VICTORIAN EXCESSES:
THE POETICS AND POLITICS OF STREET LIFE IN LONDON

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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The Poetics and Politics of Street Life in London

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This dissertation claims Victorian writers depicted London's streets and public

spaces as visible and material analogues to the abstract workings of capitalism. Excess

and lack intermingle in Victorian representations of London's streets and the underclass

who inhabited them. These spaces served both as backdrop for representing and

reflecting conceptions of capitalist exchange and provided the possibility of such

representations. These chapters identify the internal economies of several literary texts

and demonstrate how these economies serve as metonyms for the marketplace. Rather

than being arranged according to principles of conservation or expenditure, these internal

economies demonstrate a system in which excesses and remainders are produced by and

serve to disrupt the system. Two categories of excess appeared in Victorian writing

about London's streets. The first, which is explored in chapters one and two, is excess as

residue or waste. Chapter one, which examines Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* and *Our

Mutual Friend*, positions the waste collector as a figure for the residue that haunts the

modern city and impedes both narrative and capitalist progress by reintroducing into the

capitalist system what it seeks to expel. The second chapter explores another kind of

residue: the residuum, a name that was used for the non-working poor. Arthur

Morrison's *A Child of the Jago* and Émile Zola's Parisian novel *L'Assommoir*, this

chapter argues, describe the non-working poor as a form of capitalist and thermodynamic

waste that threatens the system which creates it. The second kind of excess, which is the

concern of the final two chapters, is produced by consumption rather than labor and as

such is the surplus of capital accumulation and commodity culture. Chapter three

explores James Thomson's *City of Dreadful Night* and its articulation of urban time as

recursive. The poem develops a notion of time that in the process of looking backward—

in terms of both form and theme—creates excess by multiplying itself infinitely. The

final chapter identifies an economy of replication in two texts which combine the visual

and the verbal to depict London's crowds: Gustave Doré and Blanchard Jerrold's

London, A Pilgrimage and Jack London's *The People of the Abyss*. In these texts, the

city's celebratory crowds open up the possibility for the multiplication of meanings and

subject positions while simultaneously conveying a sense of pressure toward dissolution.

Acknowledgements

In memory of my mother, Kathleen

And for my father, Loren

Contents

List of Illustrations

Nothing succeeds like excess.

—Oscar Wilde, *A Woman of No Importance*

Unreal City,
Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,
A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many,
I had not thought death had undone so many.

—T. S. Eliot, *The Waste Land*

Introduction:
Victorian Excesses

The Victorians are remembered for they ways which they celebrated excess: expansive novels with unmotivated details and multiple plots, the excessive decoration and ornament of their interiors, and the monumental spectacles of the Great Exhibition and Victoria's Jubilees. Yet they are also often described in terms of their suspicions about excess and the ways they valorized prudence and restraint. For the Victorian middle class, the underclass served as a symbol of a variety of excesses, from mob violence to intemperance to overpopulation. This dissertation examines the ways that excess and lack intermingle in Victorian representations of the public spaces of London and the underclass who inhabited these spaces in order to argue that literary representations of the city imagine the city's streets and public spaces as visible and material analogues to the abstract workings of capitalism.

In *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798), Thomas Malthus had claimed that because human population always increases at a greater rate than production of subsistence there are checks to the growth of population in the form of misery and vice. Malthus argues that this limitation to population growth most often affects "the lowest orders of society. [. . .] [O]f the number of children who die annually, much too great a proportion belongs to those who may be supposed unable to give their offspring proper food and attention, exposed as they are occasionally to severe distress and confined, perhaps, to unwholesome habitations and hard labour" (36). For Malthus human suffering is a natural result of the tendency to overpopulate, and thus misery cannot be eliminated as long as the poor continue to have children whom they cannot support.

Malthus' theory of population was debated throughout the nineteenth century. Friedrich Engels notably called Malthus' theory "this vile and infamous doctrine, this repulsive blasphemy against man and nature [. . .] Now the consequence of this theory is that since it is precisely the poor who constitute this surplus population, nothing ought to be done for them, except to make it as easy as possible for them to starve to death; to convince them that this state of affairs cannot be altered and that there is no salvation for their entire class other than that they should propagate as little as possible" (*Marx and Engels on the Population Bomb* 59). While Engels is stunned by Malthus' callousness, he figures the poor in the same terms as Malthus: they constitute a "surplus," and at the same time, they are characterized in terms of what they lack.

The poor were not the only form of excess which became a central concern for Victorian writers and thinkers. The excesses of capitalism and of what was considered to be surplus population were figured as two sides of the same coin. As Marx explains in

Capital, unchecked accumulation is the capitalist's aim: "The circulation of money as capital is [. . .] an end in itself, for the valorization of value takes place only within this constantly renewed movement. The movement of capital is therefore limitless" (253). Capital, Marx says, "comes out of circulation, enters into it again, preserves and multiplies itself within circulation, emerges from it with an increased size, and starts the same cycle again and again" (256). Despite capital's ability to infinitely reproduce itself, it, of course, is not put to work to ameliorate the misery and vice of the "surplus population." The capitalist system thus creates both surplus labor and surplus capital, and in fact, the accumulation of capital, Marx explains, is dependent on surplus labor. As wealth increases, so do the number of individuals who are part of what Marx calls "the industrial reserve-army," individuals who are not put to work, but who can be called on to work if needed: "The greater the social wealth, the functioning capital, the extent and energy of its growth, and, therefore, also the absolute mass of the proletariat and the productiveness of its labour, the greater is the industrial reserve-army" (Ed. Engels 707). The greater accumulation of capital, Marx explains, creates increasingly more misery: "But the greater this reserve-army in proportion to the active labour-army, the greater is the mass of a consolidated surplus-population, whose misery is in inverse ratio to its torment of labour. The more extensive, finally, the lazarus-layers of the working-class, and the industrial reserve-army, the greater is official pauperism" (Ed. Engels 707). Capital accumulation not only generates pauperism, but it also creates a "reserve-army" of laborers who can be absorbed into production when they are needed and dispelled when no longer necessary. The system thus produces "lazarus-layers" who can be brought back to life from the reserve as needed. Wealth is directly responsible for the

suffering of the underclass: "Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole, i.e., on the side of the class that produces it own product in the form of capital" (Ed. Engels 709). Excess accumulation creates excess labor, and thereby the suffering of the underclass.

The dialectic of excess and lack which characterizes the capitalist system became most palpable during the Victorian period in the public spaces of London. In *London Labour and the London Poor*, Henry Mayhew describes the London docks in terms of the spectacular display of wealth: "The docks of London are to a superficial observer the very focus of metropolitan wealth. The cranes creak with the mass of riches. In the warehouses are stored goods that are as it were ingots of untold gold. Above and below ground you see piles upon piles of treasure that the eye cannot compass. The wealth appears as boundless as the very sea it has traversed" (3:308). London's docks put the accumulation of capital on display for all to see. As Mayhew describes it, the wealth visible on the docks is awe-inspiring in its magnitude. Yet for Mayhew, even more shocking than the wealth on display is the juxtaposition of excessive poverty and extreme wealth within the vicinity of the docks: "The brain aches in an attempt to comprehend the amount of riches before, above, and beneath it. There are acres upon acres of treasure, more than enough, one would fancy, to stay the cravings of the whole world, and yet you have but to visit the hovels grouped round about all this amazing excess of riches to witness the same amazing excess of poverty" (3:308). Both wealth and poverty are described as excess. Mayhew notes that the wealth visible on London's docks could satisfy "the cravings of the whole world," but these riches do not work to alleviate the

suffering even of those directly proximate: "If the incomprehensibility of the wealth rises to sublimity, assuredly the want that co-exists with it is equally incomprehensible and equally sublime. Pass from the quay and warehouses to the courts and alleys that surround them, and the mind is as bewildered with the destitution of the one place as it is with the superabundance of the other" (3: 308). It is not that the poverty becomes incomprehensible because of the proximity of wealth. Instead, both the poverty and the wealth that can be seen on and near the London docks are forms of excess which bewilder the viewer because of the scope of each independent from the other. While the wealth is described as "superabundance," the poverty is strangely defined as both lack and excess.

This dissertation considers the ways in which literary representations of London posited the city's streets and public spaces as visible and material analogues to the abstract workings of capitalism. Excess and lack intermingle in the Victorian imagination of the public spaces of London and the underclass who inhabited these spaces. Three interrelated leitmotifs run through these chapters. The first is political economy and the ways in which Victorian writers projected the abstractions of the capitalist system onto the public spaces of London. A second leitmotif, which is closely related to the first, involves the internal economy of the representations of London streets and the London poor. These economies serve as metonyms for the marketplace, and rather than being arranged according to principles of conservation or expenditure, they demonstrate a system in which excesses, remainders, and traces are continually produced and serve to disrupt it. The third leitmotif involves Victorian conceptions of time in relation to notions of capitalist teleology and Christian eschatology. As I will show, the

internal economies I identify often envision time in ways that eschew teleology in favor of waste or superfluity. The texts that I examine put into dialectical exchange the languages of science and the emerging social sciences in order to think through London's excesses and deficiencies, which had become more visible and existed on a grander scale during this period than ever before.

The forces that capitalism creates and is threatened by are the subject of this dissertation. The system of capitalist exchange seeks to eliminate unproductive activity and waste, but it is never completely successful in ridding itself of these things. Steven Shaviro claims, "Capitalism defines a totality [. . .] but at the same time it unleashes forces which exceed and disrupt that totality" (42). In *Heterologies* Michel de Certeau describes "any autonomous order" as being

> founded upon what it eliminates; it produces a 'residue' condemned to be forgotten. But what was excluded re-infiltrates the place of its origin—now the present's 'clean' [proper] place. It resurfaces, it troubles, it turns the present's feeling of being 'at home' into an illusion, it lurks—this 'wild,' this 'ob-scene,' this 'filth,' this 'resistance' of 'superstition'—within the walls of the residence, and, behind the back of the owner (the *ego*), or over its objections, it inscribes the law of the other. (3-4)

Shaviro explains that the aim of capitalist society is "to *manage* crisis, to maintain maximum homogeneity, to recuperate expenditure and ward off catastrophe" (50). But unproductive activity cannot be altogether eliminated. Urban squalor is thus produced by the capitalist system which it troubles.

This dissertation diverges from critical approaches to London which have described Victorian depictions of the city in terms of a crisis of representation. Beginning with Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City*, a number of critics have sought to explain the ways in which the huge increase in London's population during the

nineteenth century affected and was reflected in literary representations of the city. For

Williams, writers throughout the century depicted London in terms of "an absence of

common feeling, an excessive subjectivity" (215): "The perceptual confusion and

ambivalence which Wordsworth made explicit has been simplified and developed to an

image of the human condition within urban and industrial capitalism [in Engels' *The

Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*]" (216). Like Williams, Julian

Wolfreys emphasizes the ways in which London was represented as unknowable during

the first half of the century: "Modernity erupts through the very act of writing the city,

and the writers which we study engage in rhetorical events of poetic cartography. Such

cartography does not reveal the city. Instead it suggests the limits to which mapping can

extend, beyond which representation cannot reach" (13). Nicholas Freeman, who surveys

representations of London from 1870 to 1914, divides responses to the city into three

categories: empiricist, impressionist, and symbolist. Freeman claims that after Dickens's

death writers and artists attempted to develop new ways of representing the city: "The

city seemed to be out of control, growing rapidly in all directions and continually

generating new versions of itself. Within it, life moved at an ever faster pace and spoke

what Forster termed 'the language of hurry'. London was impossible to imagine as *in toto*

other than on the level of abstraction or generalization" (34). In his study of late-

Victorian literary writing about London, Joseph McLaughlin claims that writers

attempted to understand the city by employing the anthropological discourse most often

associated with descriptions of the outposts of empire to describe London's poor:

"[W]riters in the late nineteenth century appropriated ways of thinking and talking about

the colonies and discursively transformed the metropolis into a new borderland space: the

urban jungle" (2). Lynda Nead focuses on London from 1855 to 1870 in *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets, and Images in Nineteenth-Century London*, and argues that during this period London became part of a "highly concentrated discourse on the modern" (5). The creation in 1855 of the Metropolitan Board of Works (the city's first comprehensive local government) validated the notion that London could fashion itself into a modern metropolis, and the use of the language of improvement, Nead argues, differentiated the city's past from its present. The version of modernity that emerges from this suggests that modernity was a "configuration of diverse and unresolved historical processes" (5). Nead claims that London's streets became an important site for gauging the city's modernity: "The streets of the city were the most visible signs of its progress or degeneration. They were sites of passage, communication and transaction of business, and to many of those involved in the debates about the condition of London its streets were its major defect. They were indirect, narrow and obstructed. Rather than facilitating the flow of movement, they constituted an aneurism in the most vital parts of the metropolitan body" (16). Nead also claims that Londoners constructed their identities on London's streets: "Subjectivity was not already in place when men and women occupied the streets of Victorian London, but was formed through the encounters, interactions and experiences of that occupation. Social space, in this context, is not a passive backdrop to the formation of identity, but is an active ordering of the social and cultural relations of the city" ("Mapping the Self" 167).

While considerable critical attention has been paid to the Victorian interest in poverty and the conditions of London's slums, this work has largely focused on the importance of the male spectator, or by contrast, has helpfully uncovered women's roles

in public discourse and the public sphere. Much has been made of the nineteenth-century *flâneur*, especially in terms of the figure's association with the male author. In his 1863 "Le Peintre de la vie modern," Charles Baudelaire described the *flâneur* as "l'observateur passionné" ["the passionate spectator"]: "La foule est son demaine, comme l'air est celui de l'oiseau, comme l'eau celui du poisson. Sa passion et sa profession, c'est d'*épouser la foule*. [. . .] L'observateur est un *prince* qui jouit partout se son incognito" (1160) ["The crowd is his element, as the air is that of birds and water of fishes. His passion and profession are to become one flesh with the crowd. [. . .] The spectator is a *prince* who everywhere rejoices in his incognito" (Trans. Mayne 9)]. Baudelaire's *flâneur* is perfectly comfortable in the city and its crowds, and although he is able observe everything, he himself remains unobserved, anonymous, and detached. Walter Benjamin popularized this figure in his readings of Charles Baudelaire and nineteenth-century Paris, claiming that the *flâneur* is a figure for the poet in modernity. Critics have also identified the *flâneur* in Victorian London in, for example, Charles Dickens's persona "Boz" in *Sketches by Boz* (1836).

A number of critics have sought to bring attention to the fact that the Victorian streets were occupied by not just the male *flâneur* but also a variety of women. In "The Invisible *Flâneuse*," Janet Wolff claims, "There is no question of inventing the *flâneuse*: the essential point was that such a character was rendered impossible by the sexual divisions of the nineteenth century" (154). For Wolff the female counterpart to the male *flâneur* is the female prostitute, who does not enjoy the same liberties as the *flâneur*. In *City of Dreadful Delight*, Judith Walkowitz, like Wolff, points to the importance of the prostitute as a figure that contrasted that of feminine domestic virtue. She claims that

contrary to the notion of the "angel in the house," by the 1880s a number of marginalized groups were active on London's streets. In *Walking the Victorian Streets: Women, Representation, and the City*, Deborah Epstein Nord is similarly interested in the status of women as writers and as urban dwellers. She describes a particular urban vision of the female writer, which is based on her "consciousness of transgression and trespassing, from the vexed sexuality her position implies, and from her struggle to escape the status of spectacle and become a spectator" (12). This work has been an important corrective to accounts that have failed to identify the roles of women in Victorian public spaces, allowing my own project to presuppose this history and address the ways in which literary form was employed by Victorian writers to make sense of a host of inequalities that were visible in London's public spaces.

Other studies of Victorian London have been concerned with encounters between the classes in the form of middle-class philanthropic efforts and have identified an attraction/repulsion paradigm in these interclass meetings. Seth Koven's *Slumming: Sexual and Social Politics in Victorian London*, for example, points out the ways in which London slums served as both philanthropic and tourist sites for most of the century preceding World War II. He uncovers a relationship between benevolence and sex in slumming, claiming that in traversing class boundaries, well-to-do men and women eroticized poverty. In doing so they sought to understand their own sexual subjectivities: "The metropolitan slums provided well-to-do philanthropic men and women with an actual and imagined location where, with the approval of society, they could challenge prevailing norms about class and gender relations and sexuality" (4).

My project is also in dialogue with critical studies which have sought to uncover relationships between Victorian literature and political economy. In *The Body Economic: Life, Death, and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel*, Catherine Gallagher argues that in the early nineteenth century political economists and their critics relocated the notion of ultimate value "from a realm of transcendent spiritual meanings to organic 'life' itself and made human sensations—especially pleasure and pain—the sources and signs of that value" (3). For Gallagher, this remaking of value resulted in two new concentrations of political economy: "bioeconomics," which was derived from Malthusian theory and focused on "the interconnections among populations, the food supply, modes of production and exchange and their impact on life forms generally"; and "somaeconomics," which was influenced by Benthamism and theorized economic behavior "in terms of the emotional and sensual feelings that are both causes and consequences of economic exertions" (3). In *The Insatiability of Human Wants: Economics and Aesthetics in Modern Society*, Regenia Gagnier offers a different model of nineteenth-century political economy. Gagnier identifies a shift in economic theory during the second half of the nineteenth century from an emphasis on the individual as producer to an emphasis on the individual as consumer: "Around 1871, economic theory began to shift its focus from the social relations of population growth, landlords, entrepreneurs, workers and international trade to the individual's subjective demand for goods. The labor theory of value, which had seen the human body and human labor as the ultimate determinants of price, was abandoned in favor of consumer demand" (3-4).

This dissertation diverges from the approaches to Victorian London I have outlined above, as well as from the studies of the intersections of political economy and

literature. In the chapters that follow, I demonstrate ways in which the public spaces of London served not just as a backdrop for representing and reflecting conceptions of capitalist exchange but also provided the conditions for the possibility of such representations. This was because in London, like in no other place, extreme wealth and extreme poverty were visible. I demonstrate that two forms of excess appeared in Victorian writing about London's streets, both of which define the capitalist system. The first is excess as remainder, waste, or a part or portion of something that is left over after use or the passage of time. This is related to human labor under capitalism and the way that the residue of alienated labor inheres in the commodity. My first two chapters address this kind of excess, in terms of the concept of waste and in terms of the non-working poor as a form of both capitalist and thermodynamic waste. The second kind of excess which comprises the focus of the last two chapters of this dissertation is related to consumption rather than labor and can be described as surplus or superfluity. This is related to the dizzying limitlessness of capital accumulation and commodity culture.

The first chapter, "Residue: Dickens's Waste Collectors," which examines the figure of the waste collector in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852-53) and *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-65), argues that Dickens employs the waste collector as a figure for the residue that haunts the modern city. As collectors of waste, these figures exist on the margins of the city's economy, attempting to gain access to the capitalist system of exchange. Waste matter is the means by which these collectors impede narrative progress and domestic resolution. And like the refuse they collect, they remain as troubling residues, representing a sort of content that cannot be completely narrativized or absorbed by the plot's domestic and economic resolutions. I argue that these characters

are figures of modernity, which embody the conflicts involved in the experience of urban capitalism. In Marxist terms, capitalism links labor and value in the exchange of commodities, and in doing so, it creates a residue. Rather than using their labor to create commodities, they reintroduce into the capitalist system what it has discarded. In this sense, they quite literally reinsert the residues of commodity production into the system which had discarded them.

