

POLICE AND THE CITY IN BRITISH *FIN DE SIECLE* LITERATURE

POLICE INADEQUACY AND THE SPACE OF THE CITY IN BRITISH *FIN DE
SIECLE* LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the representation of police in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century British literature. My analysis focuses on the relations between the subjects of the texts, as well as the texts themselves, and the institution of the police. I develop an understanding of the police as a compromised force of bureaucratic adjuncts who, in the conception of these Victorian texts, possess a troubling power over the bodies and spaces of British citizens. I discuss the multifarious anxieties about imperial and national decline during the period, and show how in all of my primary texts fears about the loyalties and effectiveness of police run parallel to fears for more traditionally Victorian modes of social control, such as class, charity, and the family. Also I examine the built space and social environment of *fin de siècle* London as it is constructed in these texts and show how they figure the capital as a space of alienation, danger, and degeneration. The combined investigation of the space and those who police it reveals serious concerns about justice and identity as meted out by an often-impersonal but increasingly interventionist state. The project seeks to contribute to a larger cultural history of the police in order to better understand that institution which orders and arbitrates so much of modern life, and also seeks to articulate some of the concerns raised during the development of the modern welfare state.

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Police Inadequacy and the Space of the City in British *Fin de siècle* Literature

The administration of criminal justice is the commonest, the most striking, and the most interesting shape, in which the sovereign power of the state manifests itself to the great bulk of its subjects.

J. F. Stephen, *A General View of the Criminal Law in England* (1863)

The police occupy a troubled position in modern society. Their mandate ostensibly originates with the desire of the citizenry for the protection of property and persons, but interactions with the police frequently belie the unyielding and self-protective power of the state. As both bureaucratic labourers and local arbiters of justice, the police are instrumental agents: fallible and individual, they also are (or are perceived as) direct vectors for the expression of the state's will upon its own populace. Louis Althusser uses the hailing by a police officer as a metaphorical example of the subject's ideological formation, where a momentary recognition by the subject as the object of a powerful gaze forcibly locates the subject in a skein of ideological precepts and power relations (31). My interest is in the slippage that this hailing produces. How is this interaction modulated by its historical moment? How is the state construed by the subject if the subject is skeptical or suspicious of its hailing agent? How does uncertainty regarding the police speak to the subject's relationship with the nation-state?

The late Victorian period in Britain provides a uniquely fruitful environment for the investigation of these questions. In hindsight, the period appears as a tremendous,

confused explosion of triumphalism and anxiety in almost equal measures. Rapid geographical expansion, which will not abate until after the First World War, vies with apocalyptic visions of squalid English cities. As the empire grows and raw resources are exploited by British interests all over the globe, the economy at home stagnates and is swamped by a series of recessions. The advent of mass culture and an efflorescence of accessible artistic production brings with it dire warnings of cultural decline and degeneration. Theorists of decline extrapolated from scientific advances in the fields of biology and physics to posit an irrecoverable societal fall away from traditional morality and structure. Max Nordau, whose *Degeneration* (1892) exemplifies some of the doom-laden rhetoric of the time, characterizes the aesthetic shifts in Europe at the end of the century as “the end of an established order, which for thousands of years has satisfied logic, fettered depravity, and in every art matured something of beauty...Over the earth the shadows creep with deepening gloom, wrapping all objects in a mysterious dimness, in which all certainty is destroyed and any guess seems plausible” (6). In the specifically British context, Stephen Arata notes fears of “the weakening of national might, the possibly fatal decay” which is decried “across disciplines and genres” (1). A passage from 1 Corinthians, “we are those upon whom the ends of the world are come” becomes a common and characteristic refrain (Lester 3). These fears have to contend with a rhetoric of imperial might, which posited that “[i]t was good to be British and on top of the world, a member of the most enlightened, civilized, and progressive race in history” and indeed, “it would have seemed crazy to deny it” (Brantlinger 14). The negotiation of the tension

between these competing rhetorics of vitality and decay finds its expression in the bewilderment of much of the literature of the time with regards to the powers and purviews of the state, an edifice which in the liberal view should be descriptive rather than proscriptive of the will of its population.

The role of the state in the lives of its citizens inspired increasing debate as the end of the nineteenth century approached. Zarena Aslami observes in the writings of such luminaries as Herbert Spencer and others “invested in a certain model of liberal individualism” the idea that the state was “exceeding its disciplinary and juridical capacities” (6). Aslami, taking a psychoanalytic approach to the figure of the state for nineteenth-century Britons, sees resentment among the bourgeoisie toward “a strong interventionist state” originating in an excessive reliance on representative government as a replacement for the sovereignty of royalty and the nobility (15). Conversely, the Fabians, New Liberals, and others envisioned a “heroic” state “endowed with the capacity to transform lives,” and imputed to it the “ethical obligation to intervene in the brutalities of capitalism and the social injustices of gender inequality” (6). All of the primary texts of this thesis, including Arthur Conan Doyle's early Sherlock Holmes stories (1887-93), Arthur Morrison's *A Child of the Jago* (1897), and Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907), work out in their respective ways reactions to the surveillance and management which this kind of interventionism entails.

Most scholars agree that the British welfare state of the twentieth century came into rudimentary being at the end of the nineteenth century, whether it was an innovation

of the period or a longer development beginning in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars (Aslami 9). V. A. C. Gatrell sees in attitudes towards the prevention of crime, where more powers accrued to the police and judiciary to intervene in the lives and labour of citizens, that “the old Whig notion that the proper end of a civil society was the defence of natural liberty against the despot was slowly eclipsed by the assumption that order was a sufficient social value in terms of which the legitimacy of policy might be assessed” (254). As I discuss in my first chapter on Sherlock Holmes, the negative liberty of the old Liberals, freedom from taxation or tyranny, was replaced by an interventionist policy of “extending rights (or opportunities) to the deserving or withholding them from the undeserving in the interests of stabilising society” (Gatrell 257). The police, then, during this transitional phase, become acutely visible as figures of the operation of the state upon the lives and bodies of its citizens. As the state increasingly intervenes, or appears to intervene, in the everyday life of the nation, the police officer is entrusted with a power and duty not only to uphold the law and protect private property, but also to embody and affect public morality.

While I do not want to attempt a history of the British police here, of particular concern to my project is the historical novelty of a centralized police bureau in London even during the period in which I am interested. Officially instituted in 1829 by Robert Peel, the creation of the Metropolitan Police was a reform measure brought about to consolidate the prosecution and prevention of crime following the repeal of the 'Bloody

Code'¹ (Emsley, *Policing* 59). However, even though in the bourgeois view the burgeoning capital was “particularly vulnerable to disorder” and a “breeding ground” for criminals (Radinowicz 169), the British were extremely hesitant to embrace a centralized, permanent force of government agents in the streets of London and elsewhere. Indeed, to the ostentatiously independent British mind the idea “was anathema...[s]uch a force smacked of the absolutism of the continental states” (Emsley, *Crime* 171). This opposition maintained into the 1880s. In W. T. Stead's landmark piece of investigative journalism on child prostitution in London, *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon* (1885), he cautioned against the police overstepping their bounds as custodians of the law into the sphere of public morality:

however strongly I may feel as to the imperative importance of morality and chastity, I do not ask for any police interference with the liberty of vice. I ask only for the repression of crime... Whatever may be my belief as to the reality and the importance of a transcendental theory of purity in the relations between man and woman, that is an affair for the moralist, not for the legislator. (Web cit.)

Even in the heinous environment in which Stead finds himself, he prioritizes the necessity for the police to avoid involvement in private affairs on the grounds that morality, like free trade, must regulate itself without government interference. This resistance aside, it is difficult to overestimate the effect of the Metropolitan Police on the London imaginary as the city developed throughout the nineteenth century, to the point where the London

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This retroactive phrase refers to the British legal state's broad reliance on the death penalty as a deterrent measure in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

policeman became an exemplary image of the safety and regulation of the British capital. Haia Shpayer-Makov goes so far as to suggest that it was, “in fact, the very jurisdiction of the Metropolitan Police that created the concept of metropolitan London and helped popularize the notion of a cohesive metropolis” (*Making 2*). The peripherality of the police in the texts I have selected, which is to say their general remoteness from the narrative as agents of social protection, locates these texts in contemporary debates about the responsibilities and powers of the state. In these texts, the police are *suppressed* as state actors and instead appear as an intrusive force beholden to obscure goals. The partial effacement of the police in texts that all deal with crime and criminals speaks to an uneasiness in representing the execution of state power.

My intent here is to view the police as symptomatic of the broader trend of increasing bureaucratization and surveillance which characterizes all elements of British public life into the twentieth century. Jacques Rancière fruitfully considers an older conception of police in his writing on consensus and dissent in modern society. In *Disagreement*, Rancière follows Foucault's exploration of the word police in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, stating that for writers in that time the word covered “everything relating to 'man' and his 'happiness'” as far as the state could provide it (28). What he calls the “petty police” are those forces responsible for “the truncheon blows of the forces of law and order and the inquisitions of the secret police” (28). He writes that “[t]he petty police is just a particular form of a more general order that arranges that tangible reality in which bodies are distributed in community. It is the weakness and not

the strength of this order in certain states that inflates the petty police to the point of putting it in charge of the whole set of police functions” (28). This is the connection I wish to make between this older form of police and the system of authority which the police, as a bureaucratic entity, personify. The modern police, more than strictly purveying deterrence and punishment, are a part of the institutionalized structures that collect, correlate, and act upon data pertaining to the beneficial operation of the state. As Rancière notes, in the modern context, “the policeman is one element in a social mechanism linking medicine, welfare, and culture. The policeman is destined to play the role of consultant and organizer as much as agent of public law and order” (29). In Rancière's conception of police, policing delimits the spaces in which given bodies appear, and “the properties of [those] spaces” (29). The texts I study in this thesis show the police as a compromised entity entirely inadequate to the spatial regulation of the city for the benefit of the masses. Instead, in the context of London in the nineteenth century, with its strictly demarcated but worryingly proximate zones of wealth and poverty, to police is as much to ensure the safety of privileged spaces by making sure that only certain bodies appear there.

My point in addressing this in the radically different context in which I am interested is that the nineteenth-century British conceptualization of the institutional police shares major similarities with the much earlier Continental conceptualization of the maintenance of the polity through statistical (i.e., quantifiable) knowledge and positive action. As Foucault notes, throughout the course of the eighteenth century, “growth within

order and all positive functions will be assured by a whole series of institutions, apparatuses, mechanisms, and so on, and then the elimination of disorder will be the function of police. As a result, the notion of police is entirely overturned, marginalized, and takes on the purely negative meaning familiar to us” (354). However, in the British context, the police did not come to bear, at least in the nineteenth century, this “purely negative meaning”. The overbearing civil apparatus which was comprised of these institutions and mechanisms did not come to pass in Britain until much later, by some accounts not until the early twentieth century (Goodlad 6). Never having the broad institutional support of their French counterparts, British police were more focused on the protection of property and public safety rather than the construction of a panoptical disciplinary apparatus.

Lauren Goodlad and Mary Poovey both suggest that Foucault's later work is more meaningful than his conceptualization of regimes of total discipline, which is more specifically bound up in French history. Poovey, writing about the industrial, economic, and social modernization that swept Britain in the nineteenth century, suggests that “no theoretical position that credits modernity with totalization is adequate to the historical record” (14). This is in opposition to “New Historicist representations of modern power,” where “power/knowledge subsumes potential opposition by proliferating ever more differentiated versions of itself” (14). She cites Ian Hunter's work on governmentality and emphasizes that “the implementation of” political or institutional “programs depends on specific, piecemeal, and local measures whose success is contingent on other factors”

(14). It is important to note, as Poovey does, that the welter of conflicting entities and powers in Britain during the nineteenth century precludes a stable, totalizing state power, and instead the formation of an entity like the police is more the result of local necessities. The subsequent performance of the police as state agents is also beholden to a variety of different aims depending on the dominant discourses at the intersection of the state, the people, and the police themselves. My project is deeply invested in tracing some of the “*irrationality*” which the ostensible rationalization of the police creates and exposes (Poovey 15).

Goodlad identifies such an irrationality in her study of character and how it affected British relations between the people and the state. Character, put simply, is what Goodlad calls a specifically British “antimaterialist concept of the individual” which valorized personal liberty, individuality, and an unobtrusive state (xii). This conceptualization is at odds with “the materialist underpinnings of a modern state: . . . depersonalizing bureaucracy, social scientific knowledge, and . . . processes of commodification, embourgeoisement, and the development of a mass culture” (xii). The processes of modernization, however distasteful, were also those which motivated attitudes about nationhood and imperialism; the mechanisms of these processes were those which underwrote British global dominance in the nineteenth century. The “paradoxical task” of the progressive writers Goodlad analyzes “was to imagine a modern governing agency that would be rational, all-embracing, and efficient, but also anti-bureaucratic, personalized, and liberatory” (xii). The culture had to come to terms with

those elements which made it so incredibly powerful in the nineteenth century, even as those elements undermined deeply-held notions of what it actually meant to be British. It is the explicit nature of these debates which leads Goodlad to focus on other aspects of Foucault's work than the panopticism he outlines in *Discipline and Punish* (Goodlad 17): “[Foucault] is far less interested in Britain, where a self-consciously liberal and vehemently Protestant national culture helped to ensure that the growth of centralized, modern institutions remained subject to a deep-seated popular hostility” (12). Instead, she looks to his concept of pastorship, where the “crucial productive processes” of normative morality and economic growth “are now detached from panopticism's specific institutional features...and from the dominatory analysis of power” (18). Rather, in the model of pastorship, the individual is subject to “moral and religious imperatives” which constituted “pleas on behalf of the shepherdless poor for the reinvigoration of community and character-building bonds between upper and lower ranks” (20).

The three texts which I have chosen for this study demonstrate the imbrication of some of the classically British modes of pastorship with statist control in the form of police officers and the police institution. My study focuses on police representation in Arthur Conan Doyle's early Sherlock Holmes stories, Arthur Morrison's *A Child of the Jago*, and Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*. These very different texts engage respectively with pastorship by the figure of the gentleman, charitable organizations, and the structure of the family itself as modes of social management; all also show recourse to punitive measures wielded by the state against its citizens when these modes fail. Failure

is a central concern in the discourse of the period: the failure of rule, the failure of morality, the failure of the race. Failure also extends to the built space of the capital itself: London is the setting for *A Child of the Jago* and *The Secret Agent* as well as the great majority of Sherlock Holmes' cases, and the city is figured as dangerous, overwhelming, and divisive. Rather than being an accumulative space of community and cultural vitality, the city is an alienating presence, separating groups and even individuals from one another with a terrible finality.

The city is haunted by the brutal spectre of the alienating force of late capitalism in these texts, where subjects are alienated from one another by the economic determinants which structure their lives. All three authors take up a gothic palette to render the incomprehensible bulk of the vast metropolis, an aesthetic modality which was finding new life in representations of monstrosity in the latter part of the nineteenth century. This new homely gothic “fictionally inscribed on the London landscape monstrous transformations, mutilations, and dualities that spoke of urban concerns” (Dryden 16). The horror stories of authors like Stevenson and Wilde imagine the city as a space of more traditional, fantastic monstrosity than do the authors I am interested in. However, the presence of gothic overtones in ostensibly realist texts illustrates the provocative uncanniness of a social and geographic space approaching the limits of traditional cognitive mapping. Indeed, the degenerative spaces of these texts, particularly *A Child of the Jago* and *The Secret Agent*, speak to the difficulty of imagining positive governance.

This mobilization of the gothic to describe the city and its inhabitants creates a terrain which resists the possibility of normative public morality. Linda Dryden identifies this more modern gothic as articulating “a fear that civilization may not be an evolved form of being, but a superficial veneer beneath which lurks an essential, enduring animal self” (32); the animal or primitive aspect of the individual becomes a hard limit beyond which social intervention cannot penetrate. The linkage of public and private in the overlapping aesthetics of the gothic mode and the degenerative model places the possibility of social regulation in a liminal space where the moral implications of overbearing state surveillance vie with suspicions that the social contracts of both Victorian liberalism and the new welfare state cannot, rather than will not, be upheld. My study enters into existing conversations on the nature of both the late-Victorian state and the relationship between the state and its citizens. My study diverges from the broader work of critics like Aslami and Goodlad in my consistent focus on the representation of the police. However, this focus allows for a thorough examination of how the literature of this period relates to the administration of criminal justice, social surveillance, and ultimately the operation of the state upon the bodies and communities of its citizens.

As mentioned above, the texts central to this thesis are Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories, Morrison's *A Child of the Jago*, and Conrad's *The Secret Agent* – each addresses the issue of governance and surveillance in the context of a rapidly changing state and each evince considerable skepticism of the police as its agents. Over the course

of this thesis I show how the inadequacy of the police in the challenges posed by these texts denotes a functional failure of the epistemological authority of the state. Chapter 1 focuses on Conan Doyle's detective and the repeated failures of the police in all of the cases to which they are called and Holmes' magisterial solutions. Though the tone of these stories tends to be triumphalist and supportive of their main character, it is my assertion that the representation of Holmes evinces a greater uneasiness than his considerable capabilities may suggest. Holmes epitomizes the gentleman of leisure, the amateur whose gifts are a product of breeding, education, and an inherent competence. Even with all these virtues, such as they are, the primary result of his activities is an undermining of the police rather than productive work in the service of the nation.

Chapter 2 interrogates the complex politics of Morrison's representation of an apocalyptic slum in London, the titular Jago. The novel depicts the total failure of the late-Victorian community to productively engage with the socio-economic determinants of poverty; instead, the Jago is besieged, with the police as foot-soldiers. I investigate the character of Father Sturt, based upon a well-known clergyman of the time, whose charitable engagement with the inhabitants of the Jago is at all times linked with the brutality and power of the police, who are a faceless, alien occupying force. I also address the ways that the space of the Jago creates and maintains the 'anti-social' behaviours which characterize its populace.

