent history. East Enders' Sunday outings to the Forest were underway by 1856, when the Great Eastern railway terminus at Loughton opened, including a platform dedicated to excursion passengers.[62] The plot of Morrison's novel thus connects the period immediately before and immediately after the official protection of the forest in the 1878 Epping Forest Act. Chapter 19 of *To London Town* narrates the return of Johnny and Bessy to the forest on a day trip, their mother remaining behind in Blackwall where they live. The chapter provides a case study of Morrison's approach to historical time and temporal setting in relation to the spatial expansion of London into its hinterland. The brother and sister travel by train, the same mode of transport they had used when moving there, noting that "the town had grown much in twenty months," many small houses now being sited where previously there were none.[63] Revisiting the forest, where they formerly lived, means moving from a rapidly urbanizing region into one now being protected as a patch of rurality. They walk to an Ancient British earthworks in the woods, "its outer angles watching over the silent woods

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[62] "Loughton Tube Station," *Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia* (accessed 9 January 2019), https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loughton_tube_station.

[63] Morrison, *To London Town*, 186. The Mays very specifically follow the route of the GER line which has since 1948 made up an eastern branch of the London Underground's Central Line, passing via Stratford, Leyton, Leytonstone, and Chigwell, all mentioned in Morrison's text.

beyond," a forest site loved by Bessy as "a romance in itself."[64] The Conservators established by the 1878 Act as officers responsible for the protection of Epping Forest were "especially" instructed, in the wording of the Act, to "preserve and protect the ancient earthworks called Ambresbury Banks and all other ancient remains."[65] In other words, Morrison's novel promotes attributes of the newly protected forest that middle-class visitors (or residents) less interested in 'beanfeasting' than in cultural tourism might enjoy.

Revisited on this outing, the cottage formerly home to the Mays and still owned by them has become a beyond-suburban ideal. It has become a house suitable for a writer or a retired investor living on income from the City, but which would not be practical as a residence for anyone needing to go to work daily in a built-up area, being too remote for that. A chapter earlier, Johnny and Bessy's widowed mother Nan has received a suitor for her hand at their new home in waterside Blackwall who is known to the Mays in their earlier rural life. This is Bob Smallpiece, "the forest keeper," an archaic figure "with a face like a long-kept pippin" who appears as "a vast astonishment of leather and velveteen, such as had never before brought a Blackwall housewife to attention in the midst of her dusting and sweeping."[66] Bob proves bashful and unable to propose. His potential place as Nan's new husband is seized instead by Butson, who views Bob as "an Essex bumpkin."[67] Butson's pretensions as a West End swell living off Nan's earnings in the shop are exposed using physical violence by Johnny later in the book.

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[64] Morrison, *To London Town*, 189.

[65] Epping Forest Act, 7. (3).

[66] Morrison, *To London Town*, 30, 176.

[67] Morrison, *To London Town*, 180.

It is tempting to see Smallpiece and Butson as embodiments of the country mouse and town mouse, the yokel and the sharpie, but Johnny's success as a migrant to the city challenges any simple dichotomizing of this sort. Morrison surveys the spread of London, before and after Mr May's death, during Bob's visit to Blackwall and the children's return to the forest of Chapters 17 to 19, and again at the end of the book. He does not seem especially conservationist or to be hanging onto the past in any particularly nostalgic way. This might distinguish him from Ashbee and the writers associated with the London Topographical Society, and align him instead with Conan Doyle, whom Morrison clearly imitated in his Martin Hewitt detective stories. For Doyle, in the Sherlock Holmes canon, the spread of London into the counties around it, dotted with the residences of the wealthy and accessible by many trains for the investigator handy with a Bradshaw, is merely a fact of the times with nothing regrettable about it. Morrison, more than Doyle, seems to sense London's changing engagement with its surroundings as an inexorable force. Johnny's education as a city dweller includes keeping himself in trim as a boxer so that he can defeat Butson (standing for the corruptions of the city) through physical conditioning. Bob, meanwhile, may be charming, but his forest life is obsolete in the era of its protection as a leisure space for use by urban dwellers. In the penultimate paragraph of the novel Bob stands in the forest, his "honest face" watching the Mays and waving good-bye as they return to London, now Londoners themselves: "Yes, he would come to them in London, one of these days. Soon? Well then, soon."[68]

More Urban than at First Sight: *Cunning Murrell* and "A Wizard of Yesterday"

[68] Morrison, *To London Town*, 312.