Chapter two, "Residuum: Thermodynamics and the Problem of Time and Space in the Entropic Narrative," argues that the development and popularization of the laws of thermodynamics during the second half of the nineteenth century changed the way that the Victorians conceptualized historical progress. Focusing on Arthur Morrison's *A Child of the Jago* (1896) and moving to Émile Zola's Parisian novel *L'Assommoir* (1872), this chapter claims that novels about slum life (both in England and on the Continent) that have been labeled "naturalist," found new forms of narrative not only in evolutionary theory and biological sciences of the time, but also in the physical sciences, including the emerging science of thermodynamics. The laws of thermodynamics not only posited the eventual heat death of the universe, they also came to be associated with capitalist economy. It was at this moment that England's underclass was first called "the residuum," a term which originally referred to the waste left after a thermodynamic process, as in a steam engine. *A Child of the Jago* and *L'Assommoir* posit a relationship between work and waste that is entropic: in the closed system of the slum, energy is converted into waste rather than work, or by extension, in the system of capitalist economy, the underclass is the waste of the bourgeoisie, waste that will only increase over time. The laws of thermodynamics paradoxically indicated that a closed system both

conserves and wastes, progresses and declines, changes over time and maintains equilibrium. Similarly, these texts are neither linear nor circular, but structured by diachronic shifts layered by stasis, repetition, and regression. Morrison and Zola replace the narrative of capitalist progress with entropic narratives, which emphasize the paradoxes of capitalist economy that create both labor and waste, progress and decline, diachrony and synchrony.

Chapter three, "Recursion: *The City of Dreadful Night* and the Eternal Present" argues that James Thomson's *The City of Dreadful Night* (1874) posits an experience of time as an eternal present in which past and present exist in a recursive structure. Thomson's poem, I argue, both thematizes recursion and employs it as a structure. As a narrative poem, *The City of Dreadful Delight* follows a speaker over time, but the speaker's experience of time in the urban environment is neither cyclical nor linear. Instead, the poem develops a notion of time that in the process of looking backward—in terms of form (allusion and ekphrasis) and in terms of theme (personal pasts, history, evolutionary degeneration)—creates excess by multiplying itself forward. This notion of a recursive temporality, moreover, is symptomatic of urban modernity and is, as I show, closely associated with nineteenth-century commodity culture. The three ekphrastic episodes that comprise the final cantos of Thomson's poem—in addition to embodying individual recursive structures—work together to create recursion. By the 1880s impressionist writing offered an escape from the city's excesses. The impressionist moment and its relativism freed the city-dweller from the social and political realities of the city—and from the sort of temporal crises which were part of Victorian consciousness and which are expressed in Thomson's poem in the form of recursion. If the subjective

experience of the moment is all that is possible, then the conflicts between different notions of time—evolutionary time and Christian eschatology; universal, industrial time and personal time; and Victorian modernity and the haunting past—are subsumed into the moment.

The fourth chapter "Replication: Wasteful Expenditure and the Celebratory Crowd," turns to the celebratory crowds of Londoners at recreation. Analyzing Georges Bataille's notion of ostentatious expenditure, this chapter argues that the celebratory crowd both opens up spaces for proliferating meanings and subjectivities and also conveys a sense of pressure toward dissolution. The London crowd in these texts becomes a metonym for a London whose excesses offer multiplying possibilities and also carry the potential for ruin. I focus on two texts by foreign visitors to London, French artist Gustave Doré's illustrations for *London, A Pilgrimage*, which began appearing in England in monthly parts in 1872, and an account with accompanying photographs of an American writer's experiences posing in 1902 as a sailor stranded in London, Jack London's *People of the Abyss*. These texts juxtapose verbal and visual depictions, and in doing so they open up spaces for proliferation. It has often been argued that in the nineteenth century the crowd first became the metonym for modern urban subjectivity, but the celebratory crowds of *London: A Pilgrimage* and *The People of the Abyss* might be more aptly described as allegorical representations of the pressures and possibilities of an economic system in which excesses coexist with deficiencies that create abjection.

> L'égout, c'est la conscience de la ville. Tout y converge, et s'y confronte. Dans ce lieu livide, il y a des ténèbres, mais il n'a plus de secrets. Chaque chose a sa forme vraie, ou du moins sa forme définitive. Le tas d'ordures a cela pour lui qu'il n'est pas menteur. La naïveté s' est réfugiée là.
>
> —Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables* (1862)[1]

Chapter One:
Residue: Dickens's Waste Collectors

I.   Capitalism, Residue, and Narrative

Near the middle of Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-65), Silas Wegg discovers a will in the dust mounds that were once owned by John Harmon. At this point in the novel, Nicodemus Boffin, "the golden dustman" is in possession of the mounds, which were, according to one version of the will, bequeathed him in the case that Harmon's son fails to comply with a condition of the will that he marry Bella Wilfer. Because the younger John Harmon is believed to have drowned in the Thames, Mr. Boffin is the owner of the mounds, which although they are essentially mounds of garbage, are worth a fortune for what can be collected from them and sold. The will which Wegg finds appears to be a later version than that which bestowed the entire

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[1] ["The sewer is the conscience of the city. Everything converges and clashes there. In this ghastly place, there are shadows, but there are no longer secrets. Everything has its true form, or at least its definitive form. The heap of filth has in its favor that it is not a liar. Innocence is a refugee there" (my own translation).]

fortune on Boffin. Wegg describes the contents of the will to Mr. Venus: "Inasmuch as he has never made friends, and has never had a rebellious family, he, John Harmon, gives to Nicodemus Boffin the Little Mound, which is quite enough for him, and gives the whole rest and residue of his property to the Crown" (493). The moment brings into focus the multiple meanings of the term "residue": it is both the material waste of the dust mounds and the remainder of the Harmon estate—which is, in fact, the dust mounds. The abstracted value of the estate is always visible materially in the form of the dust mounds. It is this strange conjunction of the material and immaterial, excess and deficiency, which defines the residue and which structures two of Dickens's great mid-century novels about London: *Bleak House* (1852-53) and *Our Mutual Friend*.

In this chapter I argue that Dickens employs the waste collector as a figure for the residue that haunts the modern city. I examine representations of scavengers and waste collectors in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* and *Our Mutual Friend* in order to argue that these characters embody the conflicts involved in the experience of urban capitalism. As collectors of waste, these figures exist on the margins of the city's economy attempting to gain access to the capitalist system of exchange. These figures are posited as enduring features of the city as their bodies are absorbed into the air and soil of London. Waste collectors remain as residue, representing a sort of content that cannot be completely narrativized or absorbed by the plot's domestic and economic resolutions. The waste collector not only subsists on what has been discarded by others but becomes in Dickens's vision transformed into a haunting residue—a reminder of a troubling social and economic system. The waste collector represents resistance to notions of capitalist progress.

There have been a number of critical explorations of nineteenth-century conceptions of and representations of waste. Many of these studies have considered Victorian ambivalence concerning dust. Kate Flint, for example, argues that scientific advances such as the microscope encouraged the Victorians to see dust as more than just a danger:

> The powerful lens of the microscope, revealing simultaneously the dangers and the welcome properties of dust, is not enough in itself. Neither is it sufficient to see with the eye of the social recorder, although this may allow one to bring order to the components of dust and hence, in Mary Douglas's terms, to reclaim the properties of the dust-heap from over the borderline of that which has been discarded, and which therefore threatens the social order. Dust, as so many commentators on the materiality of this substance pointed out, is a paradoxical substance: a threat, yet, to use a formulation of Wallace once again, 'a source of beauty and essential to life.' Its real fascination to the Victorians lay, however, not so much in the dialectics of materiality, but in the fact that its insidious physical presence also partook of something far more metaphysical; reached, even, towards the Kantian sublime. [. . .] The importance of dust to Victorian culture lies precisely in this capacity to suggest the vastness of imaginative conjecture that may lie behind and beyond the most apparently mundane: the invisible behind the visible. (63)

In *Dusty Bob: A Cultural History of Dustmen*, B.E. Maidment offers an extended discussion of the "literary dustmen," a prevalent stereotype that circulated in popular prints in the 1830s and 1840s. These prints, Maidment shows, caricatured the London dustman (those who were hired to remove debris from homes) and his educational aspirations and suggest middle-class anxieties that emerged during the period regarding working-class culture: "Dustmen became inextricably connected in popular figuration with the social challenges offered by the advance of mass education and debates concerning the desirability of self-advancement" (6). For Maidment the dustman is a sort of representative working-class figure whose vulgarities and aspirations were easily caricatured and recognized by the Victorian middle class. Other critical assessments

generally focus on the Victorian preoccupation with dirt, hygiene, and sanitation.[2] My

interest here is not to lay bare some new aspect of the anxieties that Victorians felt about

sanitation and hygiene. Instead, I will examine the specific role of the Victorian waste

collector, his relationship to urban space, and the distinctive narratives that were created

around this figure during the period. More specifically, I argue that waste collectors—

scavengers, ragpickers, rag and bottle shop owners—as figures at the margins of

capitalist exchange, frustrate narrative progress and resolution.

The word "residue," meaning "the remainder, rest; that which is left, of persons or

of things" dates from the fourteenth century. At the beginning of the fifteenth century,

the word took on a legal meaning: "That which remains of an estate after all charges,

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[2] See Christopher Hamlin, "Providence and Putrefaction: Victorian Sanitarians and the Natural Theology and Health and Disease"; Ellen Handy, "Dust Piles and Damp Pavements: Excrement, Repression, and the Victorian City in Photography and Literature"; Michelle Allen, "From Cesspool to Sewer: Sanitary Reform and the Rhetoric of Resistance, 1848-1880"; Eileen Cleere, "Dirty Pictures: John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, and the Victorian Sanitation of Fine Art"; Robert Lougy, "Filth, Liminality, and Abjection in Charles Dickens's *Bleak House*"; Lauren M.E. Goodlad, "Is There a Pastor in the House? Sanitary Reform, Professionalism, and Philanthropy in Dickens's Mid-Century Fiction"; David L. Pike, "Sewage Treatments: Vertical Space and Waste in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London." In addition to the critical work on the relationship between Victorian sanitation and the urban poor, there also exists a body of writing that seeks to define filth and the associated disgust, either historically or universally. While Mary Douglas has famously defined dirt as "matter out of place" (44), William Ian Miller disputes her relativism, claiming that disgust "describe[s] an emotional syndrome that in its *rough* contours is a universal feature of human psychic and social-psychological experience" (10). Building on Douglas's work, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White describe the Victorian preoccupation with sanitation reform in terms of its political implications: "Transgressing the boundaries through which the bourgeois reformers separated dirt from cleanliness, the poor were interpreted as also transgressing the boundaries of the 'civilized' body and the boundaries which separated the human from the animal" (132). More recent work on the subject includes William A. Cohen and Ryan Johnson, eds., *Filth: Dirt, Disgust, and Modern Life* and Natalka Freeland, "The Politics of Dirt in *Mary Barton* and *Ruth*."

debts, and bequests have been paid" (*OED*). The non-legal sense can carry two related, but almost opposite connotations: it can connote waste, that which is unwanted, that which has not been used up, or that which is inassimilable. The legal meaning describes an excess that remains which can be inherited. The term "residue" also connotes temporal movement. It suggests as past in which nothing had yet been left behind or deemed unwanted. It also describes a present in which the remainder has been separated out. And it indicates a future in which the waste (or the surplus) might be recycled (or bequeathed)—or might simply remain. Residues can be indiscernible or uncomfortable reminders of the past. As such, they are essentially transgressive. They also can connote failure—failure of a system to work properly, failure to progress or achieve resolution. Residue not only describes a history, but it also carries with it an assertion about what is valuable and what is less valuable or valueless, and in this sense it is essentially an economic term.

In the first volume of *Capital* (1867), Karl Marx explains that exchange value (which is measured by the amount of human labor used to produce a commodity) allows commodities with different use-values (the physical and social functions of a commodity) to be exchanged. This quality of the commodity can neither be described in terms of its physical qualities nor in terms of the useful human labor that produced it. There is something else embodied in the commodity, which Marx describes as "residue" [*Residuum*]:

> Let us now look at the residue of the products of labour. There is nothing left of them in each case but the same phantom-like objectivity; they are merely congealed quantities of homogeneous human labour, i.e. of human labour expended without regard to the form of its expenditure. All these things now tell us is that human labour-power has been expended to produce them, human labour

is accumulated in them. As crystals of this social substance, which is common to them all, they are values—commodity values [*Warenwerte*] (128).[3]

Marx describes the commodity that has been stripped of its use-value in a series of metaphors: "phantom-like" and "congealed," what is left is a "residue" or "crystals of this social substance." The labor that is left as residue in the commodity is not the human labor that exists in a specific form in order to measure exchange value. Rather, it has been transformed into a strangely material abstraction that in its residual ghostliness threatens to remain or return. Capitalism links labor and value in the exchange of commodities, and in doing so, it creates a residue. Peter Hitchcock interprets Marx's residue as the essence of commodification:

> The residue, as he calls it, is the quintessence not of an individual commodity but of commodification itself: it is *gepenstige Gegenständlichkeit*, or ghostly objectivity. [. . .] Marx underlines that what is left is the human labor power expended to produce the commodities: human labor has actually accumulated in the commodities, but not as a human, but only as a ghost (the ghost of objectivity). To put it still more bluntly, the nature of commodities is the nature of ghosts. [. . .] What seems like a mixed metaphor or an oxymoron, a congealed or jellied spirit (like ectoplasm), is the necessary conjuration of the spirit of capital: for what remains, remains to come back. (158)

Hitchcock's use of the term "ectoplasm" seems particularly fitting, for Marx claims that an abstraction—the system of capitalist exchange—produces something material—a residue.

Marx's residue, I argue, is created by the activity of exchange, and yet it resists the very system that creates it. In *Specters of Marx* Jacques Derrida points to the ways

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[3] [Betrachten wir nun das Residuum der Arbeitsprodukte. Es ist nichts von ihnen übriggeblieben als dieselbe gespenstige Gegenständlichkeit, eine bloße Gallerte unerschiedsloser menschlicher Arbeit, d.h. der Verausgabung menschlicher Arbeitskraft ohne Rücksicht auf die Form ihrer Verausgabung. Diese Dinge stellen nur noch dar, daß in ihrer Produktion menschliche Arbeitskraft verausgabt, menschliche Arbeit aufgehäuft ist. Als Kristalle dieser ihnen gemeinschaftlichen Substanz sind sie Werte—Warenwerte. (13)]

that Marx uses tropes of ghosts to describe the "[h]aunting [that] belongs to the structure

of every hegemony" (37). [4] Marx's notion of the "phantom-like" residue which haunts the

commodity is a reminder of what capitalism seeks to erase from the commodity: the fact

that human labor has been alienated in its production. As Étienne Balibar argues,

> Labour-power keeps on being transformed into a commodity and thereby enters
> the form of the capitalist collective (which, in the strong sense, is capital itself as
> a 'social relation'). Yet such a process involves an incoercible residue, *both* in the
> individuals and in the collective (once again this opposition does not seem
> pertinent). And it is this material impossibility which inscribes the reversal of the
> capitalist tendency in necessity, whatever the point at which it occurs. (102)

For Balibar it is important that this residue cannot be coerced—it resists the structure of

which it is a part.

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[4] Derrida's notion of the "haunting" in Marx's writing is related to a number of other
related Derridean concepts including the trace, *restance*, and the specter. Derrida's
notion of the trace is by no means a simple concept, nor is it consistently defined
throughout his work. What is clear about the trace is that it is meant to undermine the
notion that being, or identity, is equivalent to presence. In the interview "Others Are
Secret Because They Are Other," Derrida elaborates on the relationship between the
trace, *restance*, and specter:

> A trace is never present, fully present, by definition; it inscribes in itself the
> reference to the specter of something else. The remainder is not present either,
> any more than a trace as such. And that is why I have been much taken up with
> the question of the remainder, often under this very name or more rigorously
> under that of *restance* or remaining. The remaining of the remainder is not
> reducible to an actual residue, or to what is left after a subtraction, either. The
> remainder *is* not, it is not a being, not a modification of that which is. Like the
> trace, the remaining offers itself for thought before or beyond being. It is
> inaccessible to a straightforward intuitive perception (since it refers to something
> wholly other, it inscribes in itself something of the infinitely other), and it escapes
> all forms of prehension, all forms of monumentalization, and all forms of
> archivation. Often, like the trace, I associate it with ashes: remains without a
> substantial remainder, essentially, but which have to be taken account of and
> without which there would be neither accounting nor calculation, nor a principle
> of reason able to give an account or a rationale (*reddere rationem*), nor a being as
> such. (151-52)

Those who are involved in the activity of collecting waste, then, have a peculiar relationship to capitalist exchange, for they do not sell their labor for the production of commodities. Instead, they reintroduce into the system of exchange what it has already eliminated. Waste collectors find value in what is deemed valueless by others; or rather, they have a lower threshold in determining whether an object has value. They participate in capitalist forms of exchange, but only on the very margins of the system. In collecting and selling refuse, they quite literally reinsert the residues of commodity production into the system which had discarded them.

Dickens's depictions of waste collectors, especially those in *Our Mutual Friend*, have often been linked to Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*,[5] which began publication in 1849 in the *Morning Chronicle* and was published in four volumes in 1861. Mayhew claimed that he aimed to represent the actual living and working conditions of the London poor. Most of the second volume of *London Labour* is devoted to descriptions of scavenging and waste disposal. Mayhew reveals that there were a large number of individuals in Victorian London who were involved in some way in the collection and sale of various forms of refuse. Mayhew estimates that thousands of individuals subsisted on finding and collecting refuse in London during this period, and he groups waste collectors into three "classes":

1. The bone-grubbers and rag-gatherers, who are, indeed, the same individuals, the pure-finders, and the cigar-end and old wood collectors.
2. The dredgermen, the mudlarks, and the sewer-hunters.
3. The dustmen and nightmen, the sweeps, and scavengers. (2:136).

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[5] See, for example, Harland S. Nelson; Murray Baumgarten, 76; Efraim Sicher, 341-42. Gertrude Himmelfarb claims that attempts to identify Mayhew's influence on Dickens's characters "is more revealing in showing how Dickens transformed those characters, if indeed he borrowed them in the first place" (735n).

Mayhew estimates the total amount of money made yearly by all of London's collectors: "The gross total, of average yearly money value is 1,406,592*l.* for the second-hand commodities I have described in the foregoing pages; or as something like a minimum is given, both as to the number of the goods and the price, we may fairly put this total at a million and a half of pounds sterling!" (2:464). Mayhew reveals that the collection of refuse is both widespread and profitable. He describes the waste that is collected as "second-hand commodities," but dog excrement ("pure"), the ends of cigars, animal bones, and pieces of rags can hardly be considered to have been commodities before they are collected from the streets. A more accurate example of a second-hand commodity is the second-hand clothing that was commonly sold in Holywell Street, St. Giles, and Petticoat Lane.[6] Second-hand clothing, unlike the refuse collected from the streets, is a commodity both times it is sold. The scraps collected by the street finders can only be described either as what remains after a commodity has been used or consumed (in the case of the cigar ends and animal bones), or as what has never been a commodity but which even as refuse has value for some use to which it can be put (as in the case of dog excrement which was bought by tanners to use to clean leather). Though Mayhew's description of refuse as "second-hand commodities" is not quite accurate, what he reveals is that the waste that was discarded on the streets was being collected and sold on a large scale.