In Chapter 3 I identify in Conrad's novel of revolutionists and police the extent to which the fundamental structure of Victorian society, the family, fails in its capacity as a

bastion of intersubjectivity. Rather than a source of community, Conrad makes the family bear the brutality of the economic determinism of late capitalism. Separated from one another by the necessities of survival and lost in a funereal, murky labyrinth, the characters of the novel engage in desperate games and brutal exploitation. I focus in this chapter on the gothicism of the city and how it is metonymically representative of the structural violence visited upon its inhabitants by the inhuman systems which they serve.

“There is Nothing So Unaesthetic as a Policeman”: The Roots of Police Incompetence in
Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes Stories

Sherlock Holmes's work most often consists of taking up those jobs of detection which stymie the officers of the Metropolitan Police. He works privately as well, but in stories like *A Study in Scarlet* (1887), “The Adventure of the Greek Interpreter” (1893), and “The Boscombe Valley Mystery” (1891), his services are required by the police when the motivations for crime depart from the purely economic. The Metropolitan Police, a civil institution developed during a period of rationalization, falters when crime falls outside the bounds of social and economic rationality: according to Christopher Clausen, the police “always fail” in the Holmes stories because they are too enmeshed in the social order they are supposed to protect to be able to imagine threats from outside it (112). Holmes, then, provides this imaginative capability. With his seemingly esoteric knowledge of cigarette ash and soil, his command of the quarters and denizens of the city, his unceasing observation, and his willingness to accept any conclusion, if supported by the facts to which he has access, Holmes takes over from the police when forces incommensurate with the logic of the bureaucratic institution appear. Far from being the icy positivist he is sometimes characterized as, solving “locked room” puzzles through scientific calculation, Holmes's actual methods usually involve the connection of disparate information and a keen understanding of human impulse. My intention in this chapter is to think through what sort of protection Holmes provides to the state and the

nature of the inadequacy of the police. The police in the texts I am considering are relatively peripheral, in that they generally appear only to request Holmes' aid and bear witness to the virtuosic solution of the mystery. In all of these texts the police are either confounded by crimes enigmatic to their experience or latch on to a series of wrong conclusions and dead ends. I suggest that extant in the stories is a concrete notion of the police as interlopers in crime as these texts produce it, injecting bureaucratic mediocrity into a sphere which Conan Doyle's sleuth dominates through a performance of late-Victorian gentlemanliness and character.

The problem with Sherlock Holmes of course is all those ways in which he does not match the expectations of the late-Victorian professional: a childless, eccentric drug addict whose solutions very often have no bearing upon anyone outside the parties directly involved, he appears to be a man wasting his talents. Particularly in *The Sign of Four*, the detective is dissolute, and his reliance on his work to motivate him seems like a perverse image of the industrious Victorian professional. Stephen Arata asserts that Holmes himself “has been singularly successful in dictating the terms within which his cases have been understood” (133), and situates Holmes “within the familiar bounds of late-Victorian decadence” (144). Marie-Christine Leps draws attention to the ambiguity of Holmes' method and the often inconsequential conclusions to the stories, in which no laws are found to have been broken or no closure is attained. The performance of the police in the stories creates a profound tension: bluff and workmanlike, they are continual foils for Holmes' brilliance. Holmes' successes are directly proportionate to the

institutional failure of the police, because without their initial failure Holmes' methodology is exposed as contingent and ultimately unimportant virtuosity, signifying nothing so much as dilettantish knowledge for its own sake. Holmes triumphs not so much over the perpetrators of the crimes he investigates as he does over anxieties concerning class instability and encroaching bureaucratization. Doyle's legerdemain in his Sherlock Holmes stories is to create a figure who upholds liberal, middle-class values *because of*, rather than despite, his opposition to the law and its officers.

The relationship between the police and the private detective creates the foundation on which Holmes' performance is built. The relationship between the two hovers between complementarity, where the detective is able to access locations and situations beyond the purview of the police, and antipathy, where the detective protects a fundamentally different social order than the one that the police represent. Lydia Alix Fillingham formulates this tension as a representation of the conflict between liberal and bureaucratic ideologies of the state. Holmes' interventions are, in her formulation, incarnations of the “minimalist impulse of the Liberal state,” the duty of which “is to preserve private life inviolate. [In contrast,] the Metropolitan Police were created specifically to preserve the greater social order, and the enforcement of individual property rights was indeed secondary” (671). Holmes, as a representative of a more individualist ideology, is able to flexibly intervene in ways which the legalistic, bureaucratic methods of the police would not allow. In “The Boscombe Valley Mystery,”

Holmes conceals in court the identity of a perpetrator of a murder, John Turner, who kills a man who is blackmailing him and threatening his estate. Besides the implicit authority with which the text invests Holmes, which I discuss below, here a crime is committed that, from a certain vantage, is justified: Turner must protect his daughter and his estate from the trespasses of Andrew McCarthy, the man he murders and who knew of his violent past in Australia. Holmes himself, when Turner delivers his private testimony, declares that “it is not for me to judge you” (BVM 57). Holmes, through his omission, protects Turner and his daughter in a way that the police never could, as evidence of McCarthy's blackmail would also indict Turner. McCarthy, rather than Turner, is figured as the villain in the story, as he drags the violence of the colonies back into the pastoral English countryside and preys upon Turner in his inability to go to the law. Holmes' methodology allows for a resolution to the case that does not upset the social situation of the area. At the end of the story, after Holmes' elision, McCarthy's son and Turner's daughter “may [be able] to live happily together, in ignorance of the black cloud which rests upon their past” (58), whereas, it is implied, a police inquest would bring their respective parents' long animosity to light. Fillingham presents the bureaucratic ideology of the police as at odds with the liberal ideology of the nation at large, a rearticulation of early fears of secret police and total surveillance. The discretion offered by Holmes allows for the negotiation of private situations by private means, and minimizes the intrusion of the state, personified by the police.

The progress from the liberal institutions of the mid-nineteenth century to the

welfare state of the twentieth, exemplified by the shifting mandate of governmental and police powers, is in Peter Baldwin's phrase, a “lumpy” one, in that different aspects of the state shifted from one system to the other at different rates (66). In terms of the law and its implementation, the shift from the protection of property to the prevention of interpersonal violence, which continued throughout the nineteenth century, proceeded unevenly (Mandler 15). As Zarena Aslami notes, there are divided opinions on the development of the capacities of the British state throughout the nineteenth century, with some critics suggesting that in the time from the 1880s until the 1920s the consolidation of monopoly capitalism brought about a “cultural revolution,” whereas others posit that state intervention in this period began with the “Benthamite reorganization of state structures in the 1830s” (9). Whatever the genealogy of these structures, Aslami comments that the period did witness a distinct change in the “idea of the state” (9).² Intrusive moral and behavioural controls were enforced on the poorer classes even as conventional British political ideology championed a “freedom from” intervention; that is, a minimalist conception of government which did not interfere with the operations of the market and private life, avoided costly wars, and refrained from intrusive surveillance of its citizens (Harling 27). The application, or the threat of application, of moral/behavioural policing to classes other than “paupers, prisoners, and prostitutes”

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Though Victorian liberalism was not perfectly coextensive with the fortunes of the Liberal Party, the party did suffer a major crisis in the mid-1880s which virtually removed it from politics for a decade. For a comprehensive account of the parliamentary history of the 1880s, when Gladstone's decision on Irish Home Rule split the Liberal party, see chapter XII and the epilogue of Parry, *The Rise and Fall of Liberal Government in Victorian Britain* (1993).

seemed like a symptom of a burgeoning bureaucracy antithetical to traditional approaches to the discipline of British society (Harling 34). To return to Fillingham's conception of the intra-ideological tension in the Sherlock Holmes stories, the police “are an essentially intrusive body” with an “insistent tendency towards investigation and invasion” (671). This is an alarming development, where the demands and expectations of a Britain organized by the belief in the character of the British subject, which is to say an individualist empowered by shared beliefs in self-reliance and personal liberty, are superseded by a shabby materialism which ostensibly operates upon all subjects, making no distinction between their personal circumstances nor their performance of Victorian social mores. To phrase this another way, as critics like Fillingham and Rosemary Jann point out, the Victorian middle and upper classes bridled at being surveilled in the same way as they expected the poor to be. Holmes himself allows for the negotiation of this tension by mitigating the intrusion of the police into the private realm, offering himself as an unaligned agent.

Indeed, Holmes' relationship with the police shows the necessity, in the texts, of the maintenance of character as a modality of leadership. Character, according to Samuel Smiles, was a willful, “self-originating force” possessed by Protestant, individualistic Britons in a much greater degree than their subjugated Continental and Oriental counterparts (qtd. in Goodlad 24). This force allowed for the “limitless improvability of all human beings,” but its cultivation, performed through public religiosity, charitable organizations, and the like, depended on “intrinsically unequal relations between rich and

poor, educated and uneducated, colonizer and colonized” (Goodlad 25). Indeed, as Lauren Goodlad points out, by the end of the century the pretence of “disinterested governance by an Oxbridge elite” was underwritten by an understanding of gentlemanly character derived from “quasi-feudal appeals to social hierarchy” as well as the supposedly “rationalized and empirical” outcomes of elite education (26). As I will continue to demonstrate throughout this chapter, Holmes personifies this combination of mystification and empiricism, where his ability to resolve tears in the social fabric stems from both a nebulous, intuitive grasp of people and society and a claimed commitment to factual evidence. Where the police officers represent institutional mediocrity in an environment of “increasing levelling and materialism” (Goodlad 26), Holmes embodies a compensatory gesture by which traditional leadership reasserts its command.

The shifting ideological ground of the *fin de siècle* in Britain speaks to the conceptual transition of Britain from a nation into a state. Whereas the former denotes an entity united by shared tradition, lineage, and custom, the latter was understood to be that entity under the control of the British political apparatus, which was parliamentary and bureaucratic but partook of cultural modes as well. Zarena Aslami's work shows that late-Victorian realist literature sought, for example, to shape readers “who could navigate a new, sacralizing state culture. [It] represented the late-Victorian everyday as saturated materially by state intervention and symbolically by state fantasy” (161). Britishness, during this most expansive phase of empire, becomes less about citizens' connections to regent and country and more a situation of being under the auspices of the British

government. Linda Colley identifies Britishness as never being homogenous and complete in itself, despite intense cultural work throughout the nineteenth century to suggest just that, but rather that it was a superimposition “over an array of internal differences in response to contact with the Other, and in response to the conflict with the Other” (6). Colley is speaking of the early and mid-nineteenth century, dominated by what Goodlad calls “Whig arts of government” which were committed to nonintervention by the state and to individual self-regulation (15). These arts were predicated on a mutual understanding by Britons of their status and the goals of the nation, and “depended on a national supremacy that most Britons simply took for granted” (Goodlad 199). By the end of the century, the Other was increasingly found within the physical borders of the nation, whether figured as the unregenerate poor, the decadent aristocracy, or placeless immigrants from the far corners of the empire. The state, then, rather than the nation, became the ontological paradigm for the discipline of this heterogenous population, as new understandings of the populace destabilized the fantasy of the internally coherent nation.

This shift was met with some resistance from classes which had, either implicitly or explicitly, supported interventionist measures against the poor which were aimed at their “improvement”. Fillingham sees Holmes, and the literary detective more generally, as a “bureaucratic adjunct” who helps “reconcile bureaucracy and the Liberal ideology” (673), but Clausen imagines Holmes as the protector of the older liberal social order, “whose relatively fortunate members feel it to be deeply threatened by forces that only he

is capable of overcoming” (112). The law, writes Clausen, is a “weak reed” in these stories and rather than negotiating the application of the law, Holmes provides a protection above and beyond what it can provide (113). This view of Holmes as a protector or upholder of social mores which were, if not threatened, then ignored is common to many interpretations of the character. John Greenfield reads the detective as being “in the position of being a dispenser of justice that seems right to readers even though it is not strictly legal” (19), and for Anna Neill Holmes provides, in his retention of “only a perfectly ordered collection of facts...an antidotal influence to the aimlessness and excessiveness of [the] *fin de siècle*” (612). For all of these critics, Holmes is a figure who mediates the transition from Victorian liberalism to a bureaucratic mode of governance that seemed intrusive and overweening. Greenfield identifies the “rising professional middle class” as being the target audience of the stories, and lists the conveyed “ideological assumptions” of that class. These include:

restoring personal respectability as well as commercial and professional reputation, maintaining integrity in sporting or gaming events, placing a higher justice above strictly legal concerns, clearing those wrongfully accused by the weight of circumstantial evidence, exposing betrayals by family, loved ones, or employees, reinforcing xenophobic fears, and upholding gender stereotypes of heroic men and weak women in need of protection. (20)

The thrust of these ideologemes is conservative, and Holmes personifies an acceptable remedy to the encroaching forces of depersonalized government, imperial exhaustion, and

the continuing, if still feeble, political empowerment of women. Doyle wrote his detective stories at the same time as an efflorescence of the gothic and the New Woman novels, among other productions, were providing cultural force to anxieties about the vulnerability of British modes of life which had, just like its international supremacy, been taken for granted for most of the century following the Napoleonic wars.

In addition, the actual detective department of the Metropolitan Police was not held in particularly high regard during this period, in contrast to the attitude of the press in Doyle's stories, which, as noted below, largely celebrates the detectives. The Ripper murders and the subsequent uproar occurred just after *A Study in Scarlet* and before any of the short stories were published, and throughout the previous decade the department was subject to scandals which cast public doubt on its ability and integrity. In 1877 the Turf Fraud Scandal exposed several long-serving chief inspectors as having taken bribes and warned criminals of police intentions (Shpayer-Makov, *Ascent* 38). After “intense public interest,” there was a complete overhaul of the detective branch of the Metropolitan Police along lines more akin to the French system, with greater centralization of control and information (38). The police mismanaged their response to the bread riots of 1886, with specific criticism levied against of “the bureaucratic flow of information,” whereby different entities within the police organization, including the Home Secretary, learned late or not at all of the riots and there was poor communication between divisions (Fillingham 683). While not a direct criticism of the detective branch, this still points to a general lack of faith in the expanding bureaucracy and the

concomitant decline in effectiveness.

Holmes's authority in adjudicating guilt stems from his adherence to and performance of the threatened liberal model of character and politics. In “The Boscombe Valley Mystery,” as mentioned above, the actual perpetrator of the murder goes unpunished, Holmes choosing to remain silent as Turner's death will force him to “answer to a higher Court than the assizes” (57), underscoring Holmes' commitment to Victorian ideals of religiosity. It is not faith *per se* which the detective attends to here, rather he looks to maintain as smoothly as possible general ideals of the social good in his dealing with criminals and their guilt, which the standardized procedures and punishments of the judicial apparatus might not allow. In another story, “The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle,” Holmes decides the fate of the criminal in the story based on what would best serve the offender and the community at large. James Ryder, a hotel clerk, steals a precious gem from a guest and pins the crime on a previously convicted plumber who works at the hotel. Ryder is unsuited to crime, though in Holmes' view has “the making of a very pretty villain” in him, and after securing the gem and hearing his story, Holmes sends him off without calling for the police. Holmes then informs Watson that he is “not retained by the police to supply their deficiencies,” that the case against the plumber will now “collapse,” and that though he is “commuting a felony...it is just possible that [he] is saving a soul” (97). Prison time would make Ryder “a gaol-bird for life. Besides, it is the season of forgiveness. Chance has put in our way a most singular and whimsical problem, and its solution is its own reward” (97). Holmes overdetermines his justification for

independently commuting Ryder's sentence, bringing together many of the factors which make him seem to be an ideal protector of a threatened discursive regime. Holmes explicitly devalues bureaucratic systems of crime prevention: he is contemptuous of the police, and emphasizes the brutality and futility of corrective institutions, as they serve to create more criminals than they rehabilitate. He airily waves aside the requirements of the law in service to a higher code of morality, calls attention to the traditional mood of the Christmas season, and concludes that the application of professional knowledge is more the province of the detective than the actual prevention of crime in its usual sense. Here Holmes underscores much of the bourgeois ethos of the stories: tradition, a keen sense of character, and a stated belief in positivistic reason are of better service to the community than an impersonal, bumbling, and perhaps dangerous bureaucratic apparatus.

Besides his adherence to particularly English values in the face of encroaching bureaucratization, Holmes' authority also rests upon the ostensibly objective and scientific nature of his approach to crime detection. Holmes' approach posits a unified, knowable world, one in which all phenomena are linked together; his solutions, because of the way he arrives at them, imply the possibility of solutions to the larger social problems of the period, if only enough knowledge is gained and collated. In an often-quoted passage, Holmes declares that “[f]rom a drop of water... a logician could infer the possibility of an Atlantic or a Niagara without having seen or heard of one or the other. So all life is a great chain, the nature of which is known whenever we are shown a single link of it” (SS 20). The trouble with this statement is that the Atlantic and the Niagara already exist and are

probably known to the logician: the logic is never truly tested. Indeed, on a fundamental level the function of the stories is not to provide the example of the successful method: they instead show a world in which the method will always succeed. Rosemary Jann calls attention to the constructedness of the stories: “[Holmes] insists that an impersonal and inflexible logic guarantees the correctness of his deductions, but he is actually able to mold the “clay” of facts correctly every time because Doyle has already determined the shape of the brick” (688). Jann's insight is that “Doyle has artificially limited the range of possible interpretations of behaviour, making what is only possible seem inevitable” (688); Holmes shores up not only cultural expectations of the importance of class and character, but also the fundamental epistemological precepts of the positivistic pursuit of knowledge. What Arata calls the “*frisson*” of watching the master at work is the predominant allure of the stories (149), and is perhaps more important than the (often ambiguous) solution of the crime. In his virtuosic performances of detection, Holmes is forcing the circumstances of the world into knowable shape, and he is abetted by his creator.