Morrison's *Cunning Murrell* is a novel that thematizes time and time scales in a way linked to the specific transport network which also is crucial to any understanding of *To London Town*: the commuter railway. It ends with the titular character Murrell's prediction "to the minute" of his own death.[69] The single-sentence final paragraph of the novel follows a passage in which the dying Murrell enquires about a noise and his loyal servant Ann Pett says, "Haps it be the Lunnon railway train."[70] Murrell's ability to predict the moment of his own death as the Bradshaw guide can predict the coming of the next train ("to-morrow, at one o'clock") suggests that he indeed has uncanny abilities, whilst the previous three hundred plus pages of the novel have seemed devoted to the point that he does not. The 26 chapters of the novel preceding the final chapter with its declared setting in 1860 have taken place in 1854, just before the coming of the railway to the Essex coast where Hadleigh is located.[71] Vital in understanding them is the link between modern expanding London's temporality and the railway timetable. *Cunning Murrell* is driven by the assertion made most clearly by Morrison in "A Wizard of Yesterday": that the Hadleigh he visited in 1890 was somewhere

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[69] Morrison, *Cunning Murrell*, 310.

[70] Morrison, *Cunning Murrell*, 310.

[71] The London, Tilbury and Southend Railway opened as far as Tilbury in April 1854 and was extended to Leigh-on-Sea, just east of Hadleigh, in July 1855. Colin McCarthy and David McCarthy, *Railways of Britain: London North of the Thames* (Hersham, UK: Ian Allan Publishing, 2009), 46. Morrison therefore seems certain to have very carefully laid the temporal scene at the last possible moment before the railway arrived near Hadleigh. Hadleigh itself remained without a railway station, and thus was "left […] to sleep for another thirty years" after the railway line reached Leigh (Morrison, *Cunning Murrell*, 6).

in which "places and people were still in the eighteenth century as regards aspect, costume, habits, and modes of thought."[72] *Cunning Murrell*, like Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge*, is a historical novel which unfolds near the outer limits of living memory. This distinguishes it in terms of temporal magnitude from *To London Town*, a not-yet middle-aged writer's reconstruction of the time of his own youth. Equally, this span is not that bridged by novels such as most by Walter Scott (the most widely-read historical novelist of the nineteenth century), in which the history imagined is far beyond the experience of any living reader. "A Wizard of Yesterday" underlines these historical relations in its opening paragraphs not just by saying that the "sketching excursion with my friend, Mr J.L. Wimbush, the painter" on which the material in the article was gathered happened "ten years ago," but by identifying Murrell himself in the opening sentence as "the Essex wizard who died forty years back."[73]

Like *A Child of the Jago*, *To London Town* and *The Hole in the Wall*, *Cunning Murrell* focuses spatially on an isolated community, existing close to or within, but quite apart from, metropolitan modernity. Murrell, as stated, really existed. His legend persisted well after his death, as "A Wizard of Yesterday" attests. Presumably it was locals' stories in 1890 which provided Morrison with the costume and manner he gives Murrell in the novel. The wizard's diminutive size, squeaky voice, "blue frock coat, a trifle threadbare, though ornamented with brass buttons," and "large, gingham umbrella, with thick whalebone ribs, each tipped with a white china knob," basket hanging from the handle, recall the anthropomorphic animals of the children's stories by Beatrix Potter which began being

[72] Morrison, "Wizard," 433.

[73] Morrison, "Wizard," 433.

published in 1902, Jeremy Fisher or Jemima Puddle Duck.[74] Like them, he is a figure from a past which still seems to linger or be just sensible not far off in time, in remote portions of England. Suggested in Murrell's attire is a sort of Regency urbanity or gentility, its echoes just audible in 1900. But an aspect of the non-fictional Murrell which Morrison certainly heard about at Hadleigh in 1890 was that as a young man he "had been a stillman at a London chemist's," as well as having been trained in an Essex town as a surveyor.[75] Morrison thus seems deliberately to have excluded from the text of the novel Murrell's connection to early-nineteenth-century education and lettered professions. The "cunning man" was someone from the small settlements of south-east Essex who, crucially, had spent time in London and then come home again. It was on this metropolitan experience in a London at its most rapidly growing and overflowing with infrastructural inadequacy that Murrell founded his rural reputation as a wise man. He is therefore no straightforward representative of the pre-railway rural past as opposed to the urban and suburban post-railway present.

The novel carries a dedication to Wimbush, the artist whose pictures accompany "A Wizard of Yesterday." The poised figures contained in these images are animated with a subtle energy, occupying pictorial settings on the frontier between the picturesque and the gothic.[76]

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[74] Morrison, *Cunning Murrell*, 9; Beatrix Potter, *The Tale of Jemima Puddle Duck* [1908] (London: Penguin, 2002); Beatrix Potter, *The Tale of Mr Jeremy Fisher* [1906] (London: Penguin, 2002).