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[6] Lynda Nead details the interesting history of Holywell Street. At the beginning of the nineteenth century it was inhabited by radical pressmen, but by the middle of the century, most of the shops sold either second-hand clothing or pornography. See *Victorian Babylon*, 161-89. In *Street Life in London* (1877), John Thomson photographically documented the second-hand clothes sellers in St. Giles (54-57).

In addition to providing extended descriptions of the activities of waste collectors and providing extensive data on the quantities of items collected and their monetary value, Mayhew also reports a number of first-person narratives of the waste collectors whom he interviews. In a section called "Statement of a 'Regular Scavenger,'" Mayhew reports the story of a paid street sweeper, who not only receives wages but is also able to keep any items of value which he finds while cleaning the street. The narrative, which is extended over several pages, begins, "'I don't know how old I am,' he said [. . .] 'and I can't see what that consarns any one, as I's old enough to have a jolly rough beard, and so can take care of myself. I should think so'" (2:224). Mayhew's choice to present the scavenger's comments as a first-person autobiographical narrative provides a recognizable form for middle-class readers. Yet, the scavenger begins his story not with the year or place of his birth but, rather, by declaring his ignorance of his age as well as his belief in the insignificance of such facts, and in this way, the content of his autobiographical statement negates the first-person autobiographical form, which would seem to rest on the assumption of value of recounting such details of the past. Moreover, the content of these "autobiographies" often lack the retrospective account of crisis and conversion that is characteristic of the genre of autobiography in both its spiritual and secular forms.[7] Instead, the narratives tend to be circular or episodic. The scavenger tells Mayhew, "My father was a sweeper, and I wanted to be a waterman, but father—he

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[7] Patrick Riley claims, "The history of autobiography, from its origin to contemporary times, bears witness to the abiding influence of the *structure* and the *rhetoric* of conversion. [. . .] As much as autobiography is self-presentation to the reader, it is also an endeavor through which a person tries to make sense of his or her own experience, an essay in Montaigne's sense of the word, a *trial* in which, through memory and synthesis, the raw data of experience coalesce into some kind of meaningful order. Conversion, in all its forms, is able to confer structure and intelligibility on the narrative of a life" (1).

hasn't been dead long—didn't like the thoughts on it, as he said they was all drownded one time or 'nother; so I ran away and tried my hand as a Jack-in-the-water, but I was starved back in a week, and got a h—of a clouting" (2:224). There is little narrative thrust to the scavenger's extended statement. The scavenger was a sweeper as a child and is a sweeper at the time of narration. Though the man expresses his former interest in entering another line of work, hunger brings him back to scavenging. His narrative gestures at the autobiographical genre, but his social position cancels out the autobiographical frame. Similarly, the scavenger's story tries on the conventions of the domestic novel, but fails to reproduce domestic resolution. Near the conclusion of his narrative, the scavenger claims, "'I'm not a married man. I was a-going to be married to a young woman as lived with me a goodish bit as my housekeeper' [this he said very demurely]; 'but she went to the hopping to yarn a few shillings for herself, and never came back'" (2:225).

In a section titled, "Of the 'Pure'-Finders," Mayhew includes the extended narrative of a sixty year-old pure-finder, or collector of dog's excrement. Mayhew describes finding the old pure collector in the upper room of a small house, and exclaims, "To my astonishment I found this wretched creature to be, to a certain extent, a 'superior' woman: she could read and write well, spoke correctly, and appeared to be a person of natural good sense" (2:144). When the woman begins her autobiographical narrative, the reasons for this woman's "superiority" are revealed to the reader: "'I am about sixty years of age. My father was a milkman, and very well off; he had a barn and a great many cows. I was kept at school till I was thirteen or fourteen years of age; about that time my father died, and then I was taken home to help my mother in the business. After a while

things went wrong; the cows began to die'" (2:144). The pure finder begins her

autobiographical statement in the expected way: she states her approximate age and

supplies the reasons for her dejection. The woman's story reproduces the familiar trope

of the fall from pastoral simplicity into urban poverty. Near the end of her narrative, the

pure finder claims a sort of representative position:

> 'Almost every one I've ever known engaged in pure-finding were people who
> were better off once. I knew a man who went by the name of Brown, who picked
> up pure for years before I went to it; he was a very quiet man; [. . .] One
> morning he was found dead in his bed [. . .] [T]hree or four gentleman came
> searching all through this place, looking for a man named Brown, and offering a
> reward to any who would find him out. [. . .] Would you believe it, Mr. Brown
> was a real gentleman all the time, and had a large estate, of I don't know how
> many thousand pounds, just left him. And the lawyers had advertised and
> searched everywhere for him, but never found him, you may say, till he was
> dead.' (2:145)

The old woman claims that her autobiography is characteristic of London's pure finders:

they were all "better off once," and she supplies as an example the story of Mr. Brown,

which plays with romantic tropes, complete with a lost heir and a pauper who is actually

a gentleman. Yet the romance is frustrated as the old pure finder is never relieved from

her misery, and Mr. Brown is only discovered once he is dead. These stories reflect a

yearning for narrative resolution, but the content of the narratives frustrates these forms.

Because Mayhew sought to document the actual living and working conditions of the

London poor—living and working conditions that were often repetitive, monotonous, and

unlikely to improve—literary forms such as autobiography, romance, and the novel—

with their emphasis on change and resolution—do not correspond to the lives of

London's underclass. Carolyn Steedman makes a similar point about Mayhew's

interview of a little girl who sells watercress on London's streets:

[T]here is no story for the little watercress girl. The things she spoke to Mayhew about (pieces of fur, the bunches of cress, the scrubbed floor) still startle after 130 years, not because they are strange things in themselves, but because in our conventional reading, they are not held together in figurative relationship to each other. [. . .] [I]t is the story itself that does not fit: all its content and its imagery demonstrate its marginality to the central story, of the bourgeois household. (138-39)

Steedman notes that because the child's narrative focuses on her economic circumstances and her labor, it does not conform to our expectations about childhood. Similarly, in the case of the waste collectors, Mayhew's narratives demonstrate the inability of familiar literary forms and tropes to shape or structure their stories.

If Mayhew's reporting demonstrates the ways in which the lives of London's underclass do not correspond to literary forms, in *Bleak House* and *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens's portrays waste collectors as figures who are central to the unraveling the mysteries of each novel's plot.[8] They hoard and hide information, and thus delay the narrative resolution of the main characters. And although they are eventually pushed out

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[8] At least one of Dickens's contemporary critics described Dickens's creative process in terms of scavenging. In an 1865 review of *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-65), the anonymous reviewer claims,

Mr Dickens has now to our knowledge, for sixteen years been haunted by a great Dust-heap. In the *Household Words* for 1850 first appeared the account of that amazing mound. All his life long, at any rate in all that portion of it with which the public is acquainted, our writer has been industriously engaged in attempting to ferret out the bright things in dirty places; he had been like a very Parisian chiffonnier, industriously searching, with intense eye, among the sweepings, the odds and ends, and puddles of society, if haply some overlooked and undiscovered loveliness might not be found there. (612)

The reviewer describes Dickens's practice of writing as analogous to the work of a rag picker or street scavenger and suggests that the fascination with waste and the depictions of scavenging in *Our Mutual Friend* are in some way related to the author's act of invention. In this way, the creation of narrative is an act of salvaging or reclamation, finding "bright things in dirty places."

of the plot by the exigencies of domestic and economic resolution, they remain as residues, reminders that the system of exchange cannot completely escape its own refuse.

Not only do *Bleak House* and *Our Mutual Friend* feature waste collectors, but they also include Dickens's darkest visions of the urban landscape. In both novels London is depicted as multiplying its own decay. In *Bleak House* Dickens depicts the urban slum, Tom-all-Alone's, as a filthy and diseased human body:

> Jo lives—that is to say, Jo has not yet died—in a ruinous place, known to the like of him by the name of Tom-all-Alone's. It is a black dilapidated street, avoided by all decent people; where the crazy houses were seized upon, when their decay was far advanced, by some bold vagrants, who, after establishing their own possession, took to letting them out in lodgings. Now these tumbling tenements contain, by night, a swarm of misery. As on the ruined human wretch, vermin parasites appear, so these ruined shelters have bred a crowd of foul existence that crawls in and out of gaps in walls and boards; and coils itself to sleep, in maggot numbers, where the rain drips in; and comes and goes, fetching and carrying fever. (197)

This anthropomorphic vision of the London slum reveals an indignation at the living conditions of the city's poor and suggests the interconnection of the social classes through the metaphor of disease and contagion. Streets, buildings, and humans suffer similarly: all are overwhelmed by filth and vermin. It is difficult here to determine if the humans in this setting are the parasites or the infested, for they are both: they are parasites to the rundown buildings and infested by their own parasites. City and human being mirror each other's decrepitude, as the city becomes infested with disease and misery. In *Our Mutual Friend* the urban space is no less diseased and distorted:

> It was a foggy day in London, and the fog was heavy and dark. Animate London, with smarting eyes and irritated lungs, was blinking, wheezing, and choking; inanimate London was a sooty spectre, divided in purpose between being visible and invisible, and so being wholly neither. [. . .] [T]he whole metropolis was a heap of vapour charged with muffled sound of wheels, and enfolding a gigantic catarrh. (420)

As in *Bleak House* the city is figured here as diseased and excremental: the very sun has gone out, leaving a brown fog surrounding the swollen, sickly discharge of the city. Moreover, both "animate London" and "inanimate London" are animated in Dickens's vision. Again, the city comes alive in its misery, aping the suffering of its inhabitants so that it becomes difficult to distinguish between the city's dilapidated structures and its human occupants.

II. *Bleak House*

In *Bleak House* the waste collector is Mr. Krook, [9] the drunken owner of a rag and bottle shop, who hoards various discarded items, though he never seems to sell anything.[10] The signs in the shop window advertise "KROOK, RAG AND BOTTLE WAREHOUSE," "KROOK, DEALER IN MARINE STORES," "BONES BOUGHT," "KITCHEN-STUFF BOUGHT," "OLD IRON BOUGHT," "WASTE PAPER BOUGHT," "LADIES' AND GENTLEMEN'S WARDROBES BOUGHT" (48).

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[9] Krook 's neighbors call him, "Lord Chancellor" to suggest the ways in which his shop functions like the Court of Chancery, which accumulates paperwork but never produces judgments. Critics have therefore generally understood Krook's character to symbolize the Lord Chancellor and the Court of Chancery. See, for example, Emily Steinlight, 150; J. Hillis Miller, "Interpretation in Dickens' *Bleak House*," 182; and Janice Nadelhaft, 235. My reading of Krook's character and his death, by contrast, underscores Krook's social position and role as a waste collector. In other words, this correspondence is ironic; for while the Lord Chancellor is a figure of authority, Krook is a drunken old man, who hoards garbage.

[10] Critical assessments of *Bleak House* often connect Dickens's depiction of London's slums to the Victorian preoccupation with the reform of social and sanitary conditions. For these critics, the filth of the slum stands in for many of Victorian society's fears, from disease to bureaucratic corruption. Robert Lougy claims that the text is "haunted by the fear that that which does not belong might somehow find a way in" (489). Efraim Sicher makes a similar argument about the novel: "In a Carlylean metaphor for the Condition of England, pestilence, mist and blindness emerge out of the slippery mud, like a miasma out of the noxious gases on the river" (178).

Krook's first words to Esther as she enters the shop are, "Have you anything to sell?"

(49) and he greedily eyes Ada's hair: "Here's lovely hair! I have got three sacks of

ladies' hair below, but none so beautiful and fine as this. What colour, and what

texture!" (50). Krook's interest in Ada's hair stems not from any sort of economic

interest. Rather, as he already possesses "three bags of ladies' hair," his attraction to

Ada's seems to be a desire to collect more of what he already has. Krook explains to

Esther,

> I have so many things here [. . .] of so many kinds, and all, as the neighbors
> think (but *they* know nothing), wasting away and going to rack and ruin, that
> that's why they have given me and my place a christening [The Court of
> Chancery]. And I have so many old parchmentses and papers in my stock. And I
> have a liking for rust and must and cobwebs. And all's fish that comes to my net.
> And I can't abear to part with anything I once lay hold of (or so my neighbors
> think, but what do *they* know?) or to alter anything, or to have any sweeping, nor
> scouring, nor cleaning, nor repairing going on about me. (50)

Krook's language in this description suggests not only a greedy sexual lasciviousness, but

it also indicates that his interest is not associated with use-value or profit, but rather with

the collection of items which seem to have no aesthetic or practical value. It is eventually

revealed that Krook possesses the documents that unravel all of the novel's mysteries: the

letters that were written between Lady Dedlock and Captain Hawdon and the second will

in the Jarndyce case. However, because Krook is illiterate, he is unable to interpret the

information that he gathers, and instead of having the documents interpreted for him, he

secretly hoards them. This action not only prevents his own understanding of the

meaning of the documents, but it also obscures the understanding of others and

temporarily impedes narrative resolution.

Esther describes Krook writing letters with chalk on the wall, "He touched me on

the arm to stay me, and chalked the letter J upon the wall–in a very curious manner,

beginning with the end of the letter, and shaping it backward" (55). Krook then asks Esther if she can read the letter. When she replies that she can, he asks, "What is it?" Esther explains, "He went on quickly, until he had formed in the same curious manner, beginning at the ends and bottoms of the letters, the word JARNDYCE, without once leaving two letters on the wall together. 'What does that spell?' he asked me" (55). Krook explains to Esther, "I have a turn for copying from memory, you see, miss, though I can neither read nor write" (55-56). Krook has a command of all the symbols: he can write each letter on the wall, and he remembers how to write the letters in order, but he cannot interpret the meaning of the letters. Thus, his understanding of the documents he possesses remains fragmented and incomplete, and he is unable to piece together the information to recover the narrative which the documents might reveal.

Krook's death mirrors his life: both entail a search for meaning that produces incoherent and incomplete knowledge. Before and after the discovery of Krook's remains, a variety of attempts are made to interpret and make sense of the sights, smells, and tastes that result from Krook's combustion. Snagsby asks Weevle just before the discovery of Krook's burned body, "Don't you observe Mr. Weevle—not to put too fine a point upon it—that you're rather greasy here, sir?" Weevle responds, "Why, I have noticed myself that there is a queer kind of flavour in the place to-night. [. . .] I suppose it's chops at the Sol's Arms" (394). Snagsby responds, "I should say their cook at the Sol wanted a little looking after" (394). Weevle and Snagsby are unknowingly inhaling, tasting, and even wearing the burning remains of Krook's body that are being diffused into the city air, yet they imagine that the smell is emanating from the cooking at the Sol's Arms. Once Guppy and Weevle discover Krook's remains, they experience this

crisis of interpretation, and their dialogue is no longer presented directly: the narration changes to free indirect discourse, and the thoughts of the two men merge: "Here is a small burnt patch of flooring; here is the tinder from a little bundle of burnt paper, but not so light as usual, seeming to be steeped in something; and here is–is the cinder of a small charred and broken log of wood sprinkled with white ashes, or is it coal? O Horror, he IS here! And this from which we run away, striking out the light and overturning one another into the street, is all that represents him" (403). The narrator and reader are interpolated into the pluralized free indirect discourse, which registers a shared horror in discovering that this is "all that represents him." Weevle and Guppy realize that they had previously misinterpreted what they had smelled, tasted, and seen; for before them are parts of Krook's body. Though the objects are never explicitly identified, the reader, like Guppy and Weevle, is able to understand how the burned objects imperfectly correspond to Krook: the log must be a charred leg or arm; the papers are certainly the Jarndyce will; and the unidentifiable "something" soaking the papers must be Krook's bodily fluid. Krook's body, thus, becomes, like the documents he once hoarded, a sort of unreadable text, which occludes narrative progress, especially as corporeal substance fuses, in its decomposing form, with the materials surrounding it. In the same way that Krook is unable to interpret the documents, those who view his remains find themselves unable to create a coherent narrative to explain his death.

The Coroner's Inquest provides little explanation for Krook's bizarre death: the coroner claims, "[T]hat would seem to be an unlucky house next door, gentlemen, a destined house; but so we sometimes find it; and these are mysteries we can't account for!" (414). The signs that Krook leaves behind such as the burned items and the strange

smell remain empty symbols.[11]   Others, besides the coroner, weigh in on Krook's death: "[M]en of science and philosophy come to look, and carriages set down doctors at the corner who arrive with the same intent, and there is more learned talk about inflammable gases and phosphuretted hydrogen than the court has ever imagined. Some of these authorities (of course the wisest) hold with indignation that the deceased had no business to die in the alleged manner" (413). The authorities come to look at the signs that Krook has left behind. Yet they cannot understand what they observe, and the only pronouncement they can offer is that Krook should not have died by spontaneous combustion.

Dickens foregrounds the controversy surrounding the interpretive difficulty of Krook's death in his well-known preface to the novel. He defends his depiction of spontaneous combustion by citing a number of documented cases, and making his famous claim of having "purposely dwelt upon the romantic side of familiar things" (4). Here, Dickens undercuts his own defense by suggesting that texts do not provide perfectly accurate representations, that he has romanticized the everyday world. More than that, though, *Bleak House* destabilizes the familiar. Krook's death is, perhaps, the best example of this destabilization because it initiates a quest for meaning that is never entirely satisfied. As a result of his combustion, Krook's body becomes diffused into the London air: it becomes part of "fog everywhere" (5) that famously opens the novel. His

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[11] Critics have often read Krook's death as a symbolic punishment for the immorality of the Chancery. D.A. Miller claims, "For insofar as Krook dies, as in certain modern aetiologies of cancer, of his own internal repressions, then Chancery can be safely trusted to collapse from its own refusal to release what is unhealthily accumulating in its system. Alternatively, insofar as Krook's violent end is meant to foreshadow what is in store for the institution he figures, then his death carries a warning to the court to amend its ways or else" (62). See also Virginia Blain, who describes Krook's death as "the splendid parodic death of Chancery" (39).

diffused body comes to represent the novel's thematic concerns with meaning and interpretation. As meaning is repeatedly deferred, Krook is dispersed into the London air as residue. In other words, the waste collector's own difficulty with interpretation and the indecipherability of his death are metonymic of the social and epistemological incoherence that are never entirely resolved by the novel's plot.