Thus far in this chapter I have tried to establish just how Sherlock Holmes functions as a liberal figuration of social discipline which is rational and scientific but also personal and highly individual. Holmes' interventions in police actions, as I will continue to demonstrate, consistently critique the abilities and resources of the police, specifically the detective branch of the police, as being inadequate to the task of solving crimes in the way that Sherlock Holmes is able to do. Their inadequacy is characterized

by bureaucratic infighting, a lack of observational talent, a commitment to simple solutions, and a general incuriosity about the world. Taken together, these flaws suggest that it is too much of a focus on typical, low level crime (which is not treated in the stories) and the inertial momentum of the institution which conspire to prevent these policemen from becoming detectives in the mold of Holmes. The pressures of their work, which they are bound to in a way that Holmes is not bound to his, stops them from knitting together the fabric of life in a reassuring display of material mastery. Quoting an 1864 edition of *The Saturday Night Review*, Haia Shpayer-Makov notes that rather than being tasked with long-running investigations, police detectives “[m]ostly...gathered information and coped with petty crime,” duties for which “little ‘ingenuity’, ‘extraordinary genius’, or formal knowledge was necessary” (*Ascent*, 74). Whereas the policemen are tasked with catching thieves and fraudsters, Holmes reinforces an epistemology grounded in “the positivist belief in science as the answer to the social question” (Leps 195). The police detectives appear to have a reasonably good record in prosecuting the quotidian aspects of their work: in *A Study in Scarlet*, the newspapers are “glad to learn” of Lestrade and Gregson's engagement in the case, and they “confidently [anticipate] that these well-known officers will speedily throw light upon the matter” (60). The press is even more glowing in its report that “Mr. Lestrade, one of the very smartest of our detective officers” is in charge of the case in “The Adventure of the Cardboard Box” (19). Occurring early in the career of Holmes, and so not solely attributable to his influence, the reputations of Lestrade and Gregson seem to be built upon solid police

work. Routine competence flounders in these texts because they are more about Holmes' virtuosity as a producer and manager of knowledge; the praise from the press of the police only shows how truly individual he supposed to be is in his understanding of the world.

Part of Sherlock Holmes' mastery, such as it is, stems from his disinterest: he is purely motivated by the chance to perform “brain-work” and exert his powers upon the “commonplace” world, and in so doing, rise above it (*SF* 11). Holmes is incorruptible insofar as he has no apparent desire or need for money, which could potentially compromise him as an agent of truth. The police detectives, though they never take bribes or anything of the sort, are compromised in their commitment to the dictates of the institution, which prizes simple, quick resolutions to the crimes which beset British society. In *A Study in Scarlet*, Lestrade and Gregson are at odds in their attempts to solve the case first and “pocket all the credit” (28), and the competition between them leads each down wrong paths as they seek the murderer of Enoch Drebber. Holmes introduces them together in a disparaging comment on the nature of Scotland Yard, headquarters of the CID:

Gregson is the smartest of the Scotland Yarders...he and Lestrade are the pick of a bad lot. They are both quick and energetic, but conventional – shockingly so. They have their knives into one another, too. They are as jealous as a pair of professional beauties. There will be some fun over this case if they are both put upon the scent. (28)

Holmes' contempt for the detective division is palpable, and the comments about the mutual jealousy of the two policemen and their professional rivalry speak to the pressures of the professional organization, where publicized achievement is rated more highly than actual competence. When Holmes and Watson arrive at the scene of the murder, Gregson evades responsibility for the trampling of muddy footprints, stating that he had relied upon Mr. Lestrade to protect the evidence outside (31). Their rivalry continues, with Lestrade “[scoring] a point” upon Gregson in his discovery of the word “RACHE” written in blood upon the wall (36). Both detectives charge off following different leads, and come to different but similarly inaccurate conclusions. Their respective wild-goose chases function as a criticism of the futility and redundancy of an institution which sets its workers against each other, but also as a criticism of the conventionality of the institution itself. Gregson believes that Arthur Charpentier killed Drebbler, after the man violated his sister at the boarding house at which Drebbler was staying; Lestrade follows up on Stangerson, Drebbler's erstwhile secretary, only to find him murdered. Charpentier followed Drebbler into the night with a heavy stick and Stangerson was nowhere to be found following the murder: either man being the murderer seems like a possibility, but Holmes can barely suppress his contempt for the policemen: “[i]t's quite exciting,' said Sherlock Holmes, with a yawn. 'What happened next?'" (68). In contrast to their banal police methods, Holmes is able to parse footprints which the police casually obliterated (31); recognize “RACHE” as German for revenge (even though this clue is a red herring) (39); and extrapolate that the culprit was “ruddy-faced” from blood on the floor (159).

Holmes clues are never so concrete as he suggests; he has an intuitive grasp of their true meaning which excludes false interpretation. As Jann points out, Doyle positions Holmes as a master of the multifarious minutiae of everyday life, and shows the workmanlike methods of Gregson and Lestrade, reasonable as they may be, to be wanting.

The most egregious example of bureaucratic incompetence in Conan Doyle's work appears in "The Adventure of the Greek Interpreter" (1893), one of the darkest of the Holmes stories. In this text, Sherlock's brother Mycroft, a man of retiring habits, puts Holmes on to the scent of a mystery involving Mr. Melas, a Greek linguist. Melas had been brought to a house where conspirators were trying to have another Greek man, Kratides, whom they had been starving, sign over some property. Upon meeting Sherlock, Melas protests that "I do not believe that the police credit me – on my word I do not... [j]ust because they have never heard of it before, they think that such a thing cannot be" (112). After relating the story to Sherlock, Melas is kidnapped and taken back to the house, where the conspirators lock the two Greek men in a room suffused with charcoal smoke. Mycroft, Sherlock, and Watson are unfortunately delayed in following Melas when they stop at Scotland Yard and must wait "more than an hour before [they] could get Inspector Gregson and comply with the legal formalities which would enable [them] to enter the house" (118). They are just too late for Kratides, but Watson succeeds in drawing Melas "back from the dark valley in which all paths meet" (119). This scene explicitly links one of the most violent images in the Holmes texts with bureaucratic bumbling, as two bound men lay suffocating in an infernally dim room filled with dark

smoke while forms were being filled out. The involvement of the police almost leads to two deaths, rather than one, and Gregson disappears from the story after his performance of police blundering, both criminals having escaped. Holmes and Mycroft, who is lent an obscure authority by his work at Whitehall and his detective abilities in the mold of Holmes,³ are empowered in the story to protect the interpreter and the other Greek but are almost foiled by their formal recourse to the law.

The other failure of the police in these stories manifests a strong class bias. As Shpayer-Makov writes, the Metropolitan Police was among the first public institutions to focus on merit-based testing and professional advancement (*Making* 74). As detectives were selected from the uniformed ranks (Shpayer-Makov, “Shedding the Uniform” 146), they would have been assumed to come from the labouring classes from which most police officers were recruited and advanced on ostensibly strict meritocratic grounds.⁴ There are not many constables in the Holmes stories, besides those silently on guard outside of crime scenes, but one who does manage to speak does so in direct contrast to the rational logic of Holmes. After investigating the first murder scene in *A Study in Scarlet*, Holmes and Watson travel to the home of John Rance, the constable who found the body. Rance lives in Audley Court, which is “not an attractive locality...a narrow passage led us into a quadrangle paved with flags and lined with sordid dwellings” (45). Rance speaks in a Cockney dialect, and is initially irritable at being woken, until Holmes

3 Mycroft Holmes' powers are even more advanced in his second and final appearance in “The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans,” where he is figured as a kind of human computer working for the British government, but this story was published much later in 1908.

4 See chapter 3 for a more detailed discussion of Shpayer-Makov's work on the recruiting practices of the Metropolitan Police.

offers him a half-sovereign, at which point Rance declares that he would “be most happy to to tell [Holmes] anything” (45). Rance is not “afeard of anything on this side o' the grave” (46), but when Holmes accurately describes his movements outside the house he stares at the detective with “utmost amazement” (46); he looks at Holmes with “a frightened face and suspicion in his eyes” when told of his actions once inside the house (47). Rance and his colleague then see Jefferson Hope, the murderer, outside the house but think that he is a drunk, a lapse for which Holmes castigates him: “I am afraid, Rance, that you will never rise in the force. That head of yours should be for use as well as ornament” (48). The text recognizes the constable as a labourer rather than a professional, with his dialect and relative poverty, and his actions frustrate the investigation. His incredulity when faced with Holmes' knowledge of the scene borders on superstitious and emphasizes the gap between police methodology and Holmes' own.

Constables like Rance make up the pool from which police detectives are taken, and though this fact is not explicated in the texts, it is a part of the discourse surrounding crime and crime prevention. Up until the First World War, most of the London constabulary still came from provincial areas and had backgrounds in manual labour (Shpayer-Makov, *Making* 51). Shpayer-Makov cites several contemporary police sources who in fact privilege working-class men as being more able to perform the expected duties of detectives, whatever their deficiencies in the more administrative aspects of their job (*Ascent* 78). As the Ripper murders panicked London in 1888, however, an alternate image of the detective as a gentleman specialist took shape. In its September 12, 1888

edition, the *Daily Telegraph* outlined its ideal image of the kind of detective suited to investigate this new type of crime:

The official whom we really require, and who should be found at whatever outlay of expense or trouble, as a Director of Criminal Investigations, should certainly not be a soldier; he should be a civilian, a gentleman, if not a lawyer at least the possessor of extended legal training, a linguist, widely travelled, a man of the world, courageous, inventive, cool-headed, and indefatigable. (qtd. in Leps, 192)

Large-scale and extended investigations of the type focused on these murders needed men suited to managerial and technical work, and the best candidates seemed to be gentlemen in light of the department's failure to catch the Ripper.⁵ Class presides here as well:

Shpayer-Makov writes that “advocates” of external recruitment “defined the occupation of detection as necessitating a middle- or upper-middle-class upbringing and formal education” and quotes one journalist's view that a detective should combine the abilities of a barrister, a doctor, and a chess player (79). Sherlock Holmes, of course, possesses these virtues in abundance, as opposed to his hapless counterparts at Scotland Yard.

Foremost among these counterparts is perhaps Mr. Lestrade, the best known and eventually most successful of the police detectives. Facts about Lestrade's life are thin on the ground, but in a telling detail in *A Study in Scarlet*, after the apprehension of Hope, it is Lestrade who capably drives Hope's cab back to Scotland Yard, which perhaps speaks to a history of manual labour. In the early stories Lestrade is forever waiting for Holmes,

⁵ In actuality, the department's experiments with external detective recruitment in the late-nineteenth century were largely unsuccessful and it adhered to a policy of internal recruitment through the First World War. See Shpayer-Makov, *Ascent*, pp. 65-73.

unable to parse the obscurities of a given case: Lestrade, “[a] lean, ferret-like man, furtive and sly-looking, was waiting for us upon the platform” (BVM 48); “Lestrade, as wiry, as dapper, and as ferret-like as ever, was waiting for us at the station” (ACB 19). I quote these examples both to emphasize their repetition of the necessity of waiting but also because of their description of Lestrade. The rigours of serial publication aside, which perhaps lead to a redundancy of description, the focus is on Lestrade's animal quality, cunning but unintelligent: Holmes refers to him variously as “obtuse” and “that imbecile Lestrade” (ACB 25; BVM 55). Lestrade is also “tenacious as a bulldog when he once understands what he has to do” (ACB 23), quite the opposite of Holmes, who Watson imagines as “a pure-blooded, well-trained foxhound” as the detective is investigating a crime scene (SS 38). These animal metaphors, which persist throughout the stories, class the detectives, police and private, and comment upon their attitude to their work. Where Holmes is bred and trained for the job,⁶ Lestrade is a work animal, generally competent but lacking in imagination and initiative. Lestrade's conflicts with Holmes also rehearse class conflicts as he consistently denigrates Holmes' methods as armchair work, where his are based on experiential knowledge. After finding “RACHE” written upon the wall in *A Study in Scarlet*, he exuberantly declares that Holmes “may be very smart and clever, but the old hound [Lestrade] is the best, when's all's said and done” (37). In “The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor” (1892), Lestrade, after dredging the river and finding evidence of violence, rejects Holmes' abstruse judgment of the items, exhorting Holmes and Watson

6 In “The Adventure of the Greek Interpreter” Holmes informs Watson of the “[a]rt in the blood” which he and Mycroft share and to which he partially credits his abilities (109).

that he believes in “hard work, and not in sitting by the fire spinning fine stories” (135). These sorts of remarks gesture toward discourses surrounding professionalism and work in the latter half of the nineteenth century, where middle class 'white-collar' workers had to defend the legitimacy of their employment against accusations of parasitism and uselessness.⁷ Holmes embodies the mastery which these specialists sought to accrue to their positions: the crimes in which the consulting detective intervenes baffle the police workers with the sheer volume of information necessary to make sense of them.

Ultimately, Lestrade learns from Sherlock Holmes, inasmuch as he learns to trust Holmes' heightened instincts rather than his own experience. In the later stories “The Adventure of the Empty House” (1903) and “The Adventure of the Norwood Builder” (1903), Inspector Lestrade evinces a more complex relation to Holmes borne out of a longer acquaintance. In the former story, Holmes organizes the baiting of Colonel Sebastian Moran, a famous hunter-turned-assassin, and relies on Lestrade to back up his plan. Lestrade follows Holmes' orders to the letter, going so far as to accept Holmes' recommendation of the charge against Moran (12). In the latter text, Lestrade fumbles a case badly but is saved by Holmes' intervention, and the police detective thanks Holmes effusively, stating “you have saved an innocent man's life, and you have prevented a very grave scandal” (29). These remarks differ greatly in tone from those he uttered in earlier stories, when he critiques Holmes' “deductions and inferences” and accuses the detective of “flying away after theories and fancies” (BVM 51). In both of these later stories

⁷ See Joyce's analysis of “The Man with the Twisted Lip,” in *Capital Offenses*, pp. 146-54, and Paula Reiter's “Doctors, Detectives, and the Professional Ideal: the Trial of Thomas Neill Cream and the Mastery of Sherlock Holmes.”

Holmes too has softened: he enthusiastically grants Lestrade the credit for both cases and specifically indicates how Lestrade's professional reputation will prosper (AEH 12; ANB 29). Under the patient tutelage of Sherlock Holmes, Inspector Lestrade does not learn his skills and talents; instead the police officer learns to submit his legal authority to a more symbolically powerful figure who possesses apparently “magical...control over an increasingly unknowable city and world” (Agathocleus 130).

Tanya Agathocleus writes that *A Study in Scarlet* “expends its formal energy... making the empirical a signpost for the spiritual” (130), and I would extend this analysis to much of the Holmes canon. Holmes' triumphs over the variegated crimes of his experience, and more tellingly, his continual rhetorical and professional triumphs over the beleaguered police, establish the detective as an exemplar of Victorian liberal authority. His epistemological domination of the space of the crimes in the stories combines a mystical ability, located in both blood and education, with an ostensible empiricism which the police, in their bureaucratic mediocrity, uniformly lack. Holmes, with a light touch, provides the necessary disinterested leadership which prevents the police from mistakenly arresting and jailing any number of citizens. The peripherality of the police in these texts also shifts the legalistic nature of crime to the periphery, and the texts become sites of performance for Holmes as he demonstrates his power over knowledge and through that knowledge his power over the officers of the state itself.

M.A. Thesis – J. Squires; McMaster University - English

“Where Men and Women Had Swarmed, and Bred, and Died”: Poverty, Place and the
Police in *A Child of the Jago*

Arthur Morrison's *A Child of the Jago* (1897) is remarkable in its unflinching, almost hyperbolic account of extreme poverty in the East End of London during the last years of the nineteenth century. The novel is tightly focalized on Dicky Perrott, the titular child, sometimes straying to examine members of his family or the priest who takes up residence in the slum. The result of this is a text which illustrates the gruesome realities of slum life ostensibly from within, the author's privileged and complicated access to the inhabitants conspiring with the cycles of poverty to create a world from which there is no escape. My interest in *A Child of the Jago* stems from its depiction of a populace rebellious to the imposition of outside norms and the attempts made, both in the novel and in the period more generally, to discipline this populace. The Old Jago, based on the Old Nichol slum on the boundary between Bethnal Green and Shoreditch (Maltz 15), is a space which Morrison shows to be virtually unpoliceable, with crushing poverty leading to ubiquitous criminality and a local culture at odds with the conventional morality of the time. The slum in this text is a place where morality, biology, and criminality intersect, and Morrison's ambiguous representation raises what were contemporary questions surrounding the hereditary impact of urban life. Pertinent among these was whether the cycles of poverty and crime were due to socialization or a deeper, and to the late Victorians, more sinister biological degeneracy which could spread from the slum like an

infection of the race. The attempts at disciplining the populace of the Old Jago, then, are interesting as they must achieve several objectives: first, and most obviously, they must allow for conventional law and order to penetrate the slum; second, they must minimize the Jago's existential and practical threat to the rest of the community; and third, and least explicitly, they must eradicate the conditions of perpetuation of that which threatens the community, which can extend to the built space itself. The police are central to all three of these objectives. Though they cannot control the slum in its own space, they are able to stop it breaching its borders, and are part of the eventual demolition of the slum itself. Beyond the police, moral agents, in the form of the East End Elevation Mission and Pansophical Institute and Father Sturt, attempt to normalize the behaviour of the Jagoites through instruction and example. These efforts are an almost unqualified failure and Morrison presents no viable alternative approach, positioning this novel not as a reformatory text but as an illustration of an insoluble social problem which arises out of the pressures of developing urbanization. The operation of *A Child of the Jago* upon its subject, however, threatens to reify the gloomily pessimistic and classist beliefs which Morrison points toward as the source of the poverty and crime in the irrecoverable chaos of the slum.