[75] Morrison, "Wizard," 441.

[76] E.g. "Bang! Goes the Bottle" (Morrison, "Wizard," 435). The same is true of other illustrations by Wimbush and the paintings of his which occasionally appear at auction.

[INSERT FIG 11.3 HERE.]

Caption: Fig 11.3: J.L. Wimbush, “Bang! Goes the Bottle.” Illustration accompanying Arthur Morrison’s “A Wizard of Yesterday,” *Strand Magazine* 20 (July-December 1900), 435. Reproduced with permission of the British Library.

In the dedication, Morrison claims authenticity in a manner comparable to the claims he made for *A Child of the Jago*.

> My Dear Wimbush,—I think you will not yet have forgotten our holidays in old Essex, in the days ere the speculative builder had dreamed of Leigh, and when Hadleigh was still the Hadleigh of another century.
>
> It is in memory of those times that I offer you my little story, headed with a name familiar to us both; and with the hope that it may please you to find among my puppets images—imperfect enough—of some other old Essex friends. For myself, when some tell me, as they will, that such a man as Murrell and such beliefs as he lived on were impossible in the time and place I give them, I shall know that you, at least, are better informed: for indeed you know Murrell's doings as well as I, and you have handled the amazing (and grimy) heap of documents that he left behind him. You can testify, too, that a man was swum for a witch (and died of it) in this same county ten years after the period of the tale. But there!—Yours always,
>
> A. M.
>
> Loughton, Essex, *June* 1900[77]

[77] Morrison, *Cunning Murrell*, v.

Here, Morrison identifies himself as a writer both of and specialized in Essex, and thus meriting treatment as a regional expert. Yet the authenticity claim of both this dedication and "A Wizard of Yesterday" are different from that advanced in *A Child of the Jago* because the statement of personal knowledge of the Hadleigh texts makes no claim to be testimony about the activities and skill of the historical Murrell. The statement in the dedication that there was an actual Murrell who left documentary proof of his "doings" in an "amazing (and grimy) heap" of papers could be taken seriously or as a quite transparent ruse (or joke). Audrey Murfin has compared Morrison's verbal examination of the Jago with the way that the new medium of photography was being used in the same era (e.g. in New York, accompanying the reports of Jacob Riis) quite literally to cast light, via the flash lamp, on urban poverty and rough sleeping.[78] In "A Wizard of Yesterday," Morrison includes, alongside Wimbush's visual recreations of scenes from the life of Murrell, three photographs purporting to represent the two's 1890 visit to Hadleigh. One is captioned "Cunning Murrell's cottage"; another claims to be "a specimen of Cunning Murrell's horoscopes"; the third announces itself "a page of the Book of Conjurations, with sigils and pentacles."[79] These are reproduced with captions identical in two cases and near identical in the third by Newens.[80] But no evidence is presented in either the *Strand* article or by Newens of their provenance. Perhaps the photograph on the first page of "A Wizard of Yesterday" shows the cottage Murrell inhabited in life; perhaps it is a stock shot of some other weather-boarded cottage, in Essex or

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[78] Murfin, "Flashes."

[79] Morrison, "Wizard," 433, 439, 440.

[80] Newens, *Novelist of Realism*, unpaginated, appearing between pp. 20 and 21 as Plates 8, 9, and 10.

elsewhere; likewise, the horoscope image could be a generic one, since no text legible in it connects it with Murrell. One is reminded of the building, today a branch of Barclays Bank in Dorchester, which bears a plaque announcing that it is "reputed to have been lived in by the MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE of THOMAS HARDY'S novel of that name."[81]

The spatial world of *Cunning Murrell* is on the northern shore of the Thames estuary close to what, after the coming of the railway in 1855, became the seaside resort of Leigh-on-Sea (emphatically still "a fishing village" in *Cunning Murrell*). Across the water to the south from here lies the northern shore of Kent, "five miles away at its nearest."[82] As this indicates, while apart from London, the Hadleigh of the novel has an umbilical link to the metropolis via the ships that continually pass it; it has another by road, too. The smuggling of contraband brandy – like that of "'bacca," or tobacco, in *The Hole in the Wall* – is used by Morrison to generate plot in a way founded on the historical truth (picturesque yet gothic, like Wimbush's visuals) of the novel's setting.[83] Other than in the shipping route which enables the existence of the smuggling of "tubs" of what becomes "secreted liquor," the connection with London becomes apparent at two further moments in the plot.[84] Rattling past at night goes "the shrimp-cart from Leigh, the fastest thing on wheels from here to London" which "also functioned as the Leigh coach," with Leigh and Hadleigh pre-railway south-of-England

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81 "Mayor of Casterbridge's House – Dorchester," *The Dorset Guide* (accessed 10 January 2019), https://www.dorsets.co.uk/photos/mayor-casterbridges-house-dorchester.htm.