III. *Our Mutual Friend*

Our Mutual Friend's major thematic concern is regeneration: the regeneration of character, potential, and moral integrity. By extension, recycling, or regeneration on the material level, becomes one of the novel's central tropes. Indeed, nearly all of its characters, both the middle class and the underclass, make their livings either directly or indirectly through salvaging waste. Critical treatments of *Our Mutual Friend* routinely make claims about the ways in which waste reclamation is figured as more vigorous and ethical work than the speculative economy of the rich,[12] yet these approaches do not

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[12] Nancy Aycock Metz has claimed, "[T]he artistic reclamation of waste as practiced by the characters in *Our Mutual Friend* is convincing in its example of how chaos may be made livable, and, in part, and over time, redeemed" (72). Brian Cheadle argues, "*Our Mutual Friend* sets the working, or at least scavenging, underclasses, who embody all the vigour and pain associated with the river, against the more favoured reaches of a society characterized either by an uneasy indolence like Eugene's or by the feverish debility of the Veneering circle" (318-319). Also see J. Hillis Miller, 69-78; and Efraim Sicher, "The Waste Land: Salvage and Salvation in *Our Mutual Friend*," 329-83. Catherine Gallagher's analysis of *Our Mutual Friend* is closer to my own. Gallagher claims that the novel articulates what she calls "bioeconomics." She points to "the book's obsession with human bodies inside systems of human accumulation and exchange" (93). She says, "[T]his way of structuring economic investigations around life and death took the dead body as a starting place and tried to move toward reanimation. [. . .] [T]his operation often resulted in the reseparation of value (equated with Life) from any of its particular instantiations (or bodies)" (87). For Gallagher, the novel participates in contemporary discussions in political economy that attempted to locate value in the human body.

account for the ways in which waste collectors impede the novel's domestic and

economic resolution.

In *Our Mutual Friend,* waste material is not simply something to be put to a new

use or something to sift for hidden treasure. It is also figured as the residue of

commodity culture:

> That mysterious paper currency which circulates in London when the wind blows,
> gyrated here and there and everywhere. Whence can it come, whither can it go?
> It hangs on every bush, flutters in every tree, is caught fling by the electric wires,
> haunts every enclosure, drinks at every pump, cowers at every grating, shudders
> upon ever plot of grass, seeks rest in vain behind the legion of iron rails. In Paris,
> where nothing is wasted, costly and luxurious city though it be, but where
> wonderful human ants creep out of holes and pick up every scrap, there is no such
> thing. There, it blows nothing but dust. There, sharp eyes and sharp stomachs
> reap even the east wind, and get something out of it. (144)[13]

Dickens's narrator describes the paper which blows around the streets of London, and

like Marx's residue, this "currency," which, as it turns out, is valueless to the Londoner

(though perhaps of value to the Parisian), "haunts" the London streets. The material

swirling in the wind is associated with both money and with the refuse that is collected on

the streets of Paris. But in London, the paper is simply residue that contains neither use-

value nor exchange value.

Although this paper does not get reclaimed from the streets, there are many who

do search the streets for objects which might contain some value: "[M]elancholy waifs

and strays of housekeepers and porters sweep melancholy waifs and strays of papers and

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[13] As Dickens's narrator indicates, Parisian *chiffonniers* (ragpickers) were generally
believed to be more efficient scavengers than the ragpickers of London. In *Waste
Products and Undeveloped Substances* (1873), for example, Peter Lund Simmonds
claimed, "Nowhere is the class of waste collectors so developed as in Paris, where the
'chiffonier' forms a peculiar type, almost unknown elsewhere. [. .] [T]hese dirty,
repulsive, and uncouth labourers are next to indispensible. [. . .] They supply a whole
catalogue of Parisian industrials" (33-34).

pins into the kennels, and other more melancholy waifs and strays explore them, searching and stooping and poking for anything to sell" (393). In characteristic Dickensian style, animate and inanimate are conflated.[14] It is difficult here to distinguish between the sweeping servants, the waste that is being swept, and the scavengers who search through the waste: all are "melancholy waifs and strays" in Dickens's vision. Not only do waste matter and the human scavenger become indistinguishable in the world of *Our Mutual Friend*, but the human body becomes a valuable form of waste matter. These dubious forms of waste reclamation are introduced as the novel opens with Gaffer Hexam looking out for a floating corpse on the Thames. As a professional scavenger on the river, Hexam collects corpses and other items of potential value that have been discarded in the river. He not only pockets the money he finds on the corpses but also collects rewards for finding them. When Lizzie expresses her horror at her father's employment, Hexam opines, "How can you be so thankless to your best friend, Lizzie. The very fire that warmed you when you were a baby, was picked out of the river alongside the coal barges. The very basket that you slept in, the tide washed ashore. The very rockets that I put it upon to make a cradle of it, I cut out of a piece of wood that drifted from some ship or another" (3).

The Thames is not the only site for waste reclamation, for the Harmon dust heaps form another economic center of the text: the Boffins and John Harmon inherit a fortune made from the heaps, while Silas Wegg and Mr. Venus conspire to convert the heaps into a fortune. The novel's central plot revolves around John Harmon's return to London, his

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[14] See John Carey, who has noted Dickens's tendency to "liken inanimate objects to people. Another is to liken people to inanimate objects. Dickens does both incessantly. Stilled life, and the still enlivened are the hallmarks of his imagination" (101-02).

concealed identity, and his discovery that he can only claim his inheritance if he marries

Bella Wilfer. The Harmon dust heaps thus are central to John Harmon's story of

inheritance and identity, and waste becomes the novel's primary site of identity formation

and reclamation. This is true not just for John Harmon, who must either escape or

redefine the identity bequeathed to him through the dust heaps. Mr. and Mrs. Boffin seek

to claim a "fashionable" identity, properly befitting the social status and fortune that they

inherit along with their dust heap. Silas Wegg's efforts at securing his amputated leg

provide the most humorous relationship between scavenging and identity formation.

When Silas Wegg improves his fortunes by securing a position as Mr. Boffin's "literary

man," his first wish is to purchase the bone of his leg that was amputated in a hospital

and later purchased by the taxidermist and skeleton maker, Mr. Venus. Venus shows

Wegg his shop:

> You're casting your eye round the shop, Mr. Wegg. Let me show you a light.
> My working bench. My young man's bench. A Wice. Tools. Bones, warious.
> Skulls, warious. Preserved Indian baby. African ditto. Bottled preparations,
> warious. Everything within reach of your hand, in good preservation. What's in
> those hampers over them again, I don't quite remember. Say, human warious.
> Cats. Articulated English baby. Dogs. Ducks. Glass eyes, warious. Mummied
> bird. Dried cuticle, warious. Oh dear me! That's the general panoramic view.
> (81)

Animals and dismembered human parts mingle on Venus's shelves as he irreverently

catalogues the dead babies and dismembered human bones that he has collected. The

world of *Our Mutual Friend* with its cast of human curiosities, including the peg-legged

Wegg, Jenny Wren, the troupe of misers in Boffin's books, including Daniel Dancer, who

wore rags tied together with a hay-band and warmed his dinner by sitting on it, and even

Venus, the misanthropic taxidermist, is not unlike the world of Venus's shop. And it is to

Venus's shop that Wegg proceeds to reclaim part of himself, a piece of waste that has

been appropriated by Venus. Wegg asks Venus, "Where am I?" (82), referring to the bone of his amputated leg. Venus instantly understands his meaning: "You're somewhere in the back shop across the yard, sir; and speaking quite candidly, I wish I'd never bought you of the Hospital Porter" (82). Venus explains that Wegg's leg bone is abnormally shaped and will thus not serve as part of a skeleton. Yet he's reluctant to sell Wegg his leg, claiming, "[Y]ou might turn out valuable yet, as a— [. . .] as a Monstrosity, if you'll excuse me" (82). Wegg replies, "I have a prospect of getting on in life and elevating myself by my own independent exertions [. . .] and I shouldn't like—I tell you openly I should *not* like—under such circumstances, to be what I may call dispersed, a part of me here, and a part of me there, but should wish to collect myself like a genteel person" (82). For Wegg, Venus's acquisition of his amputated leg bone is completely different from the reclamation of other sorts of waste matter. Having part of one's body in a taxidermist's shop is, for Wegg, both a literal dispersion of himself and an imagined loss of both identity and class. Because the rascally Wegg is self-serving, conspiratorial, and greedy, critics have been reluctant to associate Wegg's literal desire to find, or collect, himself with the novel's larger thematic concerns with identity. Efraim Sicher, for example, claims that the novel is invested in a "comic mockery of the mean and unscrupulous Wegg who gets his due when he is thrown into a scavenger's dust cart" (353).[15]

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[15] Efraim Sicher, for example, claims that the novel is invested in a "comic mockery of the mean and unscrupulous Wegg who gets his due when he is thrown into a scavenger's dust cart" (353). See Joel J. Brattin, 23-30. Brattin argues that Wegg serves as a "moral polar opposite" of Nicodemus Boffin; the two characters act, he claims, as "a moral system for the novel."

Venus and Wegg's conspiracy to find treasure among the Harmon dust heaps reveals two different relationships to waste. While Wegg is a collector, Venus identifies himself as an "articulator": "Mr Wegg, if you was brought here loose in a bag to be articulated, I'd name your smallest bones blindfold equally with your largest, as fast as I could pick 'em out, and I'd sort 'em all, and sort your wertebræ, in a manner that would equally surprise and charm you" (83). The human body is a valuable form of waste matter not only as it is dragged from the Thames, but also as it can be transformed by an "articulator of human bones" (83). Venus's professional role requires him to identify and join together the bones of a skeleton, amalgamating waste matter and transforming it into something useful.[16] He describes his professional activity as "articulation," an activity which suggests opposing activities: to "articulate" is to both divide into distinct parts and to connect into joints. Venus's own description of his work suggests this dual meaning: in order to join the bones of the skeleton together, he must first distinguish between the bones. While both Wegg and Venus seek to profit from the collection of waste, Venus is an "articulator" both in terms of his profession and in terms of his social dealings. In describing his skill as both "surprising" and "charming," Venus is making a claim that his talent is appealing to those who witness it, that the act of articulating, not just the product of his articulation, is itself socially valuable. Venus's skill in translating the disintegrated body into an intact form corresponds to the text's and its characters' investment in

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[16] Much has been made of Venus's role as an "articulator" of human bones. Albert D. Hutter claims, "Venus is in effect a comic version of Dickens the novelist and of Dickens' later detectives" (157). Nancy Aycock Metz sees Venus as analogous to the artists that populate the foregrounds of Dickens's other novels: "If the artist has retreated into the background of *Our Mutual Friend*, the background becomes, in a sense, all artists" (62). Michael Cotsell asserts, "[S]o aptly does Mr. Venus's business focus and elaborate the imagery and provide a wonderful comi-grotesque satire on the human vanities and vices with which the work abounds" (105).

"articulating" the fragmentation and incoherence of urban life. Though Venus initially

conspires with Wegg to search for treasure in the Harmon dust mounds, he quickly gives

up the plan, saying, "I can't afford to waste my time on groping for nothing in cinders"

(478). Wegg responds, "you with the patience to fit together on wires the whole

framework of society—I allude to the human skelinton—you to give in so soon" (478).

For Wegg, the human skeleton is a synecdoche for the "framework of society." Wegg

seems to recognize Venus's social skill, which is analogous to his skill in making

skeletons. Venus, too, describes his work in social terms: "When I prepare a

miscellaneous one, I know beforehand that I can't keep to natures, and be miscellaneous

with ribs, because every man has his own ribs, and no other man's will go with them; but

elseways I can be miscellaneous. I have just sent home a Beauty—a perfect Beauty—to a

school of art. One leg Belgian, one leg English, and the pickings of eight other people in

it" (79-80). Venus brings disparate bodies and nations together, claiming that although

his creation does not perfectly reflect nature, he has nonetheless created something

beautiful by harmonizing differences. In this way, Venus's skeleton with its

miscellaneous parts bears a synechdochal relationship to the social body, and Venus's

talent in articulating skeletons corresponds to his ability to sort out social discord to his

own benefit. From his first appearance in the text, Venus's major interest is not profit,

but marriage. Though he is interested in marrying Pleasant Riderhood, she objects to his

profession, telling him, "I do not wish [. . .] to regard myself, nor yet to regarded, in that

bony light" (84). Yet the success of Venus's domestic narrative rests not on Venus's

choice of profession but, rather, on a choice between profiting from his conspiracy with

Wegg and revealing Wegg's plan to Mr. Boffin. Venus decides to forgo the possibility of

finding treasure in the dust heaps and, instead, resolves to expose Wegg's plot to Boffin. Venus attempts to convince Boffin that he been persuaded by Wegg into the conspiracy: "'Not that I was very hearty in it, sir,' the penitent anatomist went on, 'or that I ever viewed myself with anything but reproach for having turned out of the paths of science into the paths of—' he was going to say 'villany,' [sic] but, unwilling to press too hard upon himself, substituted with great emphasis—'Weggery'" (577-78). "Weggery," Venus suggests, is a pejorative for the uncomplicated collection of waste with a sole interest in personal gain, while Venus's "articulation" of waste matter bears a social function. Wegg's relationship to waste and to society is about collection rather than articulation as he hopes to find spoils among the dust. Wegg both parodies the identity crises of the novel's other characters and pushes against the novel's domestic resolutions. Unlike Venus, Wegg has no interest in creating a domestic narrative for himself. When Venus tells Wegg about his marriage plans, Wegg replies, "I wish you joy. One man spends his fortune in one way, and another in another. You mean to try matrimony. I mean to try travelling" (783).

Thus, when Venus gives up his conspiracy with Wegg, he opens the door to domestic possibilities for himself. After forming an alliance with Boffin, Venus creates a social network which furthers his interests in Pleasant Riderhood and domestic resolution. Venus's description of his success with Pleasant Riderhood indicates both its dependence on the social network and its similarity to Venus's professional activity of articulating skeletons: "[T]wo friends [. . .] did me the great service of waiting on the lady to try if a union betwixt the lady and me could not be brought to bear" (782). Venus makes use of the Boffins to further his social interests, and the Boffins create a "union"

between Venus and Pleasant in the same way that Venus unites disparate bones of the human skeleton. Moreover, Venus's productive relationship to waste, his ability to "articulate," is what allows him to ultimately create a reproductive domestic narrative, a "union" which can be "brought to bear." Still, Venus's domestic resolution requires that he modify his relationship to waste. He describes a condition of his marriage to Pleasant Riderhood: "after marriage, I confin[e] myself to the articulation of men, children, and the lower animals" so as to "relieve the lady's mind of her feeling respecting being—as a lady—regarded in a bony light" (783). Once married, Venus will not be allowed to articulate the adult female skeleton, and the miscellaneous parts of the female body can no longer serve as fodder for his art. In other words, Venus's domestic narrative requires him to abandon his notion of the female body as waste.

Although Venus's relationship to waste is essentially productive, the successful articulation of both his skeletons and his social world involves a cost to those around him. Venus understands his ability to articulate the human frame as a means of demonstrating power and enacting revenge. He threatens a boy, saying, "Don't sauce *me,* in the wicious pride of your youth; don't hit *me* because you see I'm down. You've no idea how small you'd come out, if I had the articulating of you" (81). Venus threatens Wegg when they disagree about who should possess the will that Wegg finds in the dust heap: "I don't want to have any words with you, and still less do I want to have any anatomical pursuits with you. [. . .] [T]he shop is pretty well crammed, and I don't just now want any more trophies of my art. But I like my art, and I know how to exercise my art" (496). Venus's ability to articulate waste gives him a sort of menacing authority that is not available to the simple collector, and this power translates into the social realm.

Wegg, like Venus, is a kind of "articulator," but what he articulates is literature rather than the human skeleton. Hired by the illiterate but socially ambitious, Noddy Boffin to read mostly historical texts to him in the evenings, Wegg becomes Boffin's "literary man" (49). Although he is able to read Boffin's volumes of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire,* he "read[s] on by rote and attach[es] as few ideas as possible to the text" (59). Wegg appears little to enjoy reading the histories:

> The Roman Empire having worked out its destruction, Mr. Boffin next appeared in a cab with Rollin's Ancient History, which valuable work being found to possess lethargic properties, broke down. [. . .] Silas Wegg had grown accustomed to the arrival of his patron in a cab, accompanied by some profane historian charged with unutterable names of incomprehensible peoples, of impossible descent, waging wars any number of years and syllables long. (476)

Wegg has little interest in the dry histories which Boffin asks him to read. He reserves his enthusiasm for less esoteric kinds of narratives. Wegg is often associated with imagination, storytelling, and the kinds of flights of fancy that are not found in the histories he reads to Boffin. For example, Wegg sets up a stall every day on a corner and sells halfpenny ballads. Although he has never had any contact with the members of the house in front of which he sets up his stall, he imagines himself a member of the household, insisting that

> he was one of the house's retainers and owed vassalage to it and was bound to leal and loyal interest in it. For this reason, he always spoke of it as 'Our House,' and, though his knowledge of its affairs was mostly speculative and all wrong, claimed to be in its confidence. [. . .] Yet, he knew so little about the inmates that he gave them names of his own invention. [. . .] Over the house itself, he exercised the same imaginary power as over its inhabitants and their affairs. [. . .] [I]t cost his mind a world of trouble to lay it out as to account for everything in its external appearance. But, this once done, was quite satisfactory, and he rested persuaded that he knew his way about the house blindfold. (45)

Wegg uses his "imaginary power" to not only tell himself stories about the house, but also to fashion a kind of romance for himself in his search for treasure in the Harmon

dust mounds. Convinced that old Harmon's dust mounds contain treasure and possibly

Harmon's will or codicils to his will, Wegg hatches a plan to unearth the mysteries of the

heaps. Asking Venus about his previous conversations with old Harmon, Wegg inquires,

"'As to what was found in the dust now. Did you ever hear him mention how he found it,

my dear friend? Living on the mysterious premises, one would like to know. [. . .]

Whether he prodded,' Mr. Wegg's pantomime is skilful and expressive here; 'or whether

he scooped? Should you say scooped, my dear Mr. Venus; or should you—as a man—

say prodded?'" (300-01). When Boffin, to whom Harmon bequeathed the heaps,

discovers Wegg's plan to find treasure in the heaps, Boffin brings Wegg a new kind of

reading material, which piques Wegg's interest in a way which the histories did not.

Boffin arrives with "Kirby's Wonderful Museum [. . .] and Caulfield's Characters, and

Wilson's. Such Characters, Wegg, such Characters! I must have one or two of the best

of 'em to-night. It's amazing what places they used to put the guineas in, wrapped up in

rags" (479). Boffin appeals to Wegg's greed and imagination by having him read

romantic tales of misers who lived lives of poverty secreting away their wealth, of hidden

wills and codicils that turned paupers into affluent men. The tales convince Wegg that

the mounds contain hidden wealth and that Boffin is aware of it. Yet, Wegg's romance

of the hidden treasure that he creates for himself ultimately fails. Although Wegg is

eventually able to "collect" himself by purchasing his leg from Venus, the novel

concludes with a re-dispersed Wegg, whose body is absorbed back into the city's waste

when he is ejected from Boffin/Harmon house into "a scavenger's cart happening to

stand unattended at the corner" (790). In this way, Wegg's body and the city amalgamate

and are rendered indivisible, so that "the City grit gets into the hair and eyes and skin,"

(393) but that "grit," the waste of the city, we learn, is itself the body of Wegg.

Waste collectors like Mr. Krook and Silas Wegg, while forced out of Dickens's

plots by the exigencies of domestic and economic resolution, remain in the form of

residues that threaten to permeate the eyes and lungs of the city's inhabitants. Krook's

combustion leaves not only a "queer kind of flavour" in the air, but a greasy substance

that covers everything. The narrator of *Bleak House* notes, "A thick yellow liquor defiles

[Weevle and Guppy], which is offensive to the touch and sight and more offensive to the

smell. A stagnant, sickening oil, with some natural repulsion in it that makes them both

shudder" (401). Before Mr. Venus is domesticated by the plot of *Our Mutual Friend*, his

shop full of dismembered human and animal parts is described in terms of a similar

greasiness: "Stumping with fresh vigour, [Wegg] goes in at the dark greasy entry, pushes

a little greasy dark reluctant side-door, and follows the door into the little dark greasy

shop" (78). These greasy residues represent the excesses of the city's economy, which

cannot be coerced into resolution.