This chapter is an examination of the corrective practices engaged against the poor in this novel, in both the explicitly punitive and the morally 'elevating' forms, and the politics which proceed from these representations. Beginning with a historical overview of the discourse surrounding the poor in this period, the chapter will move into a

recapitulation of the contemporary history of the police: both histories illustrate in explicit terms the deep apprehension surrounding the effect of urban life on the biological and moral character of the population. The more recent criticism of *A Child of the Jago*, including the essays by Benvenuto, Henkle, Kijinski, and Swafford referenced in this study, tends to focus on Morrison's politics regarding the 'residuum' whose lives he documents, and his own personal views on what should be done to solve or mitigate the social problem of this residuum. While not separating the novel from the period and debates of which it was a part, I want to refocus on the text and the multitude of forces which impact the lives of its characters, rather than reading it as a narrative purely expressing Morrison's later beliefs about eugenics and segregation. My intention is not to refute or repudiate the presence of those beliefs in structuring the novel, but to provide an alternate heuristic approach which derives from within the culture Morrison attempts to construct. To that end, my reading of the text will concern itself with the space of the Old Jago, its culture, and the ways that the incursion of outside forces are perceived.

The poor and the problem of their propagation was the subject of many debates in Britain throughout the nineteenth century, and in particular its last quarter, after the vigorous industrialism of Northern England had irrevocably changed the character of the capital city. Gareth Stedman Jones, in *Outcast London*, his study of London labour in the later part of the century, notes that even as sustainable employment was being found throughout the country at remarkable rates as industry developed, there was a growing awareness of the people left behind. He writes that

[t]he most characteristic image of the working class was that of increasingly prosperous and cohesive communities bound together by the chapel, the friendly society, and the co-op. Pitted against the dominant climate of moral and material improvement however was a minority of the still unregenerate poor: those who had turned their backs on progress, or had been rejected by it. This group was variously referred to as 'the residuum'. After two and a half decades of rapid economic growth and an apparently substantial rise in the working class standard of living, chronic poverty was no longer thought of as the inevitable lot of the great majority of mankind, but rather as a residual enclave to be eradicated by progress. [Alfred] Marshall expressed the prevailing opinion when he characterized the “residuum” as “those who have a poor physique and a weak character – those who are limp in body and mind.” The problem was not structural but moral. The evil to be combated was not poverty but pauperism: pauperism with its attendant vices, drunkenness, improvidence, mendicancy, bad language, filthy habits, gambling, low amusements, and ignorance. (11)

This class was not thought of as the victims of progress, but as opposition to it, whether from laziness or from a degeneration of the stock caused by generations of urban existence, which expressed itself, depending on the interpreter, morally or biologically. The fact of London's decline as an industrial centre and the difficulties of permanent employment was not a general consideration. Jones shows that there was a substantial decrease in steady work in the central regions of London as industry shifted north and to

the periphery of the city: “[t]he years from 1870 to 1914 were, for this area [the East End], a period of steady economic decline...By the 1880s, the inner industrial perimeter, once the focal point of London manufacture, was fast becoming an industrial vacuum” (154). The impoverished were forced to rely on casual labour and home industry, which paid very little and often required an outlay of initial funds for materials.⁸ Flight to the suburbs by the middle class and the development of London as a shipping and commerce centre led to the creation in the centre of huge, virtually unpopulated areas of warehouses, docks, and offices, which hemmed in the remaining enclaves of the extremely poor (Jones 159).

Prior to the suburban exodus, earlier in the century London had undergone massive increases in trade and population, the latter almost quadrupling from 1820 to 1900 (Jones 160). This population was concentrated in the city centre before sophisticated transit systems made living farther from one's work possible, which led to skyrocketing housing costs as the city grew (Jones 160). High rents did not abate with widespread suburban housing, as much of the vacated areas were bought up in expansions of commerce districts (Jones 166). Civil “improvements,” the clearing of streets to discourage poverty and vice and to allow for the construction of various structures, from the Law Courts to viaducts to railways, displaced “not far short” of one hundred thousand people between 1830 and 1880 (Jones 169), which packed the still-extant residential areas

8 Morrison ironically castigates the home industry movement in his depiction of Hannah Perrott's struggle to manufacture sacks and matchboxes during Josh's imprisonment. The irregularity and insufficiency of the employment are foisted by the employer onto the consuming public as a popular failure to “Support Home Industry” which disallows him from offering steady, remunerative work (Morrison 127).

that much further. This kind of clearance constitutes a major sub-plot in *A Child of the Jago*, where the Old Jago is dismantled to make way first for a church and then for tenements for classes more wealthy than the Old Jago's inhabitants. Ultimately, writes Jones, the effect of so much displacement in so short a time was “disastrous,” leading to extreme overcrowding and increasing difficulty for poor workers to live within walking distance of their jobs (169).

The housing trends of the late nineteenth century, even as they expressed the newfound mobility of some of the working class, led to troubling social issues among those poor who were unable to move from the city. Unlike the roaring crowds of miscreants as they were portrayed in the 1840s, the poor were not dangerous because of their threatening numbers; instead, social Darwinism had provided a paradigm which imputed to their existence a threat bearing “cosmic significance” (Jones 130). The “casual poor,” the lowest stratum of the impoverished, were an existential threat to the “artisans and honest poor” whom the housing crisis had forced among them; these people were being forced “to share dwellings with the 'destructive classes', or the 'lower predatory class', as one member of the Metropolitan Board termed them” (Jones 225). The fear was that the influence of this “lower predatory class” would infect or drag down the honest labourers above them, and so undermine the productive capacity of the nation as a whole. The concept of urban degeneration, in which the conditions of city life negatively affected the biology of the poor, was not adequate to explain the actuality of London poverty: Jones writes that instead it provided “a mental landscape within which the middle class

could recognize and articulate their own anxieties about urban existence” (151). Stephen Arata pushes the political dimension of degeneration theory further when he states that it “was invariably put in the service of an empowered middle class. It was an effective means of “othering” large groups of people by marking them as deviant, criminal, psychotic, defective, simple, hysterical, diseased, primitive, regressive, or just dangerous” (17). Urban degeneration, then, was a theoretical explanation for the sociopolitical effects of the displacement and overcrowding which characterized the city of the London poor during the period. Moreover, these harsh conditions of habitation are themselves recruited as 'evidence' for the broader social and aesthetic theories of the period, like those of Nordau, alluded to in the introduction, or the criminal anthropology of Cesare Lombroso.

The organization of the police was also affected by the discourse surrounding urbanization, and the institutional expression of these ideas, while being relevant to this study, also provides some concrete examples of just how serious the effects of urbanization were understood to be. Haia Shpayer-Makov's *The Making of a Policeman* tracks the organization and internal labour politics of the Metropolitan Police from their formation in 1829 until 1914. Though the upper echelon of the force throughout this period was comprised of men of the upper class, the lower ranks were awarded on an ostensibly meritocratic basis in a mode which would eventually be taken up by the entire British civil service (Shpayer-Makov 30). However, the criteria for recruitment expressed dominant discourses of urban degeneration:

Although the Metropolitan Police operated in the largest city in Europe, curiously,

the most sought-after recruit was one with a rural background. This emphasis on the merits of rural origin, which was built into police ideology during the entire period, reflected reservations about London, and cities in general, held by society at large. As the nineteenth century wore on, a theory of hereditary urban degeneration became widely entrenched in Britain side by side with continued pride in the achievements and vigour of the country's rapidly developing industrial cities. London, specifically, became a symbol of physical, cultural and moral decline. (44)

The Metropolitan Police operated with an entrenched regard for the capacities of the rural recruit up until the outbreak of the First World War, and throughout the nineteenth century maintained remarkably high numbers of rural recruits, comprising up to 48% of the force in 1889 (51).⁹

The reasons for the preference of rural recruits were manifold, including physical characteristics, psychological make-up, and expected political values, as well as a negative attitude towards those elements as they were present in the stereotypical Londoner. The police establishment considered Londoners, and particularly cockneys, to be physically feeble, ill-suited to discipline, ironically possessed of “excessive” intelligence, and, most problematically, politicized (45, 48, 49). Rural labourers, on the other hand, were thought to be both physically impressive and without any “obstinacy” (47), and most vitally, without any troubling political sympathies towards socialism or

⁹ Rural in this case applying to men from agricultural districts; those from provincial cities made up another, smaller group.

trade unionism (49).¹⁰ The correlation of urban life with compromised biology and radical politics is vital here: the Metropolitan Police deliberately organized their ranks as a bulwark against the dissent and disobedience seen as inherent in city-dwellers. The rural recruits had two valuable traits: first, their lives in the countryside isolated them from the political disputes of London; and second, they were nonetheless working-class, which meant that they would not contribute to an image of inter-class conflict in the performance of their punitive duties. Shpayer-Makov identifies this recruitment strategy as being important to the maintenance of control of the disputatious city:

[t]he employment of working-class men to control their own social stratum principally, was part of an increasingly popular strategy in governing circles for avoiding the image of a tyrannical police removed from the population. Even though police action largely reflected the interests of property owners and those in power, in an age of growing working-class participation in the political arena this agent of the state could not afford to disregard the opinion of social groups not from the elite. (61)

The police function not only as agents of state power but are also, perhaps inevitably, caught up in the discursive regime which defined the poor as dangerous products of an enervated urban space.

So far I have provided historical context for the struggles and social rifts which Morrison's novel dramatizes. Before moving on to my reading of *A Child of the Jago*, I

¹⁰ Shpayer-Makov notes that no sort of collective representation was available to policemen until after the First World War, and they were unable to even vote nationally until the late nineteenth century (49).

will briefly discuss some of the more recent criticism of the novel. My specific interest here is in separating the text from the political positions of its author and complicating the interpretation of it as a replication of the attitudes of its time. This is not to say that these positions are meaningless; rather, I want to identify some of the way that the novel reconstructs the murky ambiguities of the social discourse on the plight of the poor.

Critics of the text, myself included, largely tend to locate the novel in its contemporary debate about the meaning and causes of extreme poverty in Britain after mass industrialization. Beginning with Henry Mayhew and Charles Dickens in the mid-century and continuing with researchers and reformers like Beatrice Webb and Charles Booth in the latter decades, cultural importance increasingly accrued to those who represented in literature and statistics the plight of the lower classes in the great towns.¹¹ Along with other technocratic developments in fields like medicine, law, and literary criticism, the period gave rise to a figure whom Arata identifies as the “professional reader,” a middle-class man with access to specialized knowledges and able to perform intensive hermeneutic work, across texts as diverse as literature, the city, the criminal body, or the scene of a crime (4). The possession of expert knowledge encourages a belief in the possessor as being able to provide a solution or a programme for the problem with which he is concerned. Morrison, in his preface to the third edition of *A Child of the Jago*, in which he responds to some criticisms of the novel, suggests that he possesses a specialized knowledge of the slum, though he is careful to position it as an object of

¹¹ Lauren Goodlad also points out that the professionalization of social work in the late-Victorian and Edwardian periods enabled a masculine “appropriation of women's long-evolving pastoral authority” in the application of charity as it became “well-paid, high-status employment” (237).

study.¹² He claims that “[f]or certain 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...In this experience I have seen and I have heard things that persons sitting in committee-rooms would call diabolical fable” (Morrison 7). Morrison represents himself as having an intimate, though vague, knowledge of the slum and all its inhabitants. As “observation is [his] trade” (8), he finds himself duty-bound to report on the “horrible places and horrible lives” he sees before him (6), the existence and “evils” of which are the responsibility of the community (7). As a writer, his task is to bring the place to “the apprehension of other” (7). Even if, as Kevin Swafford writes, “historically none of Morrison's East End narratives were read as blueprints for social solutions” (51), the “slum novel” carries within it the implicit critique of the conditions of life it narrates. Morrison's positioning of himself as the knowledgeable observer of Jago life, and the unsettling account he reports, suggests that a useful hermeneutic approach to the novel is figuring out what *his* position on the Jago is.

Richard Benvenuto reads the novel in terms of its tragic structure, identifying a closed cycle of violence which immobilizes the population of the Old Jago. He charts the trajectory of Josh Perrott's life in particular as a triumphant rise and dramatic fall in terms of the morality of the Jago, but a long slide into depravity and oblivion when judged by conventional moral values. The novel, for Benvenuto, is a cautionary example of the fatal incongruence between the way of life of the Jago and mainstream Victorian society.

¹² For a discussion of the professional necessity of Morrison's effacement of his working-class roots, see Maltz, 41-42.

Roger Henkle, in his article on *A Child of the Jago* and Gissing's *The Nether World*, also sees the Old Jago as a closed space, where the male slum population is “to a man unfulfilled, fated to frustration. Economic and social conditions force this upon them, but the inchoate natures of all the characters indicate that a full, mutually interdependent code of subject construction is absent” (305). Henkle reads the text, with its brutal violence and unrelenting misery, as “symbolic” rather than representative (306). In its total remove from the world of the middle-class reader, the novel presents a geographically located condition of “pathology—not a cultural phenomenon but a condition represented through symptoms of the body... This is less a medicalization of the social vision than an effort to convey, in a physiological metaphor, a particular sensation of social experience” (319). The “moral” of the novel, according to Henkle but applying to Benvenuto's reading as well, is that “any effort to get out of the Jago, whether by virtuous work or by crime, is doomed” (307). Both Benvenuto and Henkle read *A Child of the Jago* as a cry of despair, as a dehistoricized articulation of a problem that cannot be rationally confronted.

John Kijinski and Kevin Swafford, on the other hand, locate *A Child of the Jago* very specifically within the ethnographic, imperial, and aesthetic discourses of its time. Kijinski focuses upon the national/imperial unease which the concept of urban degeneration created, citing the public outcry in 1899 after many military recruits for the Boer War from London were found physically unfit for service (490). In “Ethnography in the East End: Native Customs and Colonial Solutions in *A Child of the Jago*,” Kijinski interprets the novel according to its ethnographic approach to its subjects: “Morrison,

however, as a novelist, creates a fictional world that becomes a living urban jungle and presents his middle-class readers living subjects—'natives' who are surprisingly human but who live within a series of cultural structures that fall outside [the] norms” of late-Victorian society at large (492). He cites the contemporary approach to ethnography, “systematic methods for describing 'exotic' populations,” and notes how central to this methodology is the importance of the observing expert (492). Kijinski writes that Morrison “equates the residents of the Jago with natives of a 'less advanced' culture,” and lists the ways that the residents of the Old Jago conform to a late-Victorian image of the indigenous inhabitants of so much of their empire: “Jagos are able to work only for short periods of time[;]...are unable to understand the laws of delayed gratification[;] and...live exclusively in the present” (498). He also identifies Father Sturt as the East End equivalent of a “skilled colonial administrator” in his dealings with and understanding of the residents of the Old Jago (498). While these parallels certainly exist, the novel cannot be explained fully as a relocation of the colonial experience to create a productive alienation of the Old Jago and its problems. Indeed, the ideological work that arises from ubiquitous comparisons during the period of English slums and colonial sites does not only function to other the inhabitants of the slums. As Pamela Gilbert points out, slums in the heart of London represented “the moral failures of the British nation in a way that a slum in Manchester...never could” (86). Rather than purely arising from the uncivilized behaviours and bodies of the poor, the “incursion of a 'tropical' geography with its imaginary entailments of darkness...[and] crowding” gestures toward the shadow which

the 'light of civilization' might inevitably cast (86). Without minimizing the text's reliance on a pseudo-ethnographic form which dehumanized and aggregated its subjects, this image of the 'colonial' slum constitutes a subversive statement on the effects of then-modern British capitalism and imperialism.

Swafford reads *A Child of the Jago* and its reconstruction of the worst elements of the slum as an example of displacement, whereby the social injustice that causes the conditions of the Old Jago transforms into the personal failings of the inhabitants themselves. Thinking through the representation of the Old Jago and its inhabitants as typically grotesque and deviant, he writes that “sweeping act[s] of sociocultural displacement, the ruling classes transformed material and social realities into acts of transgression” and that “the problem, one way or another, was to be found with the victims, and narratives such as Morrison's *A Child of the Jago* sought to affirm this belief” (51). The project of the novel, in Swafford's words, is the removal of the Old Jago “from the contingencies of history and the totality of the socio-cultural and economic sphere,” disassociating the conditions there from the liberal capitalism which gave rise to them (58). Morrison's “implicit social resolution” in the text is “the need for control and/or eradication of the slum environment through heavy-handed social intervention” (58). While I certainly agree that the text is complicit in the dehumanization of its characters' real-life counterparts, this reading ignores the attempts made to break free of the Old Jago and the forces which stymie those attempts. Ultimately, as I will discuss in more detail below, the “heavy-handed social intervention” which occurs in the text is

shown to be as fruitless as the more benign schemes for the rehabilitation of the Jago.

Morrison, as I have quoted him above, saw his purpose in writing *A Child of the Jago* as “bringing the conditions of this place within the apprehension of others” (5). He admits of no task, in his occupation as a writer of fiction, beyond alerting the public of the injustice for which “every member of the community...[is] responsible in his degree” (5). In this way he locates himself perhaps not as a social reformer, but as an activist seeking to disturb the privileged classes with his depiction of a profound social ill. As Kijinski notes above, Morrison employs an ethnographic register to illuminate a region and culture within the metropolis which he believes to be invisible to those living outside it. The project of the text, then, in a perhaps paternalistic manner, is to provide the political and spatial topography which allows the inhabitants of places like the Old Jago into the symbolic space of the city. It must forcefully delineate that space so that it may be understood in relation to the city. Simon Joyce elucidates the kind of discourse which froze out the inhabitants of the Old Jago:

[i]n the sense that nineteenth-century thinkers inherited a racial philosophy of history from Hegel, the Jagoites are outside of history entirely, occupying a prehistoric and primordial black hole that is both chronologically and geographically anterior to Western modernity. Such peoples could find no place, either, in the reinvigorated British State that begins to take shape in the early years of the twentieth century” (226).

The novel does replicate the timelessness of the Jago; fully enclosed, generations – personified by the protagonist Dicky Perrott – live and die totally separated from the outside world. However, the outside world encroaches: the ultimate eradication of the slum shows the transforming city of the late-nineteenth century, insensate to the howl of the Jago.