82 Morrison, *Cunning Murrell*, 2.

83 Arthur Morrison, *The Hole in the Wall* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1982), 66.

84 Morrison, *Cunning Murrell*, 148.

settlements recalling those frequently used by Dickens as settings.[85] Then, "a Lunnon prize fight" is announced as due to take place "down to Canvey," or in other words on Canvey Island, over which Hadleigh looks from a bluff on the mainland.[86] There, importantly for the plot, a newspaper is available (as not at isolated Hadleigh).

Whereas Morrison's other three novels all have a single adolescent male protagonist, *Cunning Murrell* actually has two who are in middle age or even beyond it: the titular Murrell and the weirdly-named "retired seaman with rustic connections" Roboshobery Dove who is the closest the novel has to a hero.[87] As he would do more confidently in *The Hole in the Wall*, Morrison deploys a caper plot (detailing the planning of a crime, typically a theft, which is presented plainly to readers rather than needing to be revealed by a detective figure) in *Cunning Murrell*. In the twentieth century, caper plots would be associated with crime fiction, spawning the 'heist' genre in film, but they are at the heart of nineteenth-century humorous writing, for example Mark Twain's. Throughout *Cunning Murrell*, Morrison shows the ambivalent fascination with moves to defeat and deceive others held under the heading 'business' which would dominate his later short stories.[88] The character of Sim

[85] Morrison, *Cunning Murrell*, 172.

[86] Morrison, *Cunning Murrell*, 203.

[87] Morrison, *Cunning Murrell*, 3.

[88] For example Arthur Morrison, "Spotto's Reclamation" in *Divers Vanities* (London: Methuen, 1905), 21-41; "A Skinful of Trouble" in *Green Ginger* (London: Hutchinson, 1909), 1-23. Without engaging in excessive biographical speculation, Morrison seems to have had strong "natural business instincts" himself (Morrison, "Skinful," 13), while his most successful transactions (dealings in East Asian art) remain shrouded in mystery.

Cloyse, a local criminal and "capitalist," is described as seeing life in hard-headed financial and entrepreneurial terms.[89] With "no superstitions outside the system of book-keeping by double entry" he engages on a crime as "a stroke of business" in which he must "supply capital and pay expenses," Morrison wittily deploying a group of related phrases: "the final balancing of accounts," "the profits of the venture," "half-profit agreements."[90] *Cunning Murrell* equally well shows Morrison's aptitude for writing rascally waterside picturesques, and for narrating action.[91] Yet, as in his urban settings, Morrison is also an evocative word-painter of scenes in descriptive passages, showing light touches of the literary impressionist that while they might not match Conrad or Ford, speak against the notion that his literary powers declined rapidly after *A Child of the Jago* appeared in 1896.[92]

Looked at in twentieth-century terms, *Cunning Murrell*, like Morrison's other three novels and *Tales of Mean Streets*, occupies an ambivalent position between 'literary' and 'genre' fiction, specifically anticipating early twentieth-century "rural romances" such as Mary Webb's *The Precious Bane* (1921).[93] Overall, this is a story of the defeat of superstition in what was, in the recent past of its first readers, a "forgotten backwater of civilisation."[94] Murrell himself is no villain of melodrama, as he may initially seem to the reader. Rather he

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[89] Morrison, *Cunning Murrell*, 146.

[90] Morrison, *Cunning Murrell*, 171, 145-46.

[91] Morrison, *Cunning Murrell*, 102, 109.

[92] For example describing dawn over the Thames estuary (Morrison, *Cunning Murrell*, 188-89). For the argument that Morrison rapidly declined, see Hunter, "Tyranny," 292.

[93] Cubitt, "Realist Representation," 72.

[94] Morrison, *Cunning Murrell*, 15.

is a human figure representative of and masterly within his own time and place. Morrison emerges once again as a novelist of spatial environment notable, as Pritchett wrote in the 1940s, for "fidelity to scene," yet in a metropolitan environment extending well beyond that of the East End into the surroundings of the great city.[95]

Conclusion

In presenting the past in *Cunning Murrell*, Morrison speaks ironically of the present's own belief in its superiority over the past.