"But who eats tripe?" said Mr. Filer, looking round. "Tripe is without an exception the least economical, and the most wasteful article of consumption that the markets of this country can by possibility produce. The loss upon a pound of tripe has been found to be, in the boiling, seven-eighths of a fifth more than the loss upon a pound of any other animal substance whatever. Tripe is more expensive, properly understood, than the hothouse pine-apple. Taking into account the number of animals slaughtered yearly within the bills of mortality alone; and forming a low estimate of the quantity of tripe which the carcasses of those animals, reasonably well butchered, would yield; I find that the waste on that amount of tripe, if boiled, would victual a garrison of five hundred men for five months of thirty-one days each, and a February over. The Waste, the Waste!"

—Charles Dickens, *The Chimes* (1844)

Chapter Two:
The Residuum:
Thermodynamics and the Problem of Time and Space in the Entropic Narrative

I. The Residuum and the Laws of Thermodynamics

John Bright was the first person to use the term "residuum" to refer to England's underclass during the parliamentary debates about the Second Reform Act in 1867. Arguing that the poorest of the nation should not be enfranchised, Bright offered a definition of the residuum as those who do not work:

At this moment, in all, or nearly all our boroughs, as many of us know, sometimes to our sorrow, there is a small class which it would be much better for themselves if they were not enfranchised, because they have no independence whatsoever, and it would be much better for the constituency also that they should be excluded, and there is no class so much interested in having that small class

excerpt as the intelligent and honest working men. I call this class the residuum, which there is in almost every constituency, of almost hopeless poverty and dependence. (636-37)

For Bright the condition of the residuum is irremediable. They exist all over England, but they do not deserve to be enfranchised because they do not work, and their interests seem to be in direct opposition to the interests of the working poor. Bright's term echoed in Parliament for months: while some were scandalized by his use of the word to describe the very poor (Bright was, after all, a Liberal), others took up the term immediately. Newspapers and sociological texts soon began using the term "residuum" to describe England's underclass.

Before Bright applied the term "residuum" in this way, the word was used either generally to describe the residue (that which remains) of immaterial things, or more specifically in relation to material things, referring to "that which remains after a process of combustion, evaporation, etc.; a deposit or sediment, a waste or residual product" (*OED*). "Residuum" is a form of "residue." In the nineteenth century "residue" was employed for the first time in chemistry to describe a molecule which is incorporated into a larger molecule. Although "residue" and "residuum" were at times used interchangeably, by the nineteenth century "residuum" took on two meanings distinct from the ways "residue" was used. First, while "residue" referred neutrally to any sort of remainder, "residuum" assumed a negative significance, referring to the waste product created in a process of combustion or evaporation, or second, as Bright employed it, to refer to that group of the poor living in "hopeless poverty," who should not be enfranchised because, like the residuum left in a steam engine after combustion, work cannot be extracted from this class of people: they are a waste product of the system.

This notion of the residuum or waste product that is created through a process of work is derived from the laws of thermodynamics, which were first articulated in the mid-nineteenth century.

It seems inevitable that the Victorians were to be the first to formulate the laws of thermodynamics, for it was this area of science that appeared to explain what the Victorians valued most—work and progress—and what they feared—degeneration and waste. Thermodynamics, the study of heat and energy transfer, was popularized and applied to a range of social issues during the latter half of the century. Victorians used the language of thermodynamic laws to articulate social theories about work, waste, time and history.

The concept of energy was by the 1850s the central principle of the science of physics.[1] As P.M. Harman argues, "The concept of energy provided the science of physics with a new and unifying framework and brought the phenomena of heat, light, electricity, and magnetism within the framework of mechanical principles" (1-2). The first law of thermodynamics was formulated in the 1830s and 40s by scientists including James Prescott Joule, Hermann von Hemholtz, and Michael Faraday, who were working independently in England and on the Continent.[2] Although the second law was formulated by Sadi Carnot in *Reflections on the Motive Power of Heat* in 1824, it was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that the laws of thermodynamics were

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[1] Isaac Newton's laws of motion and their focus on force dominated the science of physics from the late seventeenth century. By the 1850s the focus had shifted from force to energy, largely as a result of the experiments of James Prescott Joule.

[2] Greg Myers posits that these three scientists were associated with different narratives of thermodynamics: "As Thomson is identified in the popular mind with decline and irreversibility, and Tyndall with progress, so Maxwell is identified with ideas of chance, uncertainty and disorder" (319).

popularized in England by John Tyndall, William Thomson (later Lord Kelvin), and

James Clerk Maxwell. The first law of thermodynamics posits that the amount of energy

in a closed system remains constant. That is, energy is conserved: it neither can be

created nor destroyed, but merely transformed into another state. The second law of

thermodynamics states that systems are always in a state of increasing entropy. This

means that although the amount of energy in a system remains constant, over time, the

energy in a given system will transform from an available (or usable) state to an

unavailable (or unusable) state. Thus, although energy is conserved in a system, it

becomes useless—waste. These two laws of thermodynamics had immense political and

philosophical implications for mid and late century Victorians. In 1864 in the *North

British Review*, Scottish physicist Peter Guthrie Tait explained the laws of

thermodynamics to Victorian lay readers:

> The *Conservation of Energy* simply asserts that the whole amount of energy in
> the universe, or in any limited system which does not receive energy from
> without, or part with it to external matter, is invariable.
> The *Transformation of Energy* is the enunciation of the experimental fact, that
> in general any one form of energy may by suitable processes be transformed,
> wholly or in part, to an equivalent amount in any other given form. It is subject,
> however, to limitations which are supplied by
> The *Dissipation of Energy*. No known natural process is exactly reversible,
> and whenever an attempt is made to transform and retransform energy by an
> imperfect process, part of the energy is necessarily transformed into heat and
> *dissipated*, so as to be incapable of further useful transformation. It therefore
> follows, that as energy is constantly in a state of transformation, there is a
> constant degradation of energy to the final unavailable form of uniformly diffused
> heat; and that this will go on as long as transformations occur, until the whole
> energy of the universe has taken its final form. (182)

Tait's terms demonstrate why the laws of thermodynamics seemed to apply to the social

realm. The terms "conservation," "transformation," and "dissipation" had broad

implications. The laws made the steam engine, the human body, the social world, and the

universe analogous closed systems. Each of these systems require energy to do work,

and physical energy in the steam engine came to be viewed as analogous to human labor

in the industrial economy. The relationship between conservation and dissipation,

moreover, is transformation or temporal development. Change over time is the basis of

both work and waste. This notion was later termed "time's arrow" by A.S. Eddington in

The Nature of the Physical World.

It was German physicist Rudolf Clausius who first used the term "entropy" in

1864 to describe the rate at which the energy of a system is converted to unusable or

irrecoverable forms:

> I prefer going to the ancient languages for the names of important scientific quantities so that they may mean the same thing in all living tongues. I propose, accordingly, to call S the *entropy* of a body, after the Greek word ἡ τροπή, "transformation." I have designedly coined *entropy* to be similar to "energy," for these two quantities are so analogous in their physical significance, that an analogy of denomination seemed to me helpful. (qtd. in Gillispie 399) [3]

As Bruce Clarke and others have pointed out, Clausius chose to borrow the same root as

"trope."[4] In using this root, Clausius seemed to evoke both meanings of the root: on the

one hand it means a turn or transformation, but it also carries the meaning of "a figure of

speech which consists in the use of a word or term in a sense other than what is proper to

it" (*OED*). The term entropy analogized the linguistic and the scientific, and the use of

the term "dissipation" to describe the transformation of energy carried with it moral

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[3] ["Da ich es aber für besser halte, die Namen derartiger für die Wissenschaft wichtiger Grössen aus den alten Sprachen zu entnehmen, damit sie unverändert in allen neuen Sprachen angewandt werden können, so schlage ich vor, die Grosse S nach dem griechischen Worte ἡ τροπή, die Verwandlung, die Entropie des Körpers zu nennen. Das Wort Entropie habe ich absichtlich dem Worte Energie möglichst ähnlich gebildet, denn die beiden Grossen, welche durch diese Worte benannt werden sollen, sind ihren physikalischen Bedeutungen nach einander so nahe verwandt, dass eine gewisse Gleichartigkeit in der Benennung mir zweckinässig zu sein scheint" (Clausius 34).]

[4] See Clarke, 74. See also Richard Menke, 970.

notions about waste. As Tina Young Choi notes, the law of entropy disturbed some

Victorians: "[I]n spite of these reassurances that no energy was ever lost from the

universe, the idea that the universe as a whole might be tending always toward a more

dissipated state was troubling to many readers. That the two laws were ordered as they

were perhaps contributed to the sense that a loss of useful energy was inevitably a

descent from idealism" (306). More than a descent from idealism, the second law of

thermodynamics signaled for the Victorians the inevitable "heat-death" of the universe.

In his 1852 paper, "On a Universal Tendency in Nature to the Dissipation of Mechanical

Energy," William Thomson explained the second law of thermodynamics and ended by

claiming, "Within a finite period of time past, the earth must have been, and within a

finite period of time to come the earth must again be, unfit for the habitation of man as at

present constituted" (1.514). Patrick Brantlinger and Richard Higgins suggest, "By the

end of the century, novelists and intellectuals had begun to associate entropy [. . .] with

both the squandering of wealth and the 'degeneration' of traditional conceptions of

cultural and moral value under the impact of capitalism and the arrival on the political

and economic scene of "the masses" (464). Thermodynamics thus held implications for

history, philosophy, and economics. While the first law stated that energy is conserved,

the second law implied degeneration and dissolution, a movement toward a final entropic

state. Together, the two laws said that a closed system both conserves and wastes,

progresses and declines, changes over time and maintains equilibrium.

The second law pointed to the tendency of a closed system to become

increasingly chaotic, disordered and/or increasingly alike or homogenous. This is

because as energy is transformed, it is also diffused within that system and thus

increasingly disordered. Energy is no longer organized for use, but paradoxically it is also more uniformly diffused within the system so as to create greater equilibrium or homogeneity. As Stanley W. Angrist and Loren G. Helper explain, entropy is defined "in terms of the number of states that are possible in a system in a given situation. The disorder arises because we do not know which state the system is in. Disorder is then essentially the same thing as ignorance" (147). In the second law, order and disorder go hand in hand. What is more, the second law describes the directionality of time: the entropy of a closed system always increases and is irreversible. These concepts had an especially strong impact on Victorian thinkers since they seemed to contradict ideal notions of social and historical progress. For example, in 1858 Herbert Spencer wrote to physicist John Tyndall about the second law:

> That which was new to me in your position enunciated last June, and again on Saturday, was that equilibration was death. Regarding, as I had done, equilibration as the ultimate and *highest* state of society, I had assumed it to be not only the ultimate but also the highest state of the universe. And your assertion that when equilibrium was reached life must cease, staggered me. Indeed, not seeing my way out of the conclusion, I remember being out of spirits for some days afterwards. (undated letter, Duncan 104)

For Spencer, the second law of thermodynamics seamlessly applied to both the "state" of society and of the universe. That the second law maintains that equilibrium equals death was dispiriting for Spencer, who was unable to reconcile this new physical law with his beliefs about social justice.

Far from eschewing progress in favor of degeneration as the model for history in the late-nineteenth century, fin de siècle writers engaged in discursive struggles about the relationships between changing notions of time and history and the political and social concerns of the period. As John Ruskin noted as early as *Modern Painters* III, "The

elements of progress and decline being thus strangely mingled in the modern mind, we might beforehand anticipate that one of the notable characters of our art would be its inconsistency" (327). Entropy became closely associated with ideas about degeneration in the late nineteenth century, but entropy, like degeneration, was never understood simply as the running down of the universe. For the late Victorians, entropy signified decline and degeneration, but it also suggested disorder, and something which was not necessarily the inverse of progress, but which, rather, was akin to a new kind of order and different experiences of time and history. While entropy is associated with decline, as Robert A. Nye claims, for the Victorians "the concept of decline was conceptually inseparable from that of progress" (49). This was true in terms of ideas relating to biological evolution, thermodynamics, and, by extension, social theory. Evolutionary theory brought the idea of biological degeneration to the fore, while thermodynamic laws contributed new language for both conservation of energy and waste. As a result social theorists discussed both social evolution and social decline, and, moreover, discussed them in tandem with one another. In other words, Victorian England had available a number of ways of understanding degeneration: biological generation versus degeneration as articulated by evolutionary theory; conservation versus entropic degeneration associated with the laws of thermodynamics; and theories of degeneration were also developed in relation to art (decadence), psychology (degeneracy), and historicism (nihilism). More than simply popularizing skepticism about progress, the laws of thermodynamics provided new ways to narrate how change takes place over time.

The development of thermodynamics and the attendant developments in notions of historical change were bound to have important implications for narrative form. Choi

has argued that the first law of thermodynamics offered "the reassuring promise of a world of eternal returns, in which causes and effects would always be contained" (301-02). For Choi, this desire for the validity of conservation is manifest in mid-century novelistic conventions such as omniscience and closure. While Choi acknowledges the second law and its claim that energy, although conserved, is turned into waste, and even claims that the two laws of thermodynamics suggested distinct forms of narrative ("Entropy demanded a linear narrative, while conservation suggested a closed, circulatory one" [307]), she nevertheless posits that popular narratives tended to favor the first law, offering an idealized form of conservation that eschews entropic decline. But I want to take the question of the analogies between thermodynamic laws and narrative forms further, by showing that the relationships between the laws, and thus between the laws and forms of narrative, is more complex than a model based on a simple contradistinction. Choi claims that the two laws signaled a contradiction to the Victorians: "For while the second law conceived of energy's transformations as irrecoverable and irreversible, always inevitably moving toward some final entropic state, the first allowed one to imagine a world of possible reversals and returns" (306-07). Choi's notion of the circularity of conservation and the linearity of entropy does not account for the complex and varying responses to and formulations of the laws of thermodynamics, both in terms of the narratives that were generated and in terms of the ways in which the science was popularized during the period. For, the idea of entropy and its political and moral implications were complicated by the ways in which these ideas came to be associated with industrial capitalism, work, and waste. More specifically, the laws of thermodynamics were understood to bear on notions of social

decline or degeneration as well as the possibility of improvement. Both laws of thermodynamics described change over time and both suggested linear forms of narrative at the same time as they suggested certain forms of circularity. While the first law posited circularity in the form of the conservation of energy, it also indicated change over time in the transformation of energy. And, while the second law posited increasing entropy over time, it also suggested a lack of change in that entropy moves a system toward uniformity and equilibrium. Competing influences within the system are ultimately balanced in its equilibrium state. In other words, a system is unbalanced when it receives input of heat, but when work is extracted, the system settles into equilibrium.

As is well known, the concept of labor took on new power in the Victorian era, with the rise of industrial capitalism, the growth of cities, and the rise of the middle class. The Victorian celebration of work took as many forms as it had sources. In Thomas Carlyle's "biography" *Sartor Resartus* (1833-34), Diogenes Teufelsdröckh famously emerges from his spiritual nadir by turning to labor: "Be no longer a Chaos, but a World, or even Worldkin. Produce! Produce! Were it but the pitifullest infinitesimal fraction of a Product, produce it in God's name! 'Tis the utmost thou hast in thee; out with it then. Up, up! Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy whole might. Work while it is called To-day, for the Night cometh wherein no man can work" (149). For Carlyle, work—the creation of something no matter what it is—is the means of generating a "world" out of chaos. John Ruskin, who often acknowledged Carlyle's influence, valorizes work in *Pre-Raphaelitism* (1851): "It may be proved, with much certainty, that

God intends no man to live in this world without working" (340). Ruskin laments that

"everybody thinks it his *duty* to try to be a 'gentleman,'" insisting,

> I do not believe that any greater good could be achieved for the country, than the change in public feeling on this head, which might be brought about by a few benevolent men, undeniably in the class of "gentlemen," who would, on principle, enter into some of our commonest trades, and make them honourable; showing that it was possible for a man to retain his dignity, and remain, in the best sense, a gentleman, though part of his time was every day occupied in manual labour. (342)

Although Ruskin does not seem to want to revolutionize the class system here, he does

seek to make labor "gentlemanly," and, perhaps even more emphatically, to get

"gentlemen" to recognize the value and importance of work. He claims that there is

dignity in manual labor, and thus "mothers who want all their six or eight sons to go to

college, and make the grand tour in the long vacation" should instead focus on their

children's discipline and morality (342-43). Later in the century following Ruskin but

within the context of the developing British socialist movement, William Morris

aestheticizes manual labor. In Morris's formulation, art and work are inextricably

connected because art is the result of "extra labour" which

> is undertaken with the aim of satisfying that mood of energy by employing it to produce something worth doing, and which, therefore, will keep before the worker a lively hope while he is working; and also by giving it work to do in which there is absolute immediate pleasure. Perhaps it is difficult to explain to the non-artistic capacity that this definite sensuous pleasure is always present in the handiwork of the deft workman when he is working successfully, and that it increases in proportion to the freedom and individuality of the work. (*Signs* 121)

The workman and artist, for Morris, are one in the same. The workman employs extra

"energy" in order to create art, and his skill and the product of such energy yields

pleasure. Morris moves beyond Ruskin by emphasizing the needs of energy itself:

energy can be satisfied by labor.

Morris was not alone in associating labor with energy. Although the association is commonplace now and appears almost innate to the definition of work, the term "energy" was not commonly employed in discourses about labor until the late eighteenth century. Ted Underwood points out, "The frequency of *energy* and *energetic* in the written record tripled between 1750 and 1800. (The frequency of the French cognate *énergie*, quadrupled over the same period.)" (33). Underwood argues that the popularity of the term during the period was associated with "a change in the expression of the work ethic" (33). For Underwood, "energy" as opposed to terms like "power," "force," or "industry," could be used to describe forms of activity that were spontaneous rather than compelled. The attraction of the term "energy" to describe labor lay in the fact that energy could be used to "describe middle-class work as a form of autonomy, rather than compulsion" (34). Underwood's argument raises questions about what happens to energy that is not channeled into work. If energy is associated with forms of middle-class labor, what of the energy of the working class or underclass? Energy was, indeed, associated with middle-class labor, but it was also understood in terms of the waste which is created when energy is converted to labor, allowing Victorian thinkers not only to valorize and naturalize middle-class labor, but also to account for the waste, or residuum, within the system of capitalist economy.

Given the Victorian celebration of work, it is little wonder that the non-working poor came to be seen to be a grave problem. Central to many accounts of the London poor is the question of whether or not individuals were willing to work. In *Life and Labour of the People of London*, which appeared in two volumes in 1889 and 1891, Charles Booth categorized the poor, those below what he considered to be the

"comfortable" working-class, into four discrete classes: A, B, C, and D. Booth describes

class A as "[t]he lowest class, which consists of some occasional labourers, street sellers,

loafers, criminals, and semi-criminals" (37). The only laborers in this class, according to

Booth, are "casual labourers of low character" (38). The rest of the class consists of

those "who pick up a living without labour of any kind. Their life is the life of savages,

with vicissitudes of extreme hardship and occasional excess" (38). Booth continues,

"They render no useful service, they create no wealth: more often they destroy it. They

degrade whatever they touch, and as individuals are perhaps incapable of improvement"

(38). In Booth's formulation, the non-working poor increase the entropy of the system.