So space is very important to the novel: it begins with a crude map. This map is almost useless for either articulating the space of the slum or familiarizing it. As Diana Maltz points out, referring to the Old Nichol, the model for the Old Jago, “no formal map took into account the extraordinary maze of illegal sheds that had sprung up where back lots and middens, or refuse heaps, had been... These shanties created an intense labyrinth of narrow passages that only a knowing local could navigate” (15). The maze of the Jago is impressive; while Morrison uses his street-names whenever possible, he also shows the possibilities of irregular movement through the area:

Dicky...carried his way deviously toward home. Working through the parts beyond Jago Row, he fetched round into Honey Lane, so coming at New Jago Street from the farther side. Choosing one of the houses whose backs gave on Jago Court, he slipped through the passage and so, by the back yard, crawled through the broken fence into the court. (Morrison 46)

Later, when Dicky is pursued because of a theft, an anonymous Jago woman pulls him into her doorway and hides him behind her skirts, before he moves through her dwelling towards the Jago proper and safety (55). The slum, to those in the know, is a warren of

passages and byways, and as the woman's assistance suggests, navigation through it is predicated upon belonging and group identification, qualities which resist cartological delineation. In seeming contravention to Morrison's stated expertise, the map occludes rather than illuminates a spatial understanding of the area; it creates the illusion of knowability which his literary representation soon demolishes. Its important function, though, is to delineate the *outer* boundaries of the Jago, the bars of the cage.

The map balks too in the face of the sheer alien quality of the slum. The novel opens on a garish scene, where “the narrow street was all the blacker for a lurid sky; for there was a fire in a farther part of Shoreditch” (11). The boundaries of the space are fixed: “off Shoreditch High Street, a narrow passage, set across with posts, gave menacing entrance on Old Jago Street” (11); this penitentiary image is contrasted with the other extreme of the street, which is lost in the darkness of the quarter (11). People sleep on the pavement, for want of cooler air or lacking a room to sleep in, and this adds to the effect that the entire area is, in a way, without internal boundaries. The lack of separation between street and home is also implied in the lack of doors, which in the Jago are “used merely as firewood” (14). When the “foul old houses” are torn down later in the novel, the wreckers uncover “secret dens of a century of infamy...subterraneous basements where men and women had swarmed, bred, and died, like wolves in their lairs” (93). These conditions, beyond their poverty, reveal an understanding of urban inhabitation very much at odds with the sharp delineations of middle-class suburban homes, as satirized in contemporary books like George Grossmith's *Diary of a Nobody* (1892).

The descriptions of the slum possess a gothic quality of exaggeration, where the usually naturalist writing takes on a phantasmagoric quality to more incisively communicate what are essentially socioeconomic horrors of poverty and deprivation. The gothic register persists in the grotesque and bestial qualities of the denizens of the Jago, where they are compared to rats, wolves, or in one harrowing instance, a dog: “[s]prawled on her face in the foul road lay a writhing woman...and spread over [her], clutching her prey by hair and wrist, Sally Green hung on the nape like a terrier, jaws clenched, head shaking” (33). An earlier passage concerning this same Sally Green has her striding down the road clutching a bloody mass of hair while her victim goes to “[restore]” herself with gin (30). Here Morrison traffics in the troubling images that Swafford rightly suggests reify ideas about the 'savagery' of his subjects and the implicit superiority of his reading audience. Robert Mighall argues that both scientific and gothic discourses of Victorian Britain impose a temporal distance on “contextual anomalies” like slums in the world's preeminent metropolis, imputing atavism or primitiveness to that which is troublingly proximate (142). *A Child of the Jago*, however, concerns itself with stressing that spatial proximity, with revealing the poverty and despair which lurks just off a bustling commercial street. As I will continue to argue throughout the chapter, Morrison's novel conceptualizes a community hemmed in by hostile forces which seek to destroy or transform it without understanding its systemic determinants. The gothicism which haunts the novel does not perform the temporal disassociation which Mighall writes of, but serves to indicate as plangently as possible the human cost of isolation and deprivation.

Kelly Hurley posits that the “social explorers” of Victorian London, sociologists, reformers, and journalists, among others, construct in their prose disgusted yet fascinated descriptions of “the urban slum as an undifferentiated space...[which] resists and exceeds language” (162). These explorers, thwarted by the “inchoate mass” of the slum, produce affect instead of meaningfulness, offering the “dubious intense pleasures of the narrative of horror” (162). Morrison's text, certainly a “narrative of horror,” does produce meaningfulness in its insistence on social responsibility for the excesses of the Jago. In particular, it treats with profound sympathy Dicky's relationships with those even more vulnerable than himself, his younger sister and Jerry Gullen's donkey. In lingering over these moments, as when Dicky cries “O Looey, Looey! Can't you 'ear? Won't you never come to me no more?” over the “inconsiderable little corpse” of his sister, the text locates in Dicky a subjectivity which is available to redemption (73). Dicky's subsequent hardening owes a great deal to the fatalistic mentality which the environment impresses upon him: “[w]hat should he do now? His devilmost...Father Sturt talked of work, but who would give *him* work? And why do it, anyway?...No, he was a Jago and the world's enemy” (165). The purpose of Morrison's journey into the wilderness of the slum is to bear witness to this transformation and the factors which influence it. The gothic register does not function to homogenize and alienate the denizens of the slum, but gestures toward an inhumanity which is the only effective recourse in such a dire situation.

Indeed, it is the alien morality of the Jago which makes it such a difficult subject for rehabilitation. Morrison creates social norms which almost seem to be wholly

opposite to Victorian society: Hannah Perrott, Josh's wife,

was no favourite in the neighbourhood at any time. For one thing, her husband did not carry the cosh.¹³ Then she was an alien who had never entirely fallen into Jago ways; she had soon grown sluttish and dirty, but she was never drunk, she never quarrelled, she did not gossip freely. Also her husband beat her but rarely, and then not with a chair nor a poker. (32)

Here we see the intimate familiarity of inhabitants of the Jago with violence, even extending to marital relations.¹⁴ The Jago has its own rules which it abides by; in the faction fighting between the Ranns and the Learys in the early part of the book, chaotic as it is, both sides adhere to strict customs regarding the seriousness of weaponry, until one fighter, “at bay in his passageway,” strikes someone with a chisel, at which point, “knives happily legitimized...everybody was free to lay hold of whatever came handy” (29).

Foremost among the Jago tenets is one commandment: “thou shalt not nark” (34). This rule, simple as it is, exposes a host of implications regarding group identity, outsiders, and a firm conviction that the police, figures of the state, are not moral agents. Both the space of the Jago, as its inhabitants conceived of it, and its morality are predicated upon an understanding of the Jago as an enclosed space which is inimical to outside interference.

The population of the area and the area itself conspire to render it almost totally

13 Here Morrison is referring to the Jago practice of women luring men into the slum to be clubbed and robbed by male accomplices.

14 While Morrison uses a sensationalist, distancing register here to perhaps disingenuously communicate the extraordinary violence of the Jago, domestic 'cruelty' in Victorian Britain was hardly the reserve of the lower classes. Interestingly, the feminist Frances Power Cobbe, in her essay “Wife Torture in England” (1878), uses similar images of a colonial Other to express the position of women in British society as Morrison does for the poor. See Hamilton, “Making History with Frances Power Cobbe” (2001).

unpoliceable. However, fundamental to the project of a national police force is that no area be outside its control; besides this, the population of the slum must be understood as the more existential threat they posed in the middle-class imaginary of the time. The productive quality of the tightly-focused narrative perspective is that the police in the novel, as a faceless enemy of the Jago, reveal the ways in which they were servants of the middle and upper classes of the period. The police do not normally enter the Jago: “a peep now and again from a couple of policemen between the 'Posties' [the boundary with Shoreditch High Street] was all the supervision the Jago had” (34). The faction fight spills into the High Street however, and one man is murdered there, so the police must enter the Jago in force. This does not lead to any arrests and the show of force is mostly a strategy to protect the policemen, as “[n]othing would have pleased both Ranns and Learys better than to have knocked over two or three policemen, for kicking-practice; but there were too many for the sport” (34). The following day, the policemen still “[hold]” the Jago, as if they are an occupying force (36). When Father Sturt, as yet unknown to the people of the Jago, breaks up the attack on the Ropers, the combination of his middle-class dress and his heedlessness of the danger makes them think that he “might have the police at instant call” (48). The next incursion of the police, after the fight, is to escort the workers who begin the destruction of the slum (90). In the case of the Old Jago, then, the police function not as the representation of the state to its own people and preventers of crime, but as an occupying army whose direction comes vaguely from the propertied classes. Morrison pushes the compromise of the police even further, showing the High Mobsman

whom Josh robs, that “respectable sufferer,” calling for the police after the burglary (117). Though this man is a active leader of organized crime, legally he leads a “blameless existence” (117), and his wealth and standing mean that the police reaction to Josh's crime is swift and decisive. This contrasts strongly with the total lack of police response to the robbery of the Ropers, a family the text is at pains to present as drearily but respectably working-class.

Besides the police, another form of discipline imposed upon the Jago is more explicitly moral, in the shape of reformatory projects. The first example of it in the text is satirical: the East End Elevation Mission and Pansophical Institute, modelled after Walter Besant's People's Palace, at which Morrison was employed before his writing career (Maltz 12). Joyce characterizes the People's Palace as “founded on the repression of two key aspects of London life: first, a long-standing radical tradition which periodically erupted in strikes and riots...and second, that region's image as the site of a generalized criminality, the home of a demoralized underclass who threatened to corrupt the social strata above them” (202). The “triumphs” of the institute are “known and appreciated far from East London, by people who knew less of that part than of Asia Minor. Indeed, they were chiefly appreciated by these” (19). The institute displayed “radiant abstractions” designed to develop the “Superior Person” (19). The young men who attended the elevating events there were of classes a few ranks above people from the Old Jago, and Morrison mentions men of higher classes yet who “came from afar, equipped with a foreign mode of thought and a proper ignorance of the world and the proportions of

things, as Missionaries” (20). Subscriptions come from many in the West End of London, for the elevation of the “degraded classes,” who, according to what the subscribers had read in “charity appeals” and “police-court and inquest reports,” believed the East End to be a “wilderness of slums” (20). The only role the staff of the institute plays in the narrative, and that unsuccessfully, is to prevent Dicky from obtaining entrance to it. The mission and the missionaries stand in for the ingenuous reader of Morrison's text, who believes the East End to be a vast urban jungle, apart from and requiring the intervention of the bearers of civilization. In *A Child of the Jago*, however, Morrison shows the slum to be a byproduct of capitalism and urban transformation, its inhabitants crushed together by the forces of commerce and social control. It is an isolated enclave, and while its deprivation and depravity are horrifying, part of the horror stems from the text's insistence on broad social responsibility for its situation. The distancing strategy of the institute, whereby the poor are supposed to be of another time and place and in need of education, conflicts with the position of the text, which, whatever its faults, never allows for social disavowal of the ills of the Jago.

Opposed to the institute is Father Sturt, practitioner of a muscular Christianity and an opponent of the “Sentimental-Cocksure” variety of the charitable (76). Based on Arthur Osborne Jay, Morrison's friend and his guide to the Old Nichol, Sturt has a highly developed understanding of the inhabitants of the Old Jago. Sturt organizes his church to suit the people of the quarter: his club offers boxing and dominoes, and his sermons are, in the perception of the Jagoites, “very easy to understand, [are] not oppressively

minatory, [and are] spoken with an intimate knowledge of themselves” (86). Sturt finds Dicky a job, and under his tutelage, Kiddo Cook becomes an exemplary image of Victorian small-entrepreneurship, with an expanding business and a marriage. However, as effective as Father Sturt is, his parish is one which requires more resources than he has available: even with his help,

the Jago was much as ever...among these he spent his life: preaching little, in the common sense, for that were but idle vanity in this place; but working, alleviating, growing into the Jago life, flinging scorn and ridicule on evil things...conscious that wherever he was not, iniquity flourished unreprieved; and oppressed by the remembrance that albeit the Jago death-rate ruled full four times that of all London beyond, still the Jago rats bred and bred their kind unhindered, multiplying apace and infecting the world. (77)

The language here, as with the surgeon later, is as brutal as anywhere in the text. However, Sturt's language here departs from the image of the Jago as portrayed in the novel. The Jago does *not* infect the world: its boundaries are strictly policed and no one escapes it, except in the manner of Kiddo Cook, who effectively renounces its behavioural and cultural expectations. Except by the priest's interference in housing and the subsequent dispersal of the Jagoites to other quarters, the denizens of the slum, shunned and isolated, are forced into cramped quarters and there visit their oppression on themselves. However much the narrator identifies with Sturt, the priest, along with the police, stands aligned with the force which ends up drastically exacerbating the misery of

the Jagoites: the clearance of the slum.

The first demolition in the Old Jago, that of the court which gives the place its name, is done under the auspices of Father Sturt to make way for his new church, and is performed under the protection of the police. Even after his first appearance, the populace of the Jago continue to connect Sturt's uncanny dominance over them to his shadowy connection to the police: “[h]is self-possession, his readiness, his unbending firmness, abashed and perplexed the Jagos, and his appearance just as the police had left could but convince them that he must have some mysterious and potent connection with the force” (57). Sturt's goal, in the construction of the church, is not only to bring religion into the Jago, but also has a goal in the diminution of the slum itself: “at a stroke he would establish this habitation [a comprehensive sanitary structure abutting the church] *and* wipe out the blackest spot in the Jago” (my emphasis, 76). The church buildings will provide moral education and the resources to sustain it, as well as the reduction of the problematic space itself. The denizens of the Jago perceive the demolition of Jago Court as a “grave social danger,” as many of the social events of the Jago take place there, and what is more, it is the court which provides sanctuary from the police (88). After Sturt begins construction, the County Council begins buying up houses and demolishing them to make way for “big barrack buildings” (135). Peter Miles notes that men like Walter Besant and Charles Booth decried such constructions, calling them unsightly and inaccessible to the people whom they were displacing (note to Morrison 135). For all his greater understanding of the Jago, Sturt acts much like the missionaries satirized at the

beginning of the novel, as his philanthropic establishment is utterly incongruent with the needs of the indigent population. Sturt, then, however benignly, begins the process of displacing the people of the Jago, a process which carries connotations of both the moral uplifting of the slum as well as the shadowy presence of the police.

The narrator indicates the useless enterprise of clearing the slum, noting, perhaps ironically, that though the rents “very little more than double” what the Jagoites had been paying, none lived in the new tenements (141). This is in line with Jones's historical account of slum clearance, where he writes that “[c]ontrary to the official view those displaced did not generally disperse to more healthy areas, but clung obstinately, regardless of discomfort to themselves, to the immediate neighbourhood, or at least within walking distance of it” (170). In the text, this leads to a new Jago appearing around its old location, as “teeming and villainous as the one displaced” (141). However, the basic culture of the Jago is disturbed, wrenched out of the alleys and spaces in which it is very specifically located. Josh's flight from the murder of Aaron Weech is doomed not because of the immorality of the act, which is ambiguous, but because the environment in which he would hide himself has become categorically different.

The figure of Weech, the fence, contributes to the ultimate ambiguity that the text maintains towards its subjects. Neither of the Jago or other to it, Weech leeches off of and encourages the criminal pursuits of Dicky and the other Jagoites, ruining Dicky's chances of getting honest work and damning him to the tragedy of the Jago. It is Weech who informs on Josh, an act counter to the idiosyncratic code of the Jago, and gets him sent to

prison. Weech's murder, while brutal, is not narratively presented as unjustified; while the police are running to the scene, Josh slashes at Weech, asking him, “You'll cheat me when ye can, an' when ye can't you'll put me five year in stir, eh?... You'll put down somethin' 'an'some at my break, will ye? An' you'll starve my wife an' kids all to bones an' teeth four year!” (150). Telling Weech that he knows that Weech cheated Dicky out of his job, Josh murders him (150). Weech's character throughout the book and these final charges show another side to the situation of the Jago, where the labour of the slum is dissipated and exploited by those with some measure of economic power.

Like they did for the High Mobsman, the police show readily at Weech's cries. During the burglary before the murder, Josh and his colleague hear the “slow step of a policeman without” (148); a sound which would certainly not have been heard earlier in the narrative, even on this margin of the Jago. When he escapes from the house, Josh is confronted with a “row of policemen” obstructing his path (151), another unlikely obstacle. Finally, pursued by police, he heads for Jago Row, remembering it as it had been, a warren of courts and alleys, and not as it has become, “an open waste of eighty yards square” (151). While he is hiding, the police canvas the neighbourhood and the Jagoites attempt their customary baffling of the police, but now to no avail (153). During Josh's trial much is made of the systematic recording of police whereabouts leading up to the pursuit, which corroborates the recognition of Josh in Weech's window by a policeman (155). The churning chaos that characterized the space of the Jago is gone, the warren of streets and passageways replaced by “an open waste of eighty yards square,

skirted by the straight streets and the yellow barracks, with the Board School standing dark among them” (151). The barracks here are the tenements which have replaced the old houses of the Jago, but calling them such emphasizes the invasive quality of the transformation of the area. The straight streets and the ominous Board School speak to the remapping happening to the slum, both physical and cultural, and it is this that ultimately allows the police to perform the careful recording of space and time necessary to their operation. The demolition of the Jago allows the entrance of police and also alienates the inhabitants from their space: in the words of Jerry Gullen, looking up at the new church and buildings, “[w]ot's the good o' livin' 'ere now?” (141).