> Bats flitted over his head, and followed him as he tramped the steadily-rising path, but no other living thing came near till he stood on higher ground than the castle hill, and was within stone-throw of Hadleigh street. For the dark castle lane was no popular resort after dusk. One might meet the White Lady, or perhaps her victim, Wryneck Sal, and there was the man that hanged himself in the castle barn. True, the year was 1854, and in London everybody was surprisingly enlightened, and all a great deal wiser and more knowing than any of their fathers before them. But Hadleigh, thirty-seven miles from London by road, was a century away in thought and manners; it knew nothing of the railway beyond what the literate among the village fathers might read in an old copy of the Chelmsford Chronicle; sowed beans with a dibble: was generally much as it was in King Charles's time: and had not discovered its forefathers to have been fools.[96]

[95] Pritchett, "East End Novelist," 153.

[96] Morrison, *Cunning Murrell*, 5-6.

He freeze-frames a pre-extinction pre-urban Essex locality in *Cunning Murrell*. When Morrison wrote these novels, areas that had long been rural were being swallowed by London. The movement of London outwards is in them juxtaposed with inwards movements of people towards London. Yet as the career of the real-life James "Cunning" Murrell shows, such moves were not new in the late nineteenth century and nor were they irreversible. Much earlier in the nineteenth century Thomas De Quincey had imaged London as the hub of a gigantic wheel.[97]

As indicated in the discussion above of Johnny and Bessy's return to Epping Forest in Chapter 19 of *To London Town*, Morrison portrays what is past, and passing, in these novels, but without nostalgia. Just as the demolition of the Jago cannot be seen as something to regret, so little sentimentality can attach to pre-railway Hadleigh because, however picturesque it is, people there are benighted, easily fooled, prey to base greed and envy. They are very ready to believe that an innocent woman is a witch, for instance, and to get involved with smuggling. *To London Town*, in the context of the 1878 Act unmentioned in the novel, seems comfortable with the end of an actually rural Epping Forest from which the likes of Bob Smallpiece will need to move to London for a living. Morrison was no radical but seems a progressivist: the two novels express above all a belief in reformed education as a means of bringing about working-class betterment. This sense is embodied in the defeat of superstition enacted in *Cunning Murrell* and in the Poplar temperance club where Johnny meets his future bride in *To London Town*. Nor, despite the grittiness and violence which continues to recur in

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[97] Thomas De Quincey, *Autobiographic Sketches* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1876), 204, qtd in Jason Finch, "Modern London: 1820-2020," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Literature and the City*, ed. Jeremy Tambling (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 127-46, 132

these writings while they are sunnier than his first two books, is Morrison a tragedian of either the individual, like Gissing, or, with Hardy, the universe.

Gissing writes in *The Whirlpool* (1897) of a massively expanded London, its working population massively displaced as commuters:

> Thousands of men, who sleep on the circumference of London, and go each day to business, are practically strangers to the district nominally their home; ever ready to strike tent, as convenience bids, they can feel no interest in a vicinage which merely happens to house them for the time being, and as often as not they remain ignorant of the names of streets or roads through which they pass in going to the railway station.[98]

Morrison in both *To London Town* and his writing of old Hadleigh in *Cunning Murrell* and "A Wizard of Yesterday" works to give place belonging to those resident "on the circumference of London," whether within the city or beyond its nominal boundaries in settlements connected by rail to the capital. His techniques in doing so include a softened tone quite distinct from that used in *Tales of Mean Streets* and *A Child of the Jago*, and a subtle handling of temporal scales, alongside his characteristic expertise in rendering locations and isolated communities. Views of him as a London writer are in danger of being seduced by the cartography of Booth. The famous poverty maps, after all, reach only what was happening socially within an area walkable by Booth's team of assistants. The effect of reading these writings of 1899 to 1900 of Morrison's is not only to alter our view of him but also to recontextualize the idea of 'London' in the period. Morrison's metropolis predicts its twentieth-century future as a vast agglomeration containing as many people beyond the

[98] George Gissing, *The Whirlpool* [1897] (London: Penguin, 2015), 398.

protected Green Belt of which the Epping Forest Act was a progenitor as within it. Morrison surely contributed something to the formation of a more settled outer suburbia than the one envisaged by Gissing, residents of which were less likely to 'strike tent' than to stay put, deepening their understanding of the surroundings over time. Compared with the productions of contemporaries like Gissing, Joseph Conrad and Henry James dating from the same years, *To London Town* and *Cunning Murrell* may seem to lack art. But viewed through the lens of a new place-based criticism, their spatial frameworks are complex and multiscalar as indeed are their mediations of temporality, and their style, plot and subdivision into shorter chapters are skilfully adapted to the tastes of the railway commuter.