Class B, according to Booth, largely consists of dock labourers, but this group like class

A is characterized as either unable or reluctant to work: "The labourers of class B do not,

on the average, get as much as three days' work a week, but it is doubtful if many of

them could or would work full time for long together if they had the opportunity. [. . .]

The ideal of such persons is to work when they like and play when they like; these it is

who are rightly called the 'leisure class' amongst the poor" (42-43). It is startling that

class B, whom Booth describes as "very poor" and "ill nourished and poorly clad" is also

characterized by "excess" and termed the "leisure class."   His definition is explained

when, later in the first volume, he offers remedies for the problem of poverty. Booth

believes class B to be more dangerous than class A because members of class B are

involved in occasional labor: "It is class B that is *du trop*. The competition of B drags

down C and D, and that of C and D hangs heavily upon E. I have already said, and I

repeat, that industrially we gain nothing from B. All that B does could be done by C and

D in their idle hours. [. . .] [I]ll-paid and half-starved as they are, they consume or waste

or have expended on them more wealth than they create" (162-63, 165). Again, and because they do not work, members of class B are figured as consumers or waste makers, who increase the entropy of the system. Class B is "du trop," an unwelcome excess, an excess that saps the system of its capacity to work. Booth's remedy is to remove class B from the London work force and "plant[ ] [them] wherever land and building materials were cheap; being well housed, well fed, and well warmed; and taught, trained, and employed from morning to night on work [. . .] in the cultivation of the land, in the making of clothes, or in the making of furniture" (167). This program, which Booth calls "limited Socialism," would be funded by the government as an extension of the Poor Law.

What Booth called classes A and B was dubbed by many social theorists of the period "residuum," a term with richer connotations. In *Classes and Masses: Wealth, Wages, and Welfare in the United Kingdom* (1896), W.H. Mallock defines the "residuum" as that which cannot be absorbed by the system:

> The right way, indeed, in which to regard [the unfortunate class] is, not as a product of [the modern industrial] system, but rather as something which has resisted it—not as a part of it, but as something which has failed to be absorbed by it; and the real problem for philanthropists and reformers is, not how to interfere with existing economic tendencies, but how, so far as possible, to bring the residuum under their influence. (6)

Mallock does not believe that industrial capitalism produces the residuum, however. Rather, the residuum is precisely that which fails to be influenced by economic principles of the industrial system.

More derogatory still is the definition offered by John W. Tripe in "The Domestic Sanitary Arrangements of the Metropolitan Poor" (1884). "The word 'residuum' is now generally used to distinguish the lowest classes who have no definite occupation by

which to obtain a livelihood" (9). In addition to being idle, according to Tripe the

residuum have poor hygiene:

> The sanitary arrangements usually correspond with the houses; the water closets
> being dark, foul smelling; the water supply apparatus frequently defective, the
> supply generally insufficient; the cisterns dirty, being rarely cleaned out; the
> dustbins frequently broken and full, containing offensive refuse, even excrement,
> so that it is dangerous to empty them. Houses in this state are frequently occupied
> by the residuum, many of whom are disgustingly filthy and destructive in their
> habits. (9)

The members of the residuum are surrounded by the various residues they create.

Neither cistern nor dustbin is cleaned out. As the social waste of industrial capitalism,

the residuum is characterized by the material waste it produces that it cannot escape or

jettison. Tripe claims that the residuum "can scarcely be reformed, except by breaking up

and dispersing them amongst a better class" (9). Tripe's language, like Mallock's,

identifies the members of the residuum as inhabitants of a closed system in which waste

increases over time. The residuum signifies the threat of increasing entropy, and the only

possibility of reform is "dispersion," an idea ultimately given form in the large-scale slum

clearance plans that were put forward by the London County Council, which was formed

in 1889 to organize the demolition of London's worst slums.[5]

In *Hopes and Fears for Art: Five Lectures Delivered in Birmingham, London, and*

Nottingham, 1878-1881 (1882), William Morris puts a socialist spin on the term

"residuum," lamenting both the use of the term and the fact of the misery of this group of

people. Morris claims that if, as many believe, the underclass is necessary for the

existence of the rest of society, then the system contains within itself its own future

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[5] For a detailed history of the LCC's slum clearance schemes at the end of the nineteenth
century, see Yelling.

destruction. As the waste that is produced within the system, the residuum will

eventually destroy civilization:

> There is an ugly word for a dreadful fact, which I must make bold to use—the
> residuum: that word since the first time I saw it used, has had a terrible
> significance to me, and I have felt from my heart that if this residuum were a
> necessary part of modern civilisation, as some people openly, and many more
> tacitly, assume that it is, then this civilisation carries with it the poison that shall
> one day destroy it, even as its elder sister did: if civilisation is to go no further
> than this, it had better not have gone so far: if it does not aim at getting rid of this
> misery and giving some share in the happiness and dignity of life to *all* the people
> that it has created, and which it spends such unwearying energy in creating, it is
> simply an organized injustice, a mere instrument for oppression, so much the
> worse than that which has gone before it, as its pretensions are higher, its slavery
> subtler, its mastery harder to overthrow, because supported by such a dense mass
> of commonplace well-being and comfort. (92-93)

Morris describes civilization in terms of historical progression ("if civilisation is to go no

further than this, it had better not have gone so far"), but progress is valued equivocally.

Progress in Morris's formulation incorporates decline. A civilization, which contains a

residuum, will inevitably destroy itself: it will become increasingly entropic. Further,

Morris refers to the "energy" of civilization in creating its own happiness, pointing out its

failure to provide such happiness and dignity for all. In using its energy to provide well-

being for such a large portion of the population, modern civilization has unavoidably

created a residuum.

In "The Industrial Residuum," (1895) Helen Dendy Bosanquet (1860-1926),

social investigator and wife of philosopher Bernard Bosanquet, provides an extended (if

ungenerous) definition of the residuum as a class. She suggests that only certain forms of

narrative are available to members of this group because the residuum resists the

exigencies of time; members of this class have neither foresight nor memory. A member

of this class experiences life in a manner that cannot be narrated, even in that individual's

own mind:

> What then are the characteristics of the class? Measured by the economic
> standard they are rather negative than positive. The ideal economic man, as we
> know, is remarkable for his foresight and self-control; in the Residuum these
> qualities are entirely absent. [. . .] The true type of this class lives in the present
> moment only; not only is he without foresight,—he is almost without memory, in
> the sense that his past is so completely past that he has no more organised
> experience to refer to than a child. Hence his life is one incoherent jumble from
> beginning to end; it would be impossible to make even a connected story out of it,
> for every day merely repeats the mistakes, the follies and mishaps of yesterday;
> there is no development in it; all is aimless and drifting. (83)

Dendy insists that the life of a person of the underclass is unintelligible as narrative, a

"jumble from beginning to end," resistant to narrative form and rife with repetition rather

than chronological "development." Dendy suggests that for those who are not part of the

residuum, life unfolds as a story that develops a sense of a discrete past and future, but

the story of the residuum is not a story at all.

Dendy's words open up an important set of issues that link the political and the

scientific: among them the residuum's vexed and poignant relationship to time. In his

seminal essay about the ways in which conceptions of time changed with the rise of

industrial capitalism, E.P. Thompson notes that time-measurement was "a means of

labour exploitation. [. . .] In all these ways—by the division of labour; the supervision

of labour; fines; bells and clocks; money incentives; preachings and schoolings; the

suppression of fairs and sports—new labour habits were formed, and a new time

discipline was imposed" (80, 90). Prior to the industrial revolution, Thompson explains,

"[t]he work pattern was one of alternate bouts of intense labour and idleness, wherever

men were in control of their own working lives" (73). The shift from an agrarian

economy to industrial capitalism required a greater synchronization of labor and time

discipline: "Those who are employed experience a distinction between their employer's time and their 'own' time. And the employer must *use* the time of his labour, and see it is not wasted: not the task but the value of time when reduced to money is dominant. Time is now currency: it is not passed but spent" (61). One way that time discipline was imposed on the working poor was through the moral critique of idleness. Thompson explains, "Throughout the nineteenth century the propaganda of time thrift continued to be directed at the working people, the rhetoric becoming more debased, the apostrophes to eternity becoming more shop-soiled, the homilies more mean and banal" (90). The classic literary example to which Thompson points is Dickens's fact-obsessed schoolmaster, Thomas Gradgrind, whose Observatory contains a "deadly statistical clock [. . .] which measured every second with a beat like a rap on a coffin lid" (75). Gradgrind and his clock are associated with Utilitarian philosophy and economic principles: "He sat writing in his room with the deadly statistical clock, proving something no doubt—probably, in the main, that the Good Samaritan was a Bad Economist" (160).

As the concept of time thrift became increasingly widespread, timepieces took on new significance. In his 1854 *Knowledge is Power*, Charles Knight claims that the clock not only teaches the laborer to value and economize time, but it also helps him engage in more productive labor:

> Almost every house in England has now a clock or watch of some sort; and every house in India would have the same, if the natives were more enlightened, and were not engaged in so many modes of unprofitable labour to keep them poor. His profitable labour has given the English mechanic the means of getting a watch. Machinery, used in every possible way, has made this watch cheap. The labour formerly employed in turning the hour-glass, or in running to look at the church clock, is transferred to the making of watches. The user of the watch obtains an accurate register of time, which teaches him to know the value of that

most precious possession, and to economize it; and the producers of the watch have abundant employment in the universal demand for this valuable machine. A watch or clock is an instrument for assisting an operation of the mind. Without some instrument for registering time, the mind could very imperfectly attain the end which the watch attains, not requiring any mental labour. (268)

The clock is figured as a commodity, which symbolizes modernity and the ways human labor has been transformed by the rise of industrial capitalism. The clock represents time that is imposed and abstracted, time that is no longer associated with signals from the environment as in an agrarian society. The clock connotes the factory and mechanization. By the 1860s the railway had made it necessary for people to wear watches and carry timetables. Eviatar Zerubavel explains,

As late as the mid-19th century, the only valid standard of time was *local time*. Each city, town, or village had its own time, which applied to it alone. Thus, there was a plurality of local times which were not coordinated with one another. [. . .] It was railway transportation that, together with the rise of the factory, was primarily responsible for spreading the significance of punctuality and precise timekeeping among the general population. (5-6)

In 1884, twenty-six countries, including Britain, the United States, and France, settled on the Greenwich meridian as the world's prime meridian, and an international standard-time zone system was put into place (Zerubavel 5-6). According to Stephen Kern, the introduction of standard time was "[t]he most momentous development in the history of uniform public time since the invention of the mechanical clock in the fourteenth century" (11). Yet, as Kern notes, the end of the nineteenth century brought along with a standard public time challenges to that notion: "The structure of history, the uninterrupted forward movement of time, the procession of days, season, and years [. . .] these features of traditional time were also challenged as artists and intellectuals envisioned times that reversed themselves, moved at irregular rhythms, and even came to a dead stop. In the *fin de siècle*, time's arrow did not always fly straight and true" (29). Kern

contends that the challenge to traditional time had its basis in the development of electric light (which blurred the division of day and night as never before) and the cinema (which challenged the uniformity and irreversibility of time).

While public time—as well as challenges to the notion of universal time—became increasingly widespread, timepieces became a commodity to which more people had access. E. P. Thompson notes, "[A] general diffusion of clocks and watches is occurring (as one would expect) at the exact moment when the industrial revolution demanded a greater synchronization of labour" (69). Thompson explains that owning a watch or clock was not only useful in the nineteenth century, it was also a source of prestige or even an investment for its owner: "In some parts of the country Clock and Watch Clubs were set up—collective hire-purchase. Moreover, the timepiece was the poor man's bank, an investment of savings: it could, in bad times, be sold or put in hock" (70). By the end of the nineteenth century, then, timepieces were widespread (although still expensive and out of the reach of many), and time had become standardized across England as a response to the exigencies of the factory and the railway. Time for the mid-Victorians had become disciplined as many aspects of life were now measured in clock time.

Arthur Morrison's 1896 novel *A Child of the Jago* is the story of Dicky Perrot, the novel's eponymous child who lives in one of London's worst slums. "The Old Jago" is Morrison's designation for the Old Nichol area of Bethnal Green in East London, which notoriously was London's filthiest and most dangerous slum. Shortly after Morrison had spent 18 months traveling into the area and observing and interacting with its inhabitants,

the Old Nichol was demolished in 1895 by the London County Council as part of its slum

clearance plan. Morrison's novel charts Dicky's and his family's misfortunes in the Jago

where thievery, drunkenness, and violence are the norm. The novel opens with Dicky

eight or nine years old and follows him as he hones his skills as a thief, attempts

legitimate work but is unfairly fired, and watches as his infant sister dies and his father is

imprisoned and later hanged for murder. The novel ends before Dicky's eighteenth

birthday as he is stabbed to death during a street brawl by a hunchback, a former Jagoite

who has a grudge against him.

Although the novel was popular at the time of its publication, critics accused

Morrison of exaggerating the violence and degradation of the district. H. D. Traill,

perhaps Morrison's most outspoken critic, compared *A Child of the Jago* to Dickens's

early novel, calling Dicky Perrott "an amalgam of Artful Dodger and Oliver Twist," and

claiming that the Jago Morrison depicts is a fiction: "But I will make bold to say that as

described by Mr. Morrison—described, that is to say as a place of which [. . .] every

single inhabitant out of 'swarming thousands' is either a thief, or a harlot, or a 'cosher' or

a decoy, or a 'fence,' or a professional mendicant—it never did and never could exist"

(13). Traill even appended several letters written by people who claimed to have

knowledge of the Old Nichol, protesting Morrison's depiction. Morrison responded to

this criticism in the preface to the third edition of the novel in 1897, describing himself as

"a simple writer of tales, who takes whatever means lie to his hand to present life as he

sees it; who insists on no process; and who refuses to be bound by any formula or

prescription by the cataloguers and the pigeon-holers of literature" (ix).[6] Morrison

criticizes those readers "who were shocked to read of low creatures [. . .] who believe it

to be the sole function of art to minister to their personal comfort—as upholstery does"

(xi).

Though Morrison's fiction about London's East End slums largely has fallen into

obscurity, a handful of recent critics have written about *A Child of the Jago*. Critical

treatment of the text has tended to point to Morrison's break with earlier writers who

sentimentalized slum life in London. For example, Dan Bivona and Roger B. Henkle

claim that Morrison's texts "are unlike the representations of the poor that had dominated

the literature for half a century; Morrison rejects the sentimental and melodramatic for a

laconic, unmodulated prose that rarely rises to a dramatic climax" (104-05). P. J. Keating

describes the novel as "a curious mixture of the English social-moralizing tradition and

French naturalistic objectivity" (179). John Greenfield refers to Morrison's "pessimism,"

and claims "[Morrison's] approach adheres rather closely to one type of realism, that is,

the sort of naturalism practiced by George Gissing and Émile Zola. The general effect of

naturalism, with its accompanying emphasis on determinism and social Darwinism, is to

reify or harden class ideology. [. . .] Morrison's practice of naturalism has the effect of

reifying the ideology of the Jago dwellers" (89).   While many critics have viewed

Morrison's writing as serving middle-class political agendas, Deborah Epstein Nord

describing English naturalist writing of the late nineteenth century, claims, "The social

realist or naturalist fictions of Arthur Morrison, George Moore, Rudyard Kipling, and

George Gissing depicting working-class life are almost without exception apolitical. [. .

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[6] Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from the 1995 Academy Chicago edition of *A Child of the Jago*.

.] Not only is there no way out of the 'nether world,' as Gissing named it, but in these works, there is also no real explanation for its existence" (193-94).

Morrison's text is not simply bourgeois propaganda, however, nor is it in fact apolitical. Morrison's narrative is structured by diachronic shifts that are layered with stasis, repetition, and regression that replace the narrative of capitalist progress with a narrative that emphasizes a complex relationship between labor and waste, progress and decline, diachrony and synchrony. Morrison's underclass is an analogue for the waste of the thermodynamic system of capitalist economy. My contention is not that the developments in scientific thought were responsible for the forms of narrative created to depict the poor at the end of the century. Rather, I mean to suggest that the language of thermodynamics was particularly suited to articulate a number of Victorian values and fears, values and fears with which Victorian writers of fiction, like Morrison, also grappled.

Many readers (both recent and Morrison's contemporaries) have noted parallels between *A Child of the Jago* and Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (novels separated by almost 60 years).[7] Both novels follow a child through a criminal underworld, and both authors, after receiving criticism for depicting London's unseemly side, made claims about the truth of their portrayals in their prefaces. Yet neither novel can be properly called a

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[7] See, for example, Bivona and Henkle, who say, "It is only natural, in a way, that Morrison should turn to some form of the *Bildungsroman* for his accounts of life in the East End, since the likely course that the slum culture would take would be to imitate the middle class in its effort to establish for itself a masculine-based, if not patriarchal, order. The *Bildungsroman* is the form that epitomizes that effort, and we can surmise that Arthur Morrison had in mind, as a kind of model, the century's best known book about poverty, Dickens' *Oliver Twist.* Also see Greenfield, who claims that Morrison takes up the "earlier tradition of the Dickensian sentimental-realistic novel" (95). For an example of a contemporary critic who draws the parallel, see above H.D. Traill.

Bildungsroman, for neither protagonist negotiates possibilities before arriving at self-

knowledge and maturity. Franco Moretti has argued that the *Bildungsroman* stages the

"marriage" of the bourgeois subject and the aristocracy:

> [T]he encounter of bourgeois and aristocrat in these novels has a long-term
> explanation: the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie refunctionalized some aspects of
> the aristocratic way of life for its own cultural formation—and the
> *Bildungsroman*, for its part, was the symbolic form which most thoroughly
> reflected on this state of affairs. One senses in these novels a recurring
> question—outside of work, what is the bourgeois? what does he do? how does he
> live?—and an answer that returns again and again: it's a strange mix of the old
> and the new, with a shifting piecemeal identity. Between question and answer
> unfolds the brief trajectory of modern youth: this experimental season of
> bourgeois existence, which explores the possible compromises between the two
> social models. (ix)

If, as Moretti explains, the *Bildungsroman* is the form that explores bourgeois identity

apart from work, then that neither Oliver's nor Dicky's story takes the form of the

Bildungsroman is no surprise. While *Oliver Twist* might be described as the encounter

between two classes, the two classes in question are the underclass and the middle class.

Although Oliver finds his way to the suburbs and discovers status and inheritance, the

novel does not chart Oliver's development or *bildung*. In fact in his preface to the third

edition to the novel, Dickens makes it clear that Oliver is meant to remain unchanged: "I

wished to shew, in little Oliver, the principle of Good surviving through every adverse

circumstance" (liii). A similar lack of development is evident in *A Child of the Jago* as

Dicky appears to have little control over his circumstances. Although both novels rely to

a large degree on chance rather than the protagonists' actions to move the plot forward, in

Dickens's novel the reliance on chance suggests a belief in an ultimate moral order.