Goodlad, in her discussion of Gissing's *The Nether World*, writes that that novel is a depiction of the “liberal constitutional order as seen from below. Policemen and prisons exist side by side with the squalid lodgings of the poor. But, apart from protecting property, the Victorian State can hardly be said to exist at all” (214). *A Child of the Jago* is the same. Private charities and religious figures appear in largely fruitless attempts to mitigate the suffering of the inhabitants of the slum, and the government appears solely in its punitive form. The novel, whether intentionally or not, illustrates the consequences of the flight from the city by the middle class and by industry, and of the massive organizational changes made to the city throughout the nineteenth century. The subjects of *A Child of the Jago* are bereft of anything approaching a social obligation on the part of property to provide for their welfare, and so develop a culture which adapts to those circumstances. The difficulty of the text is that as it evinces a considerable measure of

sympathy and even sometimes respect for its subjects, it also reifies the sociocultural stereotypes which led to the ostracism of their actual counterparts. In its portrayal of the modes by which the larger society seeks to discipline the Jago, the novel replicates the conditions of their severance from mainstream culture. Though this may be read in multiple ways, as with the critics I refer to above, as far as Morrison's and the text's political perspective on the problem of slums like the Jago, the novel is decisive in its vision of both the moral and institutional police of late-Victorian Britain as being deeply compromised.

“The Mysteriousness of Living Beings”: Modernity and Policing in a Fallen City

A Child of the Jago shows a seemingly insoluble social problem, bitter poverty and its individual consequences, and casts serious doubt on the ability of sociopolitical structures and institutions to come to grips with the inequality that creates this poverty. The novel itself is complicit in these compromised structures: while it manifests some sympathy for those trapped in the slum, Morrison also writes of the poor as a self-replicating and degenerating entity, as a people without hope or options who give free reign to what the text suggests are degenerate emotions and actions. However, as difficult as this problem is, as thoroughgoing as the discursive and structural resistance is to the political and economic determinants of poverty, Morrison writes from a position of certainty. He knows the territory about which he writes. The text offers no solutions, but its criticisms are plangent, extensive, and specific. Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent*, appearing ten years after Morrison's novel, allows for no such comfort: the text lacks all confidence in society to be able to realize, much less effectively grapple with, the sources of injustice and violence. The police in the novel are the most obvious examples of conventional society and its mores. Inspector Heat and the Assistant Commissioner both work efficiently to uncover the source of the central crime in the text, the attempted bombing of the Greenwich Observatory, and the Assistant Commissioner in particular penetrates to the heart of the *public* element of the event, which is the attempted manipulation of the English public by a foreign power. However, the substantial power of

the police, shown in the resources and efficacy they bring to bear on the case, cannot protect the nation from this public element. In contrast to the Sherlock Holmes stories, the police here have the basic occupational competence to complete their task. Their inadequacy, then, lies in two areas: the compromise forced upon their institution by the everyday requirements of bureaucracy and careerism; and the unknowability of the private sphere. Winnie's domestic murder of Verloc renders the entire affair unintelligible, as Verloc does not have the opportunity to publicly record the initiating factors of the bomb plot, and the complex causes of his and Winnie's deaths remain opaque. The city, with its teeming millions of individual lives, and more broadly, modern life with its alienating qualities, swallow up and absorb any human will to action – productive, destructive, or otherwise.¹⁵ This is the fundamental tension of the novel: not how is positive change to be effected, because that does not seem to be of any concern in the text, but rather what constitutes a genuine threat to the social order, and how should that order be protected?

The difference in narrative tone between this novel and the texts I have already covered corresponds to the change in aesthetic understanding and praxis which characterizes European high modernism. Where the focal texts of the previous chapters raise complex social questions, purposefully or otherwise, neither seems to bear the “sense of the world's disorder” in formal terms in the same way that *The Secret Agent*

15 For discussion of the text's hopeless attitude towards modernity, see Whitworth, “Inspector Heat Inspected: *The Secret Agent* and the Meanings of Entropy”; Sullivan, “Irony and Disorder: *The Secret Agent*”; and Jacques Berthoud's entry on *The Secret Agent* in the *Cambridge Companion to Joseph Conrad* (2004).

does (Wilde 18). The earlier texts do not question the possibility of knowledge itself: objective reality may be measured and understood, particularly by the figure of the expert, and the desires and motivations of other people are subject to a dissecting and interpretive gaze. Conrad's work, on the other hand, evinces a “broadly symbolist strain... [and] avails itself of indeterminacy and inconclusiveness” (Levenson 184). The characters and the city itself stand in metonymic relationship to modern life and the inadequacy of socio-economic determinants to explain human action. *The Secret Agent* muddies the distinction between public and private lives, showing the consequences of political actions expanding and contracting as they affect individual actors and the larger society. While this is not the space to rehearse a debate about the nature or definition of modernism, in the context of policing and social institutions more generally the link between aesthetic expression and lived experience is particularly fraught. We see, as the period wears on, desires for a more effective policing of certain geo-social sites (i.e., 'poor' bodies and spaces) uneasily juxtaposed with anxieties concerning the loyalties of the police as an institution and their increasing powers of surveillance and control.

The police classification of the crimes of the plot as a “domestic drama” ultimately demonstrates the limits of policing (Conrad 175). This phrase accomplishes two things: firstly, it relieves the police of the responsibility of prevention or foreknowledge, occurring as it does in the private sphere. Secondly, it organizes Winnie, Verloc, and Stevie into roles, imagining them as engaging in a routine performance; this inoculates the public sphere against the affective consequences of the crimes, occurring as

they do beyond an ostensible boundary which should be impenetrable to public entities like the police. The text, however, illustrates the profound instability of these boundaries. The knowledge production of the police, where criminals come into being through their conformity or lack thereof to a series of discourses and conventions of behaviour, cannot truly penetrate individual subjects and their relations to one another. Yet *The Secret Agent* demonstrates the imbrication of virtually unpreventable domestic crime with the affairs of the larger social body. Victorian ideology posits an essential individuality which is the basis for the liberty of the British subject, which Lauren Goodlad speaks of as “character”. As in the Sherlock Holmes stories and *A Child of the Jago*, the police come up against the hard limit of this individuality, and all of these texts express dismay at how quickly this antimaterialist conception returns to materiality in the form of the political.

The events of Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* are explicitly motivated by a Continental emissary's attempt to force the British people to refute what in the text is an aspect of their traditional national character. Mr. Vladimir, during his meeting with Verloc, grumbles that Britain “is absurd with its sentimental regard for individual liberty” (23). His intention is to make Britain fall into line with the more repressive practices of Continental police forces, particularly in regards to international anarchism, whose adherents commit outrages in Russia, Italy, France and elsewhere, but find safe haven in Britain. Vladimir's pronouncement, if ostentatious and stiff, rehearses the widespread British resistance to centralized policing throughout the nineteenth century. Newspapers, politicians, and writers envisioned centralized police as an element of a political turn to

autocracy, which through surveillance and infiltration compromised the individual liberty of thought and association which many Britons imagined as a pillar of their national character.¹⁶ The example of France, with its secret police and military *maréchausée*, as mentioned in the first chapter, was repugnant to contemporary British observers (Emsley *Policing* 150). Vladimir, by seeking to change police strategy, ultimately seeks to alter values which are vital to the British public's understanding of itself and its national project, whether or not they realistically obtain in the operation of social convention and expectation. Indeed, Conrad's depiction of the city as moribund and oppressive constitutes a profound rebuke of British libertarianism, predicated as it is on a certain freedom from the enervating effects of the social and economic environment. This approach is doomed to failure, but not because of the stalwart resistance of the British to foreign interference or anything so positive: the outrage fails to affect the public sphere in any particular way. Rather, it is the squalid mass of the city, the world of the novel, which resists all positive action. Any attempt at change – productive, destructive, or otherwise – runs up against its inexorable inertia and, rebuffed, dissipates into entropy.

While the entire book gasps within this grim, oppressive atmosphere, the actions of the officers of the police especially exemplify the tension between the need for action and the realization of its futility. In order to effectively discuss the police themselves, three major aspects of the text require analysis, all of which are bound up in each other:

¹⁶ “The radical *Weekly Dispatch* feared 'the exercise of the worst and most odious results attached to the gens d'armes system of our French neighbours – the practice of secret denunciations, the destruction of private confidence, the paralysing the energies of the people, and the facilitating of every kind of ministerial excess'” (Emsley *Policing* 59).

the novel's environment, its use of the family as a metric of social disrepair, and its politics with regards to its ostensibly political content – that is, anarchism. Following Stephen Bernstein and Robert Mighall, I suggest that the gothic nature of Conrad's London serves to alienate the space as at once atavistic and apocalyptic, inaccessible to human regulation as it exists outside human experience. The processes of modernity, as represented by the city, conspire “as forces whose slow seepage robs consciousness of its individuality” (Bernstein 297). Family, such as it is rendered here, illustrates the novel's resistance to Victorian-Edwardian social mores and that period's reliance on the family as, to use Wendy Moffat's phrase, a “bellwether of middle-class morality,” and of national self-representation (467). After a discussion of the ironic tone of the text and how it erodes and avoids a meaningful political position, I focus the remainder of this chapter on Conrad's representation of the police and their interactions with both the criminals of the text and with the city itself. *The Secret Agent*, more perhaps than Conrad's other works, is generally doubtful as to the value of human endeavour, but the specific example of the police speaks to the fallen nature of the modern state, where regulatory agencies take on their own momentum and serve themselves rather than a common good which existed in a distant – and perhaps never extant – past.

The Secret Agent is an urban novel. The narrative never leaves the claustal confines of the streets and alleys of London, and the sheer inorganic mass of the city is present in all the incidents of the plot. The inertial weight of it, the “enormity of cold,

black, wet, muddy, inhospitable accumulation of bricks, slates, and stones, things in themselves unlovely and unfriendly to man” (Conrad 45), squats behind every human impulse. As Mighall writes of the London of *Bleak House* (1853), “the Gothic worlds of slum or mansion, united by the labyrinth of legal and political fog and stagnation, can engulf all classes,” even those in the respectable middle classes who might heretofore have imagined gothic decay as dangerous only to those at the extreme ends of the British class hierarchy (76). In *Security, Territory, Population*, Foucault declares the necessity, as the sophistication of the state develops, of the capital to be representative of the sovereign territory itself: “the capital must be the ornament of the territory...[it] must also have a moral role, and diffuse throughout the territory all that is necessary to command people with regard to their conduct” (14). *The Secret Agent*, as personal and narrow as it is, relies on London as a representation of England more generally. From the charwoman Mrs. Neale to the august Sir Ethelred, the novel touches upon a broad sweep of the social classes of the city, and Vladimir's plot, in an abstract way, seeks to force a change in English character itself, from an individualistic inertia to an indifference to surveillance.

For all its looming importance, then, as the most important community in Britain economically and symbolically, the city seems more of a tomb. There are crowds in the novel, particularly toward the beginning: these crowds, however, are usually subdivided into small groups of vehicle passengers, as on Verloc's walk to the embassy (11); or, as characterized by the Professor, “numerous like locusts...thoughtless like a natural force, pushing on blind and orderly and absorbed” (65). And though these crowds do exist, the

overwhelming impression of the city in the text is one of emptiness. London is replete with depopulated spaces. The street of the embassy, in “its breadth, emptiness, and extent...had the majesty of inorganic nature, of matter that never dies” (11). The Professor meets Inspector Heat in an alley abutted by “low brick houses [that] had in their dusty windows the sightless, moribund look of incurable decay – empty shells awaiting demolition” (66). The Assistant Commissioner looks down into a “wet and empty” street which appears to have been “swept clear suddenly by a great flood” (80). These men are cut off from the society they seek either to defend or destroy. Avrom Fleishman reads the city in *The Secret Agent* as being “the spatial expression of its moral universe” (205), and indeed the vacancy of the city transforms throughout the novel, from Verloc's home, which bespeaks his complacency, to the Professor and the Assistant Commissioner's lonely streets. Such moral vacancy also gets expressed spatially in relation to Ossipon, who abandons Winnie after learning of her murder of Verloc. Subsequently, he is “seen that night in distant parts of the enormous town...seen crossing the streets without life and sound, or diminishing in the interminable straight perspectives of shadowy houses bordering empty roadways lined by strings of gas lamps” (238). Ossipon seems to become a Hyde-like figure, passing covertly through the night city with only the weird spectre of the narrator to see him. As the extremity of the novel's plot increases, so too does London become more spectral, more horrific.

This weirdness is vital to Conrad's depiction of London. Though the novel does operate at times in a naturalistic mode,¹⁷ its vision of the city veers into a gothic register.

17 Eagleton cites the novel as an example of naturalism pushed to such “self-parodic” extremes that it

Near the beginning of the novel, before Verloc has received his fateful assignment, he notices “against a window-pane the faint buzzing of a fly – his first fly of the year – heralding better than any number of swallows the approach of spring” (22). This gothic detail begins to make over London into a city of death, with spring ushered in by the “useless fussing” of a scavenger (22). Before that, in the morning as Verloc makes his way to the embassy, a “bloodshot” sun stares out over the city, covering “the roofs of houses,...the corners of walls...the very coats of the horses...the broad back of Mr. Verloc's overcoat” with “red, coppery gleams” and a “dull effect of rustiness” (10). The city is symbolically covered in blood, the buildings, horses, and particularly Mr. Verloc himself, in a grand gesture of foreshadowing. As with weird cityscapes referred to above, there exists in the novel a consistent image of the city as violent, empty, and moribund. These details are fairly subtle in comparison to Conrad's own conception of his setting during the composition of the novel, when

the vision of an enormous town presented itself, of a monstrous town more populous than some continents and in its man-made might as if indifferent to heaven's frowns and smiles; a cruel devourer of the world's light. There was room enough there to place any story, depth enough there for any passion, variety enough there for any setting, darkness enough to bury five millions of lives.

(“Author's Note,” 250)

London becomes a voracious monster, an abyss, and a crypt. Rather than a space of

questions the “mysterious, unmotivated, and opaque” form of subjectivity typical to naturalism and paradoxically aligns itself with the arid materialism of the anarchists (*Against the Grain*, 24-25).

community, in Bernstein's formulation the city is “a shadowy repository for the waste of modern anonymity” in which “the inhabitants are...figured as trapped in death-in-life existences, ghosts drifting through society's amoral structures” (286). The typical alienated subject of modernity, wrenched from organic community, separated from other, nearby subjects by vast gulfs of experience, surrounded by inorganic built space, is rendered into a gothic nightmare. The organizing structures of governance and citizenship are metonymically present as the gloomy bulk of the city; these structures, rather than supporting and empowering human community, instead force the subjects of the novel into spectral nonexistence.

The gothic mode does not operate here in its traditional fashion, where it exposes the porousness of social boundaries and the fragility of authority before retreating into a weak and ambivalent closure. Its subversions were perhaps more fully motivated by its revelatory nature, where the exposure of secret monstrosities or irrationalities served to consolidate and corroborate the presence of those anxieties, than any direct will to reveal social hypocrisy. The traditional Gothic “implicitly approved” a “mutual, controlling Protestantism” which stood against foreign modes of absolutism and Catholicism (Bernstein 300). In Bernstein's view *The Secret Agent* cannot muster even this weak reparative retreat because it shows the bourgeois family, in the traditional gothic novel the “locus of ideology and social control” (290), to be a failed institution in the support of social cohesion. Bernstein locates the corrosive affect of the novel in a consummation of “[t]he rot at the heart of the middle-class family” and “the inward radiation of gothic

darkness” from the haunted, deathly city (291). Insofar as larger Victorian and Edwardian society rested upon the family as a central metaphor and model of governance and civil society, then “the sickness of modern life” both gives rise to and is born out of “the febrile chaos of family life” (291). None of the families which populate this book, such as they are, are happy; but it is the example of the Verlocs which naturally provides much of the “artillery” for the novel's attack on family (Bernstein 290).

Winnie Verloc is the most troublingly complicated character in the novel. Though not ethically or socially responsible for the tragedy of Stevie's death, the text does cast her as *narratively* responsible, in that she, to provide for her family, must cast their collective lot with Verloc. But for her family, her “impotent mother, staggering on swollen legs,” and Stevie, “the unconscious presiding genius of all their toil,” she could have pursued the butcher's boy, “a fascinating companion for a voyage down the sparkling stream of life” (192); but of course he cannot provide for all three. Economic necessity forces her to choose Verloc, “indolent...but with gleams of infatuation in his heavy lidded eyes,” for his “barque seemed a roomy craft, and his taciturn magnanimity accepted as a matter of course the presence of passengers” (193). This reminiscence takes place at the moment of Winnie's realization of Stevie's death, and of Verloc's part in it. In the following paragraph, she remembers her last vision of Stevie, when he and Verloc were walking away from the shop: “[i]t was the last scene of an existence created by Mrs Verloc's genius; an existence foreign to all grace and charm, without beauty and almost without decency, but admirable in the continuity of feeling and tenacity of purpose” (193). There

is a pitilessness here, a vicious ironizing of the “supreme illusion of her life” when she imagines that they “[m]ight have been father and son” (193). As Wendy Moffat points out, Winnie embarks upon this marriage with Verloc in good faith, seeing it as an exchange without much in the way of personal feeling; her abusive childhood having taught her that “the myth of domestic sanctuary was false and dangerous” (476). Instead, marriage functions for Winnie as a “talisman of respectability” (Moffat 475). When it fails her in even her unambitious conception of it, it is as if “the sun [were] suddenly put out in the summer sky by the perfidy of a trusted providence” (194). Winnie’s “work” has been to provide for her brother in Verloc “as much of a father as poor Stevie ever had in his life” (148). This “effort” of hers, costing “not a few tears” (148), does not protect her brother, and indeed leads him to his death.

The marital relationship upon which Winnie unfortunately fastens her hopes is one characterized by silences and concealment. The event of the Verlocs' marriage is signalled in the text by a comment by Winnie about the fate of her mother's furniture (6); Verloc never takes his wife out but occupies his evenings mysteriously outside their home (6); the two conjugal scenes in the novel both end with Verloc's summary request to put out the light before he can share his troubling situation with her. As with Winnie's virtual blindness following the revelation of Verloc's involvement in Stevie's death, Conrad shows the bourgeois family to be a *source* of darkness, of occlusion, as it pretends to organize intersubjective bonds that are destabilized by the secret motives of its members. Conrad characterizes both Winnie and Verloc as impenetrable objects, most remarkable in

their inaccessibility: Winnie's displeasure is “made redoubtable by a diversity of dreadful silences” (121); Verloc's “intense meditation, like a sort of Chinese wall, isolate[s] him completely from the phenomena of this world of vain effort and illusory appearances” (123). My intent here is to show, beyond Winnie's failure to actualize the family structure she looks to as a source of stability, that the text implicates marriage itself as incapable of originating or nurturing profound intersubjective bonds, normally imagined as the basis for a family. Mark Wollaeger sees the desiccation of the family unit in *The Secret Agent* as being not so much a despairing image of the effect of modernity, but more a sardonic response to Victorian expectations: “the novel reveals no simple nostalgia for the formal and social proprieties of the Victorian era. Indeed, throwing a bomb into the family may be read as hostility toward the kind of novelistic order typically established in the Dickensian novel” (163). Similarly, Lauren Goodlad takes “selfless feminine domesticity” to be, for Dickens, “a seemingly irreproachable form of guidance,” imputing an “apolitical pastoral function” to the home as a generator of social morality (108). Conrad's novel makes the opposite statement. Marriage and the family categorically fail as models of intersubjectivity because of their transactional properties. The economic determinism of Winnie's marriage contaminates everything she tries to do afterward: her concession of her mother to a living grave and her complex reaction following Stevie's death show the depth to which she internalizes the economic realities which totally structure her life. Crucially, though, her murder of Verloc is not *explained* by these realities: the crime is instigated by the brutal “note of wooing” in his beckoning to her (207). It is the

compacted and overlaid complexities of this man's insensitivity, her sacrifices, her history, and her shock which lead her to killing him. As I hope to show throughout this chapter, the difficulty of *The Secret Agent's* “social questions” lie in the way that social and economic realities structure but do not explicate subjective experience and action.

The Secret Agent begins with a description of Adolphe Verloc's shop, where this “seller of shady wares” offers pornography and anarchist literature in equal measure (5). The window of the “grimy brick house” shows the merchandise for sale:

photographs of more or less undressed dancing girls; nondescript packages in wrappers like patent medicines; closed yellow paper envelopes, very flimsy, and marked two-and-six in heavy black figures... a dingy blue china bowl, a casket of dark wood, bottles of marking ink, and rubber stamps; a few books, with titles hinting at impropriety; a few apparently old copies of obscure newspapers, badly printed, with titles like *The Torch*, *The Gong* – rousing titles. And the two gas jets inside the panes were always turned low, either for economy's sake or the sake of the customers. (3)

This passage illustrates several typical elements of the narration. The narrator, whom Herbert Schneidau describes as “simply the voice of a disembodied irony” (111, n. 9), touches lightly on the objects in the window, avoiding detailed description, as with the flimsy envelopes, the “heavy black figures” being the only indication of an elided sensuality or danger. The reason for lowered gas jets is indeterminate, an example of the

narrator's inconsistent application of omniscience, where the motivations of the characters, however banal, are unavailable or indistinct. The tawdry shop is a parody of a classic English stationer's: besides the ersatz patent medicines, the marking ink, purchased by customers when faced with Mrs. Verloc, is of exorbitant price and “[dropped] stealthily into the gutter” after escaping her perceived moralism (5). The imperial legacy of the china bowl, the “dark wood,” and the rubber in the stamps now seems tarnished, shopworn, and lifeless. The narrator reserves his most cutting remark, in this description, for the anarchist pamphlets on display, the dash before “rousing titles” flattening the phrase into a sardonic comment on what is later shown to be a thoroughly hypocritical politics.

The most salient aspect of this passage, as Brian Shaffer notes, is the connection it makes between anarchism and pornography, emphasizing Conrad's own contention that his anarchists are shams. To the Edwardian mind, writes Shaffer, both spheres are “figuratively or literally masturbatory” and attract “a morally dubious readership” (443). The creation of this equivalency immediately at the beginning of the book begins to emphasize the vulgar and self-serving motives of the anarchists, whose heroic, vainglorious ideals are muttered impotently in a dreary suburb. Shaffer links the consumption of pornography, where sexual encounters happen in an immaterial, ahistorical space, with the utopian dreams of the anarchists, which gesture “toward concreteness while remaining abstract and unspecific with regard to place, time, and history” (450). Anarchism, insofar as it is represented in the text by Michaelis, Karl

Yundt, and Ossipon, “is dependent on the status quo for its fuel – so dependent that the revolutionists do not actually seek to threaten it for fear they will threaten their own comfortable situations” (Shaffer 451). These three men especially are remarkable in their dependency. Michaelis subsists on the charity of “a very wealthy old lady” (33), Yundt is “nursed by a blear-eyed old woman” whom he has “tried more than once to shake off into the gutter” (42), and Ossipon relies upon “silly girls with savings-bank books” (42). The exploitation of these gendered relationships highlights the fundamental parasitism of these erstwhile revolutionists, and also underscores the conservative domestic values of the novel which views these men as emasculate or brutish. Men, *The Secret Agent* suggests, should be economically independent. Yundt and Ossipon in particular leech off the very labouring classes they purport to defend, while Michaelis merely lives in almost comic hypocrisy, depending on the largesse of the privileged class. Along with Verloc himself, this politically incoherent band of anarchists embodies a scathing indictment of the revolutionary class in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century.

The politics of *The Secret Agent* are not this simple, however. Geoffrey Galt Harpham writes that “Conrad at his greatest has no determinant position” (136). While Conrad does paint these anarchists in a deeply unflattering light, he does not necessarily extend that hostility to the tenets of anarchism itself, at least in general terms. Stevie, particularly during the journey to his mother's new lodgings, comes to something of a political awakening himself, one grounded in an innocent desire to end suffering. Avrom Fleishman figures Stevie as one of the “moral heroes of the novel” (196): a naïf “out of

touch with the practical realities of the world,” he nonetheless shows awareness of “the heart of its moral condition” and “its divergence from a lost ideal state” (196). Harpham is unable to “regard the moral intuitions of the mentally [impaired] as exemplary” (43), but I believe that Stevie possesses a materially transcendent quality of empathy.

Moreover, that empathic response to suffering mirrors the discourse of the anarchists themselves, though without their compromise and bluster.

The long, benighted cab ride, in which Stevie and Winnie deliver their mother to a poor almshouse for widows, “a place of training for the still more straitened circumstances of the grave” (Conrad 127), provides for Stevie a venue for his consideration of the concatenated oppressions under which the poor suffer. Besides Stevie's politicization, which is my primary focus here, what is unremarked in this long scene is the necessity the mother feels to remove herself from the presence of Verloc so that he will continue providing for their family: it is one of a long chain of compromises Winnie and her family feel the need to make to maintain an increasingly meaningless hold on Verloc's generosity. The horse and driver of the cab are an image of pain and desperation. The horse, “the steed of apocalyptic misery,” is emaciated, ancient, and moribund (Conrad 133). The driver, whom Stevie helplessly entreats not to whip the horse, whispers in an “extinct” voice and gestures with a “hooked iron contrivance” in place of a hand as he describes to Stevie his difficulty in providing for his “missus and four kids at 'ome” (124, 132). Stevie does not react to the violence of the driver against the horse by “turning vicious” (134), his usual recourse when confronted by pain. Rather,

he recognizes in the whip that exploitative and all-encompassing violence of the structures which keep both horse and driver in battle with one another for the gain of someone else. Stevie contemplates the horse and cab:

Jostled, but obstinate, he would remain there, trying to express the view newly opened to his sympathies of the human and equine misery in close association. But it was very difficult. “Poor brute, poor people!” was all he could repeat. It did not seem forcible enough, and he came to a stop with an angry splutter: “Shame!” Stevie was no master of phrases, and perhaps for that very reason his thoughts lacked clearness and precision. But he felt with greater completeness and some profundity. That little word contained all his sense of indignation and horror at one sort of wretchedness having to feed upon the anguish of the other – at the poor cabman beating the poor horse in the name, as it were, of his poor kids at home. And Stevie knew what it was to be beaten. He knew it from experience. It was a bad world. Bad! Bad! (136)

Stevie has developed a more nuanced view of suffering compared to when he used to shriek wordlessly at “the dramas of fallen horses...the national spectacle” (7); even his reaction to these scenes, however, shows an awareness of the performance of class and oppression. Certain individuals, themselves trampled on by the inhuman systems of capitalism, choose to delight in the pain of others, in this case animals, whose obvious suffering confirms the spectators' superiority. The badness of his “bad world for poor people” lies in the fact that the oppressed are forced to visit upon themselves the violence

which pains him so much (136). Economic conditions determine the relations between subjects. Stevie's recognition of the lack of agency of the poor in perpetuating their shared oppression is not so far from Karl Yundt's doctrinaire exclamations about the creation of criminals by the ruling elite:

Teeth and ears mark the criminal? Do they? And what about the law that marks him still better – the pretty branding instrument invented by the overfed to protect themselves against the hungry? Red-hot applications on their vile skins – hey? Can't you smell and hear from here the thick hide of the people burn and sizzle? That's how criminals are made for your Lombrosos to write their silly stuff about.

(38)

Though Stevie is hardly reciting Yundt's ideas, both men share an understanding of the economic conditions of capitalism (though Stevie would not call it as such) as leading to structural oppression. Here, then, Conrad offers up anarchist thought, diluted (or distilled) by its passage through Stevie's brain, as being founded upon basic empathy and a shared urge to ameliorate pain.

Sham though he may be, Yundt's sympathy for the criminal class and his understanding of the construction of that class attests to a serious consideration of the goals and originary ideas of anarchism within the text, which its often darkly comedic tone evades. That ideology is tied up, however, just as everything else is, in the tawdry equivocations and betrayals which modern life creates. My intention here is to show that unlike *A Child of the Jago*, and to a lesser extent the Holmes canon, *The Secret Agent* is

politically indeterminate and is less interested in representing a state of affairs – whether that be in the context of anarchism, say, or England's permeability – than it is in using this situation to explore the subjective experience of its characters. Of course, that very indeterminacy leads to its own politics, whereby a drab pessimism, inimical to change and idealism, naturalizes the systems and structures it locates itself within.

The relentlessly deflationary attitude of the novel toward any kind of idealism or positive action reaches twin apices in its treatment of public governance and intimate domesticity, the latter of which I have touched on above. The former sphere is addressed following the establishment of Winnie's mother at her new lodging. After being cast adrift by his newfound understanding of the inequity of the world, Stevie finds in the police a “consoling trust in the organized powers of the earth” (137). Contemplating the unjust arrangement he has uncovered, Stevie “confidently” and concisely asserts “[p]olice” as the understood solution to this difficult problem, a “benevolent institution for the suppression of evil” (137). Winnie's response to his queries about the police are demonstrative of the narrato-political strategy of the novel. Her laconic reply, stemming from a “dislike [of] controversy,” is still “not perhaps unnatural in the wife of...a votary of social revolution” (138): “[d]on't you know what the police are for, Stevie? They are there so that them as have nothing shouldn't take anything away from them who have” (138). Distractedly uttered while she is “exploring the perspective of the roadway for a bus of a certain colour” (138), it is difficult to know how serious of a statement this is. As will be discussed in the next portion of this chapter, the policemen of the novel *do* protect

property and their own interests above all others; however, its limp recitation and the knowledge of Verloc's own infidelity to revolutionary politics rob the line of any power. *The Secret Agent* resists the explanatory, generalizing dogma of the revolutionists, and while it exposes in the police the “duplicity” that Stevie darkly suspects, it cannot accept the idea of a rational social order which systematic, organized, class-based oppression implies.

The duplicity of the police rests in part on the assumed nature of the institution. The novel shows both of the major police characters engaging in criminally-coded behaviours, if not outright criminality, to support their conflicting interests in the resolution of the case. When the Assistant Commissioner decides to visit Verloc himself and undercut Chief Inspector Heat, his “descent into the street [is] like the descent into a slimy aquarium from which the water had been run off” (117). More is at play here than just environmental colour: the repetition of “descent” and the image of decay and death of an emptied aquarium imbue his action with a questionable moral character. Conrad describes his appearance, in the shabby street clothes he adopts for the task, as that of a “dark enthusiast” (117). This is an exact repetition of the description of the Professor's father, who was “a delicate dark enthusiast” and had been “an itinerant and rousing preacher of some obscure but rigid Christian sect – a man supremely confident in the privileges of his righteousness” (64). As we shall see, this troubling connection situates the Commissioner not as a seeker of light, in his position as a preventer of crime, but as an apostle of imperialism with all its attendant brutality and darkness. During his walk to

Brett Street, the Commissioner, spying a policeman, evades the constable as though “he were a member of the criminal classes” (120). The world transforms around him as a van and some horses become “something alive...a square-backed black monster blocking half the street” (120). The gothic qualities of his transformation into a plains-clothed sleuth indicate the boundaries which he is transgressing, between the legal and extralegal means by which he prosecutes the case.

The Chief Inspector's transformation is less uncanny than his superior's, but it still highlights the fragility of the boundaries between those who enforce the law and those who do not. Heat himself makes no real distinction:

he could understand the mind of a burglar, because...the mind and instincts of a burglar are of the same kind as the mind and instincts of a police officer...

Products of the same machine, one classed as useful and the other as noxious, they take the machine for granted in different ways, but with a seriousness essentially the same. (74)

After being “chucked out” of the case by the Assistant Commissioner, whom he feels does not have the requisite understanding of metropolitan policing, Heat calls on the Verlocs “in the character of a private citizen” (160). Disobeying an order from the Commissioner to halt work on the bombing, he disingenuously justifies his visit as seeking “relief out of doors” for his professional satisfaction, where “[n]othing prevented him paying a friendly call to Mr. Verloc” (160). On the way there, because of his standing as a notable policeman, he must take “especial pains to avoid all the police constables on

point and patrol duty” and is reduced to “manoeuvring in a way which in a member of the criminal classes would have been stigmatised as slinking” (160). As I will discuss further below, Heat imagines his work and the order he protects to be a game, inasmuch as a game is a situation where opposing sides confront one another in a structured environment with rules known to both sides; the Assistant Commissioner and the Professor threaten the equilibrium of the game. Rather than “suppressing evil,” Heat's commitment is to the protection of a system of institutions: his policing has no moral element.

Their stolid protection of institutions informs much of Conrad's critique of the police in *The Secret Agent*. The constabulary, which seem to swarm the otherwise-deserted streets in the first half of the novel, are focused on the protection of luxury, as is Verloc, the secret agent of police:

He surveyed through the park railings the evidences of the town's opulence and luxury with an approving eye. All these people had to be protected. Protection is the first necessity of opulence and luxury. They had to be protected; and their horses, carriages, houses, servants had to be protected; and the source of their wealth had to be protected in the heart of the city and the heart of the country. (10)

Though these are Verloc's musings, the behaviour of the policemen he sees during his visit to the embassy indicate a general agreement between himself and the police. The first constable, “looking a stranger to every emotion, as if he too were a part of inorganic matter, surging apparently out of a lamp-post, [takes] not the slightest notice of Mr

Verloc” (12). This policeman, as with the next, who “[watches] idly the gorgeous perambulator of a wealthy baby being wheeled in state across the Square” (19), is more a custodian of the wealthy, vulnerable districts of the city and is essentially unable to meet the very threat Verloc's visit to the Embassy presages. Later in the novel, after Winnie has killed Verloc, the policeman who takes notice of Winnie's flight desultorily checks the Brett Street shop “for form's sake,” as he and his colleagues had received “special instructions” regarding anything unusual occurring at the location (227). The detection of crime is superseded in this case by the needs of the police institution, which, as personified by Heat, is more interested in careerism and the satisfaction of arbitrary institutional goals.

The Chief Inspector envisions his work as the maintenance of society in the face of those elements which would destroy it, though his view takes in petty criminals as a necessary part of that society. After meeting with the Professor, Heat recalls with comfort his “authorised mission on this earth and the moral support of his kind. All the inhabitants of the immense town, the population of the whole country, and even the teeming millions struggling upon the planet, were with him – down to the very thieves and mendicants” (77). As far as he is police, he is the expression of a will to order. However, his actual behaviour indicates more of a focus on the preservation of the police institution as he perceives it. His initial reaction to the bombing displays the depth of his commitment to a certain form of institutional order and his privileging of criminal knowledge as the purview of the police:

First of all, the fact of the outrage being attempted less than a week after he had assured a high official that no outbreak of anarchist activity was to be apprehended was sufficiently annoying. If he ever thought himself safe to making a statement, it was then. He had made that statement with infinite satisfaction to himself, because it was clear that the high official had desired to hear that very thing. He had affirmed that nothing of the sort could even be thought of without the department being aware of it within twenty-four hours; and he had spoken thus in his consciousness of being the great expert of his department. He had even gone so far as to utter words which true wisdom would have kept back. But Chief Inspector Heat was not very wise—at least not truly so. True wisdom, which is not certain of anything in this world of contradictions, would have prevented him from attaining his present position. It would have alarmed his superiors, and done away with his chances of promotion. His promotion had been very rapid. (67)

This passage exemplifies Heat's internalization of his role as an “old departmental hand” (111). His “infinite satisfaction” comes from an awareness that he is perfectly fulfilling the role to which he has been assigned, though also coloured with personal ambition. His certitude and expertise are directly contrasted with his lack of “true wisdom,” the absence of which allows for his meteoric rise within the department.