George Levine explains, "[F]or Dickens chance is a dramatic expression of the value and

ultimate order in nature, and it belongs recognizably to a tradition that goes back to

Oedipus. Each coincidence leads characters appropriately to catastrophe or triumph and suggests a designing hand that sets things right in the course of nature" (137). Oliver, after all, is good, remains good despite his journey into London's criminal world, and gets the happy ending he deserves. In Morrison's novel, however, chance is emptied of its moral significance. Morrison's chance is the chance of an entropic system. Entropy is defined in terms of the number of states that are possible in a system in a given situation, and thus consists of the number of degrees of freedom that a system has. Although a system may have a number of competing microstates, it will always tend toward maximum entropy. In other words, entropy demands a narrative that is neither linear nor circular, but involuted in the sense that the entropic narrative is characterized by organizing principles and disorder, of deterministic reliance on chance. Moreover, the entropic narrative is bound to the idea of change over time, but this time is neither linear nor circular time. Rather, it is a complicated amalgamation of them both, and as such, it provides a notion of historical change that accounts for the seeming paradoxes that the laws of thermodynamics suggested to the popular mind. The structure of the novel provides a model of historical change in which diachronic shifts are accompanied by alternative modes of time such as stasis, repetition, and regression.

The relationship between chance and narrative and therefore the particularly entropic character of Morrison's novel is brought to the fore by the enclosed quality of the text and the setting of its action. The structure of the novel mimics the spatial structure of the Jago, which is characterized by isolation and enclosure:

> From where, off Shoreditch High Street, a narrow passage, set across with posts, gave menacing entrance on one end of Old Jago Street, to where the other end lost itself in the black beyond Jago Row; from where Jago Row began south at Meakin Street, to where it ended north at Honey Lane—there the Jago, for one

hundred years the blackest pit in London, lay and festered; and half way along Old Jago Street a narrow archway gave upon Jago Court, the blackest hole in all that pit.

A square of two hundred and fifty yards or less—that was all there was of the Jago. But in that square the human population swarmed in thousands. (1)

Most of the action of the novel takes place in Jago Court, which is in the center of the neighborhood. Both the neighborhood and the court are represented as enclosed without affording egress. The text also includes a sketch of the neighborhood (figure 1), which emphasizes the enclosed condition of Jago Court in particular.
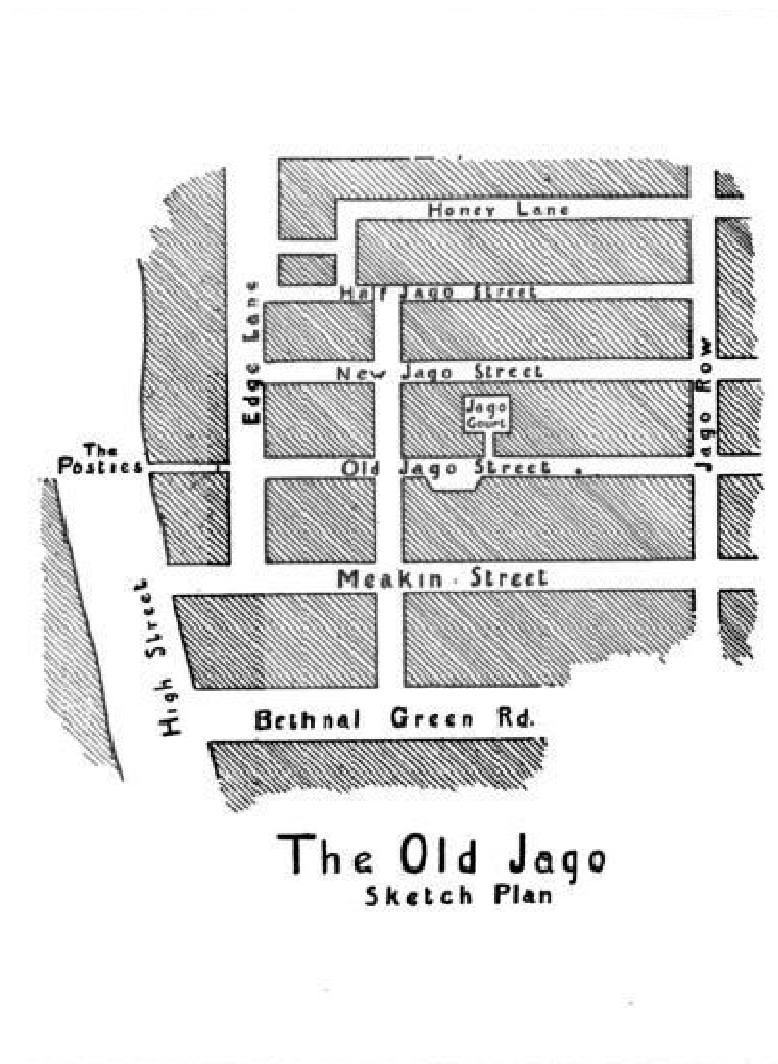
Figure 1 "The Old Jago: Sketch Plan," Arthur Morrison, *A Child of the Jago.* 1896 edition. n.pag.

Morrison's Jagoites live in what the Victorians called "lodgings"—single-family houses whose rooms are rented to distinct families. The ideal of spatial privacy promised by the single-family house dissolves in the Jago not just because each house is inhabited by multiple families, but also because there are very few private spaces in the Jago: "Front doors were used merely as firewood in the Old Jago, and most had been burnt there many years ago. If perchance one could have been found still on its hinges, it stood ever open and probably would not shut." (4). Sharon Marcus points out that it was in Paris—not in London—that apartment buildings became the dominant feature of the landscape in the first half of the nineteenth century, while in London builders concentrated on single-family homes (4). Yet, although the Jago contains single-family houses rather than apartment buildings, the neighborhood evinces many of the spatial arrangements of the Parisian tenement of the nineteenth century. Marcus explains, "Apartment houses were vantage points for visual observation and exhibition, nodes of commercial and sexual exchange, and settings for sensory overload and chance encounters associated with crowds" (3). Marcus points out that the English ideal of domestic privacy often failed to materialize in London, especially for the poor in housing arrangements like the lodging house and lodging: "Urban observers deplored that in lodging houses, the conventional dwelling unit (a house) was segmented into several parts (sets of rooms, a single room, a single room divided by a screen); that several household members were crowded into one room; and that several families were crowded into one house" (105).[8] Indeed, English lodging houses and lodgings were, like Parisian

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[8] Marcus explains the distinction between lodging house and lodging: "Lodging houses offered beds by the night or week, while lodgings consisted of a room or rooms rented for

tenements, places lacking domestic privacy and characterized by greater exchange between neighbors than between inhabitants of different single-family homes.

Although critics have associated Morrison's novel with literary naturalism,[9] the reasons for this association are generally not elaborated, perhaps because as Stephen Arata has argued, the term "naturalism" does not accurately describe the work of late-Victorian authors, who often seemed to want to escape its implications.[10] Still, although English novelists tended to distance themselves from the term "naturalism," the influence of the movement in England is indisputable. The act of distancing themselves from the movement might better be described as a reaction to activities of conservative groups like the National Vigilance Association, who publically denounced the novels of Zola and publicized the conviction of Zola's English publisher.[11] Critics have also disagreed about what constitutes a naturalist text, but they generally agree that Zola is the self-professed center of the movement and that what underpins the naturalist project is nineteenth-century scientific theory. More specifically, critics have cited the influence of evolutionary theory and theories of heredity on naturalist texts.[12] While my aim is not to

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longer periods; although they served very different residential purposes, urban observers often conflated them" (104).

[9] See Patrick Brantlinger and William B. Thesing, 6; and Sally Ledger, 69. These critics identify Morrison as one of England's few naturalist writers, but do not describe the reasons for identifying him as such.

[10] Arata argues, "[I]t is more accurate to talk about the 'New Realism' or the 'New Fiction' than about Naturalism, a term applied usefully only to certain kinds of fiction produced on the Continent and in the United States. English novelists such as George Gissing, Thomas Hardy, George Moore and Arthur Morrison are occasionally labelled Naturalists by twentieth-century critics, but in fact all English writers of the period (except Moore, briefly) distanced themselves from the Naturalist movement" (186n).

[11] See Ledger, 68.

[12] See Ledger, 69-70. Also see David Baguley, 216-18. Although Baguley uses the term "entropic" to describe naturalist writing, he does not employ the term in thermodynamic terms. He uses it more generally to suggest something akin to degeneration. Lilian R.

offer a new definition of naturalism here, I do want to suggest that Morrison's *A Child of the Jago* and Zola's *L'Assommoir* (1872), texts that have been labeled "naturalist," found new forms of narrative not only in evolutionary theory and biological sciences of the time, but also in the physical sciences, including the emerging science of thermodynamics. For both Morrison and Zola, the slum is akin to a thermodynamic system in which entropy increases over time.

II. *L'Assommoir*

L'Assommoir is the seventh volume of Zola's twenty-volume series of novels, *Les Rougon-Macquart*. Of the series, only *L'Assommoir* deals with the Parisian working class (or underclass). *L'Assommoir* is the story of a laundress, Gervaise Macquart, and revolves around a huge tenement building on the rue de la Goutte d'Or. The novel begins as Gervaise is left by her lover, Lantier, with her two illegitimate children in a hotel room shortly after having moved to Paris. The novel follows Gervaise as she marries another man, has another child, and opens her own laundry in the tenement building. Gervaise's husband is injured and takes to drinking and her lover returns to sponge off of her business. Eventually Gervaise's business fails, and she and her husband are forced to move into a small room on the sixth floor of the building. While Lantier moves on to exploit another woman, Gervaise's husband Coupeau is hospitalized repeatedly and eventually dies of delirium tremens. Soon after, Gervaise dies in a hole under a stairwell in the building.

Furst refers to Zola's "experiment in determinism," to refer to the influence of evolutionary theory and hereditary theories on Zola's fiction.

When Gervaise first encounters the tenement, she is struck by the building's size in comparison to the surrounding architecture:

> La Maison parassait d'autant plus colossale qu'elle s'élevait entre deux petites constructions basses, chétives collées contre elee; et, carrée pareille à un bloc de mortier gâché grossièrement, se pourrissant et s'émiettant sous la pluie, elle profilait sur le ciel clair, sudessus des toits voisins, son énorme cube brut, ses flancs non crépis, couleur de boue, d'une nudité interminable de murs de prison, où des ranges de pierres d'attente semblaient des mâchoires caduques, bâillant dans le vide. (49)[13]

Like Morrison's Jago, the tenement building is a circumscribed world: it looks like a sort of rundown prison, and it contains within it shops and housing for three hundred tenants. Zola made a number of sketches in his preparatory notes for the novel, including a sketch of the tenement (figure 2). The sketch shows Gervaise's shop to the left of a very narrow entrance. Like Morrison's Jago, the tenement is characterized by enclosure. The 1878 edition of the novel included an illustration by Gaston Latouche, showing Gervaise standing in the courtyard of the building, surrounded on all sides and dwarfed by the dilapidated architecture (figure 3). The novel rarely shows its characters leaving the building or its immediately surrounding area, and the novel does not contain any figures of status higher than that of a shopkeeper. Gervaise imagines the building as a giant human body. While the walls are described above as snapping jaws ("des mâchoires caduques, bâillant"), later the building becomes in Gervaise's eyes a complete organism: "Gervaise lentement promenait son regard, l'abaissait du sixième étage au pave,

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[13] Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are taken from 2001 Larousse Edition of the novel. ["The building looked all the more colossal because it stood between two low rickety houses clinging to either side of it, and foursquare, like a roughly cast block of cement, decaying and flaking away in the rain, it thrust the silhouette of its vast cube up into the pale sky above the neighbouring rooftops. Its unplastered sides, mud-coloured and as interminably bare as prison walls, showed rows of toothing-stones like decaying jaws snapping in the void" (Trans. Tancock 59).]

remontait, surprise de cette énormité, se sesant au milieu d'un organe vivant, au cœur meme d'une ville, intéressée par la maison, comme si elle avait eu devant elle une personne géante" (50).[14] When she opens her shop on the ground floor, Gervaise imagines the building as a machine:

> Le jour de la location, quand les Copeau vinrent signer le bail, Gervaise se sentit le cœur tout gros, en passant sous la haute porte. Elle allait donc habiter cette maison vaste comme une petite ville, allongeant et entrecroisant les rues interminable de ses escaliers et de ses corridor. [. . .] Il lui semblait faire quelque chose de très hardi, se jeter au beau milieu d'une machine en branle. (132)[15]

In Gervaise's conception, moving into the building renders her part of a moving machine ("une machine en branle"), a machine characterized by its complexity and labyrinthine structure. Whether as giant human or moving machine, Gervaise understands herself once she moves into the building as part of a larger interconnected system.

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[14] ["Gervaise let her eyes travel slowly down from the sixth floor to the ground and up again, overwhelmed by the enormity of the place and feeling as though she were in the middle of some living organism, in the very heart of a city, fascinated by the building as if she were confronted by some gigantic human being" (Trans. Tancock 60).]

[15] ["On the day when the Copeaus went to sign the agreement, Gervaise felt quite overcome as she went through the big archway. So she was going to live in this huge building, which was as large as a small town with its staircases and passages stretching out and criss-crossing forever. [. . .] She felt she was doing something very rash, throwing herself into the middle of a machine in motion" (Trans. Tancock 136).]

Figure 2 Preparatory sketch for *L'Assommoir*, Émile Zola, *Les Rougon-Macquart* (2:1553).

Figure 3 Illustration of the tenement building on the rue de la Goutte d'Or, Gaston Latouche, *L'Assommoir*. 1878 (n.pag).

In the first half of the novel, Gervaise demonstrates a strong interest in work, pouring all of her energy into laboring as a laundress. Before marrying Copeau, she tells him, "Mon idéal, ce serait de travailler tranquille, de manger toujours du pain, d'avoir un trou un peu propre pour dormir, vous savez, un lit, une table et deux chaises, pas

davantage" (45).[16] For four years after they marry, the Copeaus are known among their

neighbors as hard workers: "La femme faisait des journées de douze heures chez Mme

Fauconnier, et trouvait le moyen de tenir son chez-elle propre comme un sou, de donner

la pâtée à tout son monde, matin et soir. L'homme ne se soûlait pas, rapportait ses

quinzaines" (101).[17] Yet, the Copeaus' happiness fades away when Copeau is injured

and begins drinking instead of working. Before the Copeaus meet a ruinous end,

Gervaise plans an excessive birthday fête, which is described for several paragraphs in

minute detail. The party, which marks a turning point in the novel toward the

degeneration of Gervaise's fortunes and results in a large debt for the family, is

bacchanalian, and the narrator describes the participants in terms of grotesque excess:

> Ah! nom de Dieu! oui, on s'en flanqua une bosse! Quand on y est, on y est, n'est-
> ce pas? et si l'on ne se paie qu'un gueuleton par-ci par-là, on serait joliment
> godiche de ne pas s''n fourrer jusqu'aux oreilles. Vrai, on voyait les bedons se
> gonfler à mesure. Les dames étaient grosses. Ils pétaient dans leur peau, les sacrés
> goinfres! La bouche ouverte, le menton barbouillé de graisse, ils avaient des faces
> pareilles à des derrières, et si rouges, qu'on aurait dit des derrières de gens riches,
> crevant de prospérité. (224)[18]

Bodies and faces are swollen to the point that the faces of the participants become, in

grotesque reversal, excremental. Excess consumption transforms the faces of the poor

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[16] ["My ideal would be to get on quietly with my work, always to have something to eat,
have a decent sort of corner to sleep in—you know, just a bed, a table, and a couple of
chairs, that's all" (Trans. Tancock 56).]

[17] ["The wife put in twelve hours a day at Madame Fauconnier's, and yet managed to
keep her home as bright as a new pin and have a meal ready for her family, morning and
night. The husband never drank too much, brought home his fortnightly wage-packet"
(Trans. Tancock 107).]

[18] ["Christ, they didn't half blow themselves out! Well, when you're at it, you're at it
aren't you? And when you only get a real feed now and again you'd be a bloody fool not
to plug yourself up to the ears. You could see the pot-bellies welling up as the folk ate,
you could, straight. The women looked as though they were in the family way. All of
them were busting their skins, the gluttons! Open-mouthed, with fat all over their chins,
they all had faces like backsides, and so red you would say wealthy backsides, bursting
with prosperity" (Trans Tancock 217).]

into the "derrières" of the rich, which are bursting with prosperity ("crevant de

prospérité"). Prosperity is figured as the excrement—the literal waste—of consumption.

After the feast, waste continues to build in Gervaise's world as she drifts away from her

work:

> Naturellement, à mesure que la paresse et la misère entraient, la malpropreté entrait aussi. On n'aurait pas reconnu cette belle boutique bleue, couleur du ciel, qui était jadis l'orgueil de Gervaise. Les boiseries et les carreaux de la vitrine, qu'on oubliait de laver, restaient du haut en bas éclaboussés par la crotte des voitures. Sur les planches, à la tringle de laiton, s'étalaient trios guenilles grises, laissées par des clientes mortes à l'hôpital. (292-93)[19]

Work gives way to idleness in Gervaise's shop and the residues of her former work build

up around her: dirt, rags, and grease:

> Mais Gervaise se trouvait très bien là dedans. Elle n'avait pas vu la boutique se salir; elle s'y abandonnait et s'habituait au papier déchiré, aux boiseries graisseuses, comme elle en arrivait à porter des jupes fendues et à ne plus se laver les oreilles. Même la saleté était un nid chaud où elle jouissait de s'accroupir. Laisser les choses à la débandade, attendre que la poussière bouchât les trous et mît un velours partout, sentir la maison s'alourdir autour de soi dans un engourdissement de fainéantise, cela était une vraie volupté dont elle se grisait. Sa tranquillité d'abord; le reste, elle s'en battait l'oeil. Les dettes, toujours croissantes pourtant, ne la tourmentaient plus. (93)[20]

Gervaise happily settles in as part of that residue until she is finally evicted from the

store.

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[19] ["It goes without saying that as laziness and poverty came in, so did squalor. You would never have recognized the lovely sky-blue shop that had once been Gervaise's pride and joy. The woodwork and windows of the shopfront were now never cleaned and were splashed from top to bottom with mud from passing vehicles. In the shop window, hanging on the brass rod, were three grey rags that had belonged to customers who had died in the hospital. (Trans. Tancock 278-79).]

[20] But Gervaise felt nice and cozy in the middle of all of this. She hadn't noticed the shop getting dirtier and dirtier, she just grew accustomed to the dangling wallpaper and greasy woodwork as she was to wearing torn skirts and not washing her ears. The dirt itself was a comfy nest in which she loved snuggling down. It was a real thrill to let things slide, to wait for the dust to stop up the holes and cover everything with velvet, to feel the house weigh you down into a idle numbness" (Trans. Tancock 279).]

Before Gervaise slides into the residue of her previous labor, her savings and

ambitions during the three years are associated with a clock that she purchases: "En trois

années, elle avait contenté une seule de ses envies, elle s'était acheté une pendule; [. . .]

Sous le globe, derrière la pendule, elle cachait le livret de la Caisse d'épargne. Et

souvent, quand elle rêvait à sa tourner les auguilles, ayant l'air d'attendre quelque minute

particulière et solennelle pour se decider" (115).[21] Gervaise's desire to work as a

shopkeeper is associated with the clock inside of which she hides her bankbook that

records all of her savings—tangible evidence of her labor. After her business fails,

Gervaise pawns everything except the clock until finally she must give it up: "Une seule

chose lui fendit le cœur, ce fut de mettre sa pendule en plan, pour payer un billet de vingt

francs à un huissier qui venait la saisir. Jusque-là, elle avait juré de mourir plutôt de faim

que de toucher à sa pendule" (294-95).[22] Gervaise's clock is never shown in terms of its

functionality—she is not depicted using the clock to tell time. Rather, her possession of

the clock signals her status as a worker. Opposite Gervaise's shop is the workshop of a

watchmaker:

> Mais le voisin qu'elle respectait le plus était encore, en face, l'horloger, le
> monsieur en redingote, l'air propre, fouillant continuellement des montres avec
> des outils mignons; et souvent elle traversait la rue pour le saluer, riant d'aise à
> regarder, dans la boutique étroite comme une armoire, la gaieté des petits coucous

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[21] ["During the three years she had only satisfied one of her desires, and bought herself a
clock. [. . .] Under the dome behind the clock she concealed the bankbook, and often
while day-dreaming about her shop she would go off into a reverie in front of the dial,
staring at the moving hands as though waiting for the preordained, solemn moment of
decision" (Trans. Tancock 120).]
[22] ["Only one thing broke her heart, and that was to part with her clock to pay a twenty-
franc bill when the brokers came. Until then she had sworn that she would rather starve
to death than touch her clock" (Trans. Tancock 280).]

dont les balanciers se dépêchaient, battant l'heure à contre-temps, tous à la fois. (167)[23]

The watchmaker garners Gervaise's respect more than any of her other neighbors, and the clock she owns is her most valued possession—both signify the industry and status of the working class.

Gervaise eventually dies in a hole under one of the building's stairwells. Her death, like her life, is figured as a sort of running down of energy, or rather, the transformation of energy into waste:

> C'était là dedans, sur de la vieille paille, qu'elle claquait du bec, le ventre vide et les os glacés. La terre ne voulait pas d'elle, apparemment. Elle devenait idiote, elle ne songeait seulement pas à se jeter du sixième sur le pavé de la cour, pour en finir. La mort devait la prendre petit à petit, morceau par morceau, en la traînant ainsi jusqu'au bout dans la sacrée existence qu'elle s'était faite. Même on ne sut jamais au juste de quoi elle était morte. On parla d'un froid et chaud. Mais la vérité était qu'elle s'en allait de misère, des ordures et des fatigues de sa vie gâtée. Elle creva d'avachissement, selon le mot des Lorilleux. Un matin, comme ça sentait mauvais dans le corridor, on se rappela qu'on ne l'avait pas vue depuis deux jours; et on la découvrit déjà verte, dans sa niche. (454)[24]

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[23] ["But the neighbor she respected most was the watchmaker opposite, the neat-looking gentleman in the frock coat who was always poking away at his watches with tiny tools. Often she would go across the road just to give him a nod, laughing with pleasure as she looked into the narrow cupboard-like shop and saw the little cuckoo clocks whose pendulums were all gaily hurrying away, all beating time, but all out of step" (Trans Tancock 167).]

[24] ["And it was there, on some straw, empty and frozen to the bone that she starved to death. Apparently the earth was in no hurry to have her. She went quite dotty and didn't even think of throwing herself from a window on the sixth [sic] to the pavement of the yard so as to have done with it. Death meant to take her little by little, bit by bit, dragging her to the end along the wretched path she had made for herself. It wasn't even clear what she did die of. People mentioned the cold and the heat, but the truth was that she died of poverty, from the filth and exhaustion of her wasted life. As the Lorilleux put it, she died of slatternliness. One morning, as there was a nasty smell in the passage, people recollected that she hadn't been seen for two days, and she was discovered in her hole, turning green already" (Trans. Tancock 422).]

Although in Tancock's translation (see n24) Gervaise is described as starving to death, in the original French, Gervaise's cause of death is never cited as starvation. The sentence, "C'était là dedans, sur de la vieille paille, qu'elle claquait du bec, le ventre vide et les os glacés," might better be translated as "It was in there, on some old straw, that she wasted away ("clacked her beak"), her stomach was empty and her bones were frozen." A few sentences later, the narrator claims that the cause of her death is unclear. ("Même on ne sut jamais au juste de quoi elle était morte.) What's important about Gervaise's death is that she does not die of starvation or by drink, but rather from "misère, des ordures et des fatigues de sa vie gâtée," ("poverty, the filth and exhaustion of her ruined life"). It is important that Zola distinguishes between dying of starvation and dying from the filth and exhaustion of poverty. For filth and exhaustion ("des ordures et des fatigues") suggests a thermodynamic rundown in which energy has been exhausted from the system and all that is left is the residue, the filth.

III. *A Child of the Jago*

In Morrison's novel, both Jagoites and police think of the Jago as a place which can neither be entered by outsiders nor escaped from by insiders. The police refuse to enter the neighborhood without a large force:

> There were times when two or three of the police, hot in the chase, would burst into the Jago at the heels of a flying marauder. Then the runaway would make straight for the archway, and, once he was in Jago Court, danger was over. [. . .] Beyond the archway the police could not venture, except in large companies. A young constable who tried it once, getting ahead of two companions in his ardour, was laid low as he emerged from the passage, by a fire-grate adroitly let drop from an upper window. (80)

While the police avoid entering the Jago, the Jagoites see no way out of the Jago. Old Beveridge counsels Dicky to work hard to get into the "High Mob," saying, "It's the best the world has for you, for the Jago's got you, and that's the only way out, except gaol and the gallows" (51). Dicky internalizes the idea and reminds himself years later: "Who was he, Dicky Perrott, that he should break away from the Jago habit, and strain after another nature? [. . .] The ways out of the Jago old Beveridge had told him years ago. Gaol, the gallows, and the High Mob" (96).

The Jago is not just geographically isolated; it is also culturally separated from the rest of London in terms of its moral norms and behavioral expectations. The narrator explains that the Jagoites spend most of their time in the streets rather than in their homes: "They were not there for lack of shelter, but because in this weather repose was less unlikely in the street than within doors [. . .] For in this place none ever slept without a light, because of three kinds of vermin that light in some sort keeps at bay" (1-2). As in Dickens's Tom-all-Alone's, in Morrison's Jago the slum dwellers themselves resemble vermin: "Old Jago lay black and close under the quivering red sky; and slinking forms, as of great rats, followed one another quickly between the posts in the gut by High Street, and scattered over the Jago" (1). But the human "vermin" are menaced by other vermin, "vermin which added to existence here a terror not to be guessed by the unafflicted; who object to being told of it. For on them that lay writhen and gasping on the pavement; on them that sat among them; on them that rolled and blasphemed in the lighted rooms; on every moving creature in this, the Old Jago, day and night, sleeping and waking, the third plague of Egypt, and more lay unceasing" (2). Beleaguered by vermin, the inhabitants of the Jago take to the street to try to sleep. They are described as

if being viewed from afar or through an unfocused camera. They are "slinking forms" moving through the streets. In the description of the people lying on the street, the humans and vermin are indistinguishable; everything is moving, twisted, gasping.

Although the Jagoites are generally described as languid, they are also often figured in terms of their displays of energy and movement. Even when the Jagoites are described sleeping on the streets, they are "writhen and gasping." The energy that the Jagoites display is never converted into work. Instead, the Jagoites expend their energy in violence. Life in the Jago is punctuated by a rivalry between two families, the Ranns and the Learys, who regularly take to fighting in the streets. Almost everyone in the Jago participates in the street fighting, choosing to side with one of these families or the other: "[N]ear all the Jago was wont to be on one side or the other, and any of the Jago which was not, was apt to be the worse for it; for the Ranns drubbed all them that were not of their faction in the most thorough and most workmanlike manner, and the Learys held by the same practice; so that neutrality meant double drubbing" (17). The Jagoites are at their most energetic when it comes to brawling, and here the Ranns are described as "workmanlike" in assaulting their neighbors. In fact, the only time that the Jagoites cooperate with each other is when they fight against their slightly more respectable neighbors in Dove Lane: "When the Ranns and Learys combined, and the Old Jago issued forth in its entire might against Dove Lane, then the battle was one to go miles to see" (17). Celebration in the Jago is generally connected with violence, and the most energetic displays occur in the form of street brawls. The culture of violence extends to the women of the Jago who participate in the brawls. Sally Green, who at one point

attacks Dicky's mother while she is holding her infant, regularly engages in the street

fighting:

> Down the middle of Old Jago Street came Sally Green: red-faced, stripped to the
> waist, dancing, hoarse and triumphant. Nail-scores wide as the finger striped her
> back, her face, and her throat, and she had a black eye; but in one hand she
> dangled a long bunch of clotted hair, as she whooped defiance to the Jago. It was
> a trophy newly rent from the scalp of Norah Walsh, champion of the Rann
> womankind, who had crawled away to hide her blighted head, and be restored
> with gin. None answered Sally's challenge, and, staying but to fling a brickbat at
> Pip Walsh's window, she carried her dance and her trophy into Edge Lane. (20)

Sally Green is eventually repaid by Norah Walsh, who slashes her face with a broken

bottle. Greenfield argues, "Instead of class unity, the Jago community is modeled upon a

pre-industrial system of kinship, in which clan allegiances and codes of retribution

supersede organized society or class identity" (95-96). But I disagree: the culture of the

Jago, rather, is depicted as itself a symptom of industrial capitalism. The Jago is

analogous to an entropic system: although the amount of energy in the system remains

the same over time, that energy cannot be converted into work. Thus, the Jagoites

convert their energy into violence rather than labor.

 Father Sturt, a well-meaning but largely ineffectual reformer (modeled after

Morrison's friend the Reverend Osborne Jay to whom Morrison dedicated the text) is one

of the few middle-class figures in the novel, and his valorization of work for its own sake

stands in stark contrast to the attributes of the other characters. Sturt is figured as seeing

himself as an energy source for the Jago. At one point in the novel, Sturt speaks to a

surgeon who is called to deliver Hannah Perrott's child. The surgeon tells Father Sturt,

> The boy's alive, and so is the mother. But you and I may say the truth. You
> know the Jago far better than I. Is there a child in all this place that wouldn't be
> better dead—still better unborn? But does a day pass without bringing you just
> such a parishioner? Here lies the Jago, a nest of rats, breeding, breeding, as only
> rats can; and we say it is well. On high moral grounds we uphold the right of rats

to multiply their thousands. Sometimes we catch a rat. And we keep it a little while, nourish it carefully, and put it back into the nest to propagate its kind. (127)

Sturt responds: "You are right, of course. But who'll listen, if you shout it from the housetops. I might try to proclaim it myself, if I had time and *energy to waste. But I have none—I must work, and so must you.* The burden grows day by day, as you say. The thing's hopeless, perhaps, but that is not for me to discuss. I have my duty" (127, emphasis added). While the surgeon depicts the Jago as a rat's nest that continually increases itself, Father Sturt sees himself as a source of energy for the Jago. Both men articulate a degenerative vision of the Jago: while the surgeon describes a sort of evolutionary regression of the Jago's inhabitants into rats,[25] Father Sturt's vision is of entropic degeneration. He uses the terms of the laws of thermodynamics: energy, work, and waste. While the inhabitants of the Jago are characterized by their lack of energy: "On the pavement some writhed wearily, longing for sleep; others, despairing of it, sat and lolled, and a few talked" (1), Father Sturt describes his duty as working in the Jago despite the hopelessness of changing the situation. It would be a "waste" of his "energy" to try to change the system. Instead, he puts his energy into the system (visiting Jagoites, giving sermons, and attempting to establish himself as a moral compass), realizing that his work makes little difference but insisting that the hopelessness of the situation is not his concern. Father Sturt understands that his duty is to work regardless of its efficacy, a middle-class attitude not shared by the Jagoites:

> So Father Sturt tramped back to the Jago, and to the strain and struggle that ceased not for one moment of his life, though it left never a mark of success behind it. For the Jago was much as ever. Were the lump once leavened by the

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[25] Thermodynamic degeneration is of course related to evolutionary degeneration. For a discussion of the relationship between the two, see George Levine, 155-176, J. Edward Chamberlin, 263-89, and Peter Allan Dale, 225-32.

advent of any denizen a little less base than the rest, were a native once ridiculed and persuaded into a spell of work and clean living, then must Father Sturt hasten to drive him from the Jago ere its influence suck him under forever; leaving for his own community none but the entirely vicious. (69)

Sturt seems to understand not only that his own work useless, but also that if he is ever able to convince a Jagoite to work, then he must also remove that person from the Jago. Anyone who involves himself in legitimate work risks being "sucked under" by the Jago's "influence."

In the 1873 text *The Conservation of Energy*, Balfour Stewart draws an analogy between the thermodynamic transformation of energy and capitalist economy, cheerfully describing a system free from oligarchical privilege in which men with great stores of "energy" are respected and can use this energy to get others to work for them:

> [Energy of position] may be compared to money in a bank, or capital, [energy of motion] to money which we are in the act of spending; and, just as, when we have money in a bank, we can draw it out whenever we want it, so, in the case of energy of position, we can make use of it whenever we please. Too see this more clearly, let us compare together a watermill driven by a head of water, and a windmill driven by the wind. In the one case we may turn on the water whenever it is convenient for us, but in the other we must wait until the wind happens to blow. The former has all the independence of a rich man; the latter all the obsequiousness of a poor one. If we pursue the analogy a step further, we shall see that the great capitalist, or the man that has acquired a lofty position, is respected because he has the disposal of a great quantity of energy, and that whether he be a nobleman or a sovereign, or a general in command, he is powerful only from having something which enables him to make use of the services of others. When the man of wealth pays a labouring man to work for him, he is in truth converting so much of his energy of position into actual energy, just as a miller lets out a portion of his head of water in order to do some work by its means. (26-27)

Physical position is made to correspond to economic position, and energy is capital. Stewart goes on to present a somewhat darker version of the universe and the dissipation of energy in which the sun becomes a failing capitalist: "[I]t necessarily follows that he

[the sun] is in the position of a man whose expenditure exceeds his income. He is living upon his capital, and is destined to share the fate of all who act in a similar manner. We must, therefore, contemplate a future period when he will be poorer in energy than he is at present, and a period still further in the future when he will altogether cease to shine" (152). In his earlier analogy, Stewart seems to overlook the second law of thermodynamics. If capitalism is subject to the laws of thermodynamics, then the great capitalist will eventually convert all of his energy and be left with none. The sun in the earlier formation is a sort of irresponsible capitalist. The sun's failure is a result of his behavior, a result of spending more than he can afford.

Two years later, Stewart collaborated with P.G. Tait on *The Unseen Universe* (1875), which offers a somewhat different analogy between thermodynamics and economics in which the sun is no longer an irresponsible capitalist. Instead, heat is figured as the "communist of the universe" who aims for equalization, or equal dispersion throughout the system:

> [T]he tendency of heat is towards equalisation; heat is *par excellence* the communist of our universe, and it will no doubt ultimately bring the present system to an end. The visible universe may with perfect truth be compared to a vast heat-engine. [. . .] The sun is the furnace or source of high-temperature-heat of our system. [. . .] But while the sun thus supplies us with energy he is himself getting colder, and must ultimately, by radiation into space, part with the life-sustaining power which he at present possesses. (90-92).

Heat in any thermodynamic system is disordered energy, or what is left after energy has been converted to work. The sun in this formulation is a victim of the communist tendencies of heat. The running down of the universe or the economic system, in this reformulated analogy, is the result of the equalizing ideals of communism rather than of the limitless consumption of capitalist economy.

The idea of the underclass as the residue or waste left after a process of work renders the underclass analogous to the disordered entropic state of a system which can do no work. Capitalist economy is a kind of steam engine, which uses combustion to convert heat into work. The second law states that any process of converting heat into work creates waste. Thus, if capitalist economy is analogous to the steam engine, the process of converting energy into work, or the use of human labor, results in the creation of waste. The concept of the non-working poor as "residuum" is underpinned by two definitions of work: work as human labor and mechanical work as defined by thermodynamics. The laws of thermodynamics state that heat and work are the two fundamental mechanisms by which energy is put into or taken out of a system. While both heat and work describe the transfer of energy, heat refers to any spontaneous flow of energy from one object to another, caused by a difference in temperature between the objects. Work, on the other hand, is a transfer of energy into or out of a system which is not spontaneous (e.g. pushing on a piston or stirring a cup of coffee). As opposed to heat, with work an agent (perhaps inanimate) can be identified as actively putting energy into the system. Stanley W. Angrist and Loren G. Helper explain, "[H]eat and work are equivalent, being merely two different manifestations of a general property called *energy*" (65).

If the Jagoites are the residuum left as a result of work that is done within the system of industrial capitalism, then they might also be described as the *Lumpenproletariat* as defined in *The Communist Manifesto*: "The 'dangerous class,' the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society, may here and there be swept into the movement by a proletarian revolution; its conditions

of life, however, prepare it far more for the part of a bribed tool of reactionary intrigue"

(65). In this quotation from the1888 translation authorized by Engels, *Lumpenproletariat*

was rendered "dangerous class," though as many have pointed out, *lumpen* means

"ragged" rather than "dangerous." It is worth noting that the *Lumpenproletariat* are

dangerous in this formulation not because they are potentially revolutionary, but because

they are counter-revolutionary in that they are more likely to bribed by the bourgeoisie to

work against the aims of the proletariat.[26] Unlike the proletariat, the *Lumpenproletariat*

do not do legitimate work, nor do they have any of their own goals as a class.

Indeed, no one in the Jago does legitimate work. Dicky Perrott's father, Josh, was

once a plasterer, but has long since eked out a living through various forms of theft:

> He was a plasterer—had, at least, so described himself at police-courts. But it
> was long since he had plastered. [. . .] In moments of pride he declared himself
> the only member of his family who had ever learned a trade, and worked at it. It
> was a long relinquished habit, but while it lasted he had married a decent boiler-
> maker's daughter, who had known nothing of the Jago till these later days. (14)

For Josh and the other Jagoites, work and the Jago are antithetical. The novel opens with

the Perrott family having already slipped into the underclass. Instead of participating in

mainstream economy, Morrison's East Enders are depicted as bound by a parodic version

of the bourgeois subject's position in the system of exchange. Commerce in the slum,

thus, mirrors the labyrinthine geography of a place characterized by streets and

alleyways, which double back on each other, leading nowhere but back into the slum.

The commodities that the slum dweller acquires fail to conform to the rules of commerce,

and return in a sort of haunting circularity. It is not that the slum dweller cannot acquire

objects. He mugs, fences, robs, and sometimes even legitimately purchases, but the

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[26] For an extended discussion of Marx's *Lumpenproletariat,* see Gertrude Himmelfarb
386-92.

objects he acquires do not perform in the ways they are meant to perform in capitalist

society. Objects not only fail to retain use or exchange value, but they also tend to

multiply, proliferate, and return in their worthlessness or uselessness. In the same way,

the slum dweller's participation in the system of exchange is insular. Acquiring and

exchanging objects is rarely profitable, and exchange never allows access to mainstream

economy.

    In *A Child of the Jago* the iconic object is the timepiece. Watches and clocks

proliferate, yet these timepieces are figured as empty, both in terms of commodity value

and in terms of forward movement in time. If timepieces had come be associated with

industrial labor, then in the Jago where waste predominates over work and energy is in a

state of entropic