Goodlad writes of the “unsettling qualities” of “mechanism [and] monstrosity” which colour late-Victorian and Edwardian conceptions of masterful individuals, where the more convincing the performance of mastery, the greater the suspicion of “Un-

Englishness” and decay (211). Heat shows the ugly effects of an institution 'acquiring sentience' in his perfect embodiment of institutional self-preservation. His priority throughout the text is the hiding, rather than the revelation of information, especially in relation to his superiors, and he contributes significantly to the epistemological darkness which stains Conrad's London. His ease of passage through the cramped streets of the metropolis, sometimes masquerading as a criminal, connects him to the “London labyrinth” which Linda Dryden calls a “physical manifestation of the double life that many metropolitan citizens were perceived to be leading, and its dark recesses and narrow passageways were suggestive of lurking horrors” (43). Heat *is* one of these horrors, a monstrous figure empowered with the full resources of the state unbound from any responsibility to serve the vulnerable. Instead he serves a self-generating and inhuman bureaucratic entity which, in the example of himself, the Assistant Commissioner, and the constabulary, seems more focused on the protection of the abstract, empty spaces of the city than the lives and liberties of its citizens.

In fact, Heat's dogged insistence in prosecuting the revolutionists is much more a means of building a reputation for himself and the institution he serves than it is a means of protecting the public safety, except in the very narrow way in which Heat imagines social order. Heat, no “metaphysician” (70), but a “purveyor of prisons by trade,” believes that “incarceration was the proper fate for every declared enemy of the law” (91). Enemies of the law, in this instance, are not the “thieves and mendicants” who break the law: catching thieves has “that quality of seriousness belonging to every form of open

sport where the best man wins under perfectly comprehensible rules” (77). Enemies of the law, in Heat's conception of them, are those like the Professor and the other revolutionists, who would do away with the current system of laws entirely; “[t]he mind of Chief Inspector Heat [is] inaccessible to ideas of revolt” (74). His hypocrisy in the execution of his duties as he perceives them is most evident in his interaction with the Professor, the only really dangerous anarchist in the novel and the one responsible for the manufacture of the bomb which kills Stevie.

The Professor revolts against the social order in the most totalizing way of any of the anarchists. He works for the “disintegration of the old morality” so that “the great edifice of legal conceptions sheltering the atrocious injustice of society” will collapse (59, 64). He makes himself and his methods known to the police, his will to self-annihilation and the explosive packet he always carries making “naked, inglorious heroism” the only means of his subduing (52). Upon meeting him in the deserted alley, with full knowledge of the bombing that morning, Heat summarily remarks, “I am not looking for you” (66). This is also Heat's first appearance in the novel, and his disavowal of his presumably basic obligation to protect the lives of civilians against a known bomb-maker contaminates all his subsequent actions. The Professor himself notes Heat's hesitation: “[y]ou'll never get me at so little cost to life and property, which you are paid to protect” (75). Heat's reaction is to assert his duty as an officer of the law to adhere to legal process in the apprehension of the Professor. This stated obligation contradicts his methods in pursuing Michaelis as responsible for the outrage: avoiding the messy complications of

apprehending the Professor, he prefers to shunt “this affair...off its obscure and inconvenient track, leading goodness knows where, into a quiet (and lawful) siding called Michaelis” (98). Rather than abiding by perfect legality, Heat imagines taking the Professor “in his own time, properly and effectively according to the rules of the game” (98). Fundamentally, the rules of the game are those which maintain the institutional stability of the police department. Terry Eagleton, however, sees in the bureaucratic rationalities that Heat espouses “the arbitrary game of bourgeois legality, in which police and criminal are reversible counters” (29). In Eagleton's view this constitutes a gesture towards an absolutist legality which attempts to acquire “the status of that greater self-validating game of fixed pieces and endlessly shifting positions which is the universe itself” (29). The stalemate between Heat and the Professor is a representation of the metaphysics of the novel itself, where the alienating processes of capitalism impose finality without resolution, “ending and non-ending, completion and unachievement” (29). Stalemate is, indeed, the condition of the novel. After all is done, the Professor walks the streets, Vladimir is still in the embassy, and the police remain in their positions, with only the trading of a few pawns, Stevie and the Verlocs, registering that anything has happened at all.

Rather than his investigation of Vladimir, the Assistant Commissioner is challenged most significantly by the institutional inertia most fully embodied by the Chief Inspector. That the Assistant Commissioner is ensnared by the rules of the department manifests most clearly in an image of him at his desk: Heat finds him “bent over a great

table bestrewn with papers, as if worshipping an enormous double inkstand of bronze and crystal. Speaking tubes resembling snakes were tied by the heads to the back of the Assistant Commissioner's wooden arm-chair, and their gaping mouths seemed ready to bite his elbows” (78). The Commissioner is caught in a double attitude of worship and sacrifice, entreating the household gods of bureaucracy even while they attempt to devour him. The text is replete with comments about the inertia and internal politics of the police. The Assistant Commissioner, who “really [has] some qualifications for his post,” complains “[h]ere I am stuck in a litter of paper...supposed to hold all the threads in my hands, and yet I can but hold what is put in my hand, and nothing else. And they can fasten the other ends of the threads where they please” (92). Heat's interference in the case arouses his “frustrated detective instinct” (Schneidau 124), which he productively employs upon Heat, his ostensible colleague in the investigation. The Commissioner repeats in his first interview with Sir Ethelred that Heat is “an old departmental hand” and that the Commissioner's prosecution of the case, in Heat's view, constitutes a perversion of the department's “morality” and an attack on its “efficiency” (111). Heat's contempt for his superior's high-minded interference is founded in part on a bureaucratic concern for data gathering and collation: the Chief Inspector, unlike the Commissioner, is no “ephemeral office phenomenon” (99), and the incrimination of Verloc and the Professor would “[lay] waste [to] fields of knowledge...disorganize the whole system of supervision; make no end of a row in the papers” (167). It is important that Verloc, in his role as an agent of the police, is unknown to the Commissioner: the cultivation of

knowledge is Heat's purview alone, and he believes “firmly that to know too much was not good for the department” (101). Fleishman articulates the conflict between the policemen as an extension of Conrad's view of society more generally: “[e]ven within the governmental apparatus, then, men are divided from one another in their common undertakings...If such mutual mystification is the law of life among the forces of legality, how unstable must be the basis of social order?” (191). The novel approaches this question from both sides at once, showing that lack of the unified community which is a predicate of policing, as well as a public sphere inundated with the conflicting private demands of its members. Indeed, the office squabbling of the two men leads to a lack of resolution in the case. Heat's covert visit to Verloc instigates that man's death, and with it any legal opportunity for establishing Vladimir as responsible for the bombing.

The Assistant Commissioner's compromise is not as total as Heat's, but his involvement in this particular case is marred by two aspects of his career, one professional and one social. Wendy Moffat posits that he is based upon Sir Robert Anderson, “one of the new breed of enlightened policemen” (471), responsible for the professionalization of the police force. However, his prior experience as a colonial officer most informs his conduct. The Assistant Commissioner began his career in a “tropical colony...tracking and breaking up certain nefarious secret societies amongst the natives” (79). The Assistant Commissioner's “police work” (79), as he labels it, is a figment of the same nature as Stevie's “benevolent institution”: a clear delineation is drawn between the targets of the police, who are inimical to civil society, and the populace, who rely upon

the police to locate and excise these malignant elements. This conception of his work mirrors contemporaneous procedures of criminology, where the criminal is essentially differentiated from the rest of the population rather than being understood as an extension of it. The Assistant Commissioner does not care for the kind of work he has had to do since coming to England, where he is entangled in bureaucracy and inaction; the work does not have “the saving character of an irregular sort of warfare or at least the risk and excitement of open-air sport” (90), as did his former duties. In the dreary, compromised world of London, the work of police loses the danger and violence which in themselves suggest the legitimacy of his pursuit: his mission in the “tropical colony” is justified by the nefariousness of his opposition. Back in the rainy metropolis, he finds himself “appalled” by the “futility of office work” and doubtful of “men's motives and of the efficiency of their organisation” (80). When Chief Inspector Heat begins to move against Michaelis and the other anarchists, the Commissioner is motivated in his own investigation in part by a felt necessity for marital harmony, as Michaelis is a favourite of a powerful friend of his wife, a sentiment the narrator characterizes as “extremely unbecoming his official position without being really creditable to his humanity” (89). The other aspect of his interest, however, is the thrill of the police work to which he is accustomed. When he learns of Heat's involvement with Verloc and the latter's involvement with the foreign embassy, he feels “[f]or the first time since he took up his appointment...as if he were going to do some real work for his salary. And that was a pleasurable sensation” (95). Real work, in this context, means a continuation of his job as

an enforcer of the national interest as it pertains to enemies of the British imperial project, whether at home or abroad. It is worth remembering the implications of the “dark enthusiasm” he shares with the Professor's sectarian father, and that man's narrow righteousness. Rather than shining light on the criminality he investigates, the Commissioner, following his imperial model, sets up criminals as enemies of the social order against which civilized society must defend itself. He is most motivated not by a desire to reform the police or solve the crime, but a desire for transplantation of colonial practices of othering and differentiation into the suddenly dangerous metropole.

This brings us finally to the ostensible antagonist of the novel, Vladimir, whose pronouncements upon the British character and the upheaval of the state seem to position him so villainously at the beginning of the novel. By the end, little has changed: neither the police nor the public have reformed their opinions of the cabals of revolutionists said to be hiding out in England. The international espionage plot has been supplanted by the “domestic drama”. Moffat reads this shift as a further destabilization, because as the “structural conventions of mystery bolster moral and psychological conventions about justice, criminality, motive, criminality, and the idea of a stable society, the collapse of the mystery has an unsettling effect” (470). In fact, the Assistant Commissioner's victory over Vladimir has only a symbolic effect: the ambassador is made unwelcome at the Explorer's Club. Verloc being dead, no criminal case can be made, and the embassy will continue to be outside “the limits of our territory” (180). Just as the Professor continues to walk the streets of London, Vladimir or someone like him will abide, both sheltered by the laws of

England in his position as a diplomat but essentially inaccessible to its laws and officers. The Assistant Commissioner succeeds, however, in symbolically removing foreign influence from the club whose name carries so much weight in regards to the British project of Empire. Vladimir's disingenuous exhortation for the British to become “good Europeans” is rejected as the Commissioner protects a form of British sovereignty which brooks no Continental interference in affairs of law or social order. Of course, like the anarchists, this too is a sham: the club, like Michaelis's lady patroness, is the true object of protection, symbolically sanitized even as the various agents of disorder in the novel proliferate.

The central disorder, of course, the most unconscionable rent which the novel tears in British national self-representation, is that which blights the family. Chapters XI and XII, describing the murder of Verloc, feature an intense magnification where the tenebrous bulk of the city is focused into the home and shop of a middle-class couple. Spurred by the revelation of Verloc's involvement in Stevie's death, Winnie kills Verloc after a lengthy scene, focalized mainly around Verloc, wherein the titular secret agent completely misunderstands the depth and nature of his wife's reaction to the news. He attempts to bind her back to him by falling back on the gentle imperatives of patriarchal domesticity, whether that is suggesting that all she needs is a “good cry” or patronizingly forbidding her from leaving the house at so late an hour (191, 202). However, Winnie, her mind filled with a gothic vision of a “rain-like fall of mangled limbs” overlaid with “the decapitated head of Stevie” (206), is now gripped by a profound freedom. Suddenly cut

loose from the skeins of economic responsibility and transaction which bind her to Verloc, her impulse towards murder is an expression of the emptiness which remains in place of an authentic subject once those concerns are stripped away. Mark Wollaeger connects Heat's close gaze into Stevie's remains on the morgue table with this moment in the narrative and Winnie's dictum that "things do not bear much looking into": "[t]he closer one looks 'into' things...the more one finds that 'inside' the shell of social, political, and familial conventions lurks one horror after another...the inside is less a sanctum than an emptiness guarded by repression" (144). Once freed, Winnie recognizes that "there was no need for her to stay there, in that kitchen...But neither could she see what there was to keep her in the world at all" (199). The revelation of the novel, then, is how the subject exists not within, but *because of* the ideologically interpellative mechanisms of economy and governance. The murder, and Winnie's subsequent suicide, make the novel less the international plot of spies, police, and revolutionists it first appears to be but rather a zero-sum game wherein the total destruction of a family does not and cannot register on the bulk of the capital, the historical causes of their deaths functionally unknown.

As opposed to others of Conrad's novels like *Nostromo* and *Lord Jim*, *The Secret Agent* never relents in the savagery of its alienation; no real community is even glimpsed in the fog-choked byways of the capital. Michael Levenson writes that "Conrad's exemplary modernity lay in his willingness to represent the human agon in its full post-religious, post-metaphysical, post-Darwinian bewilderment" (185). Before the famous

final image of the Professor stalking London's streets, the narration lingers over Ossipon's obsessive fascination with the newspaper account of Winnie Verloc's suicide: “[a]n *impenetrable mystery seems destined to hang for ever over this act of madness or despair*” (193). The mere discovery of Winnie's identity and the last incidents of her life would not have solved the mystery of her suicide, by the logic of the book. The reasons for her murder of Verloc and her subsequent death must go back to their unhappy marriage and its economic necessity, back to her mother's burden, back to the violence from which she tried to shield Stevie in childhood. A crime solved is not a crime understood, just an ignorance more easily borne. Both the petty bourgeois rationality and the revolutionary ideologies in the novel are demystifying forces, at least in theory: both presume to explain life as materially determined, quantifiable, and thus solvable. This is at great odds with the profound opacity which Conrad ascribes to his characters, where a concatenation of economic determinants and the mysteries of the human heart both create and occlude an understanding of the world. London itself seems an atavistic throwback to a murky, primordial past, oozing and amphibious. Part of what is so “*repellent*” about the city, to use Eagleton's phrase (25, emphasis in original), is its indestructibility, its transcendence of the humanity which has built it and a warped version of which it now perpetuates. The novel exposes a lack of community so profound as to be inaccessible to governance; the police, the “benevolent institution for the suppression of evil” (137), cannot do anything except maintain their social and institutional position.

Conclusion

I began this study from the supposition that the police, with their concretized power over the lives and bodies of citizens, offer some special insight into the operation of the state upon its subjects. The late-Victorian and Edwardian eras in Britain provide a fruitful zone for inquiry as a period of transition between the political ideologies of the individualistic liberalism of the mid-Victorian period and the “modern liberal interventionist state” which would characterize Britain in the twentieth century (Aslami 161). Zarena Aslami points to the literature of this historical moment, including works by Thomas Hardy and George Gissing, as showing the state to be the “dominant fantasmatic site of optimism for change” in personal and social terms, superseding mid-Victorian fantasies about culture and marriage as transformative institutions (19). Instead of the optimism that Aslami finds in her excavations of the affective response of late-Victorian subjects to their state, however, in all of the texts that I explore in this study I found an overwhelming skepticism and apprehension about the abilities and loyalties of the police as representatives of the state. The texts I have studied and those Aslami examines share an intense focus on the state as a transformative entity; where our studies differ is that in Arthur Conan Doyle's detective stories, *A Child of the Jago*, and *The Secret Agent* I find the state to be *reduced*, shorn down until it is represented an institution compromised by institutional and class loyalties. The state's transformative power takes on a sinister cast here in that it seems alien and remote from the subjects who ostensibly make up its

citizenry, and in its representation as the police may operate upon those subjects with seeming impunity. In both the Sherlock Holmes stories and *The Secret Agent* we see the contaminating effects of interdepartmental feuding, careerism, and the logic of the self-protective institution upon the ability of the police to fundamentally protect those who they ostensibly serve. In *A Child of the Jago*, the police are nameless, faceless foot soldiers of a regime which disrespects the sovereignty of the bodies and communities of its most vulnerable citizens.

Lauren Goodlad's use of Foucault's concept of pastorship has been vital in negotiating the social spaces which the texts of this study construct. As Goodlad writes, the British national paradigm of character, a starchy, self-abjuring commitment to both liberty and order, and the “moral worldview on which it was predicated were threatened...by the materialist underpinnings of a modern state” (xii). The pastoral alternatives to state control that Doyle, Morrison, and Conrad present constitute possible strategies for the maintenance of character, or at least individual freedom from the materialist ideology of the state. Alongside the concrete representation of the state in the form of the police, all three of these writers demonstrate the operation of Victorian pastorships. Doyle represents the necessity and power of disinterested, gentlemanly leadership in the sphere of criminal detection, where Sherlock Holmes manifests the epistemological authority which the police fundamentally lack. Father Sturt and the East End Elevation Mission, in Morrison's novel, attempt to improve the lives of the poor through character-building and a sternly moralizing charity. In *The Secret Agent*, Conrad

portrays the Victorian family, the social brick that supports the structure of the nation, as it encounters the alienating spaces of modern, capitalist society. In the latter two works, these pastoral strategies prove totally inadequate in the face of the atomizing topographies of the British metropolis. Though Doyle's work evinces a liberal triumphalism, with the consistent successes of Holmes over both crime *and* the police themselves, the consulting detective must be read as a compensatory figure who functions as much to suppress the socioeconomic determinants of most crime as he does to assert an epistemological superiority grounded in class and education. The texts I have been studying focus their productive and destructive energies not primarily on the means by which the state intervenes in the lives of its citizens but on discourses of social organization that occlude the presence of the state: disinterested liberal governance, private charity, and the family.

Indeed, much of the work of this thesis has been in reconciling the centrality of these modes of social formation and control and the relative peripherality of the police in these texts. The police *are* present, however. In the London of these texts, the police appear like nothing so much as an alien, invasive force, paying heed only to their own demands and the commands of a distant elite. If, as Robin Truth Goodman asserts, in fictions of policing the “performance of the police indicates how the identity of the state is formed as it exercises its symbolic power” (3), then in these fictions of *fin de siècle* Britain the identity of the state is characterized by concealment, clumsiness, and fundamentally, *inadequacy* in its ability to intervene in the lives of citizens productively. In *The Secret Agent*, Chief Inspector Heat remarks upon the “fields of knowledge” which

he in his expert position is called upon to construct and maintain (167). Inasmuch as the police are representatives of state power, their inadequacy as social custodians amounts to a failure on the part of the state to know its own citizens and, ultimately, a failure to be recognized by those citizens as an epistemological authority.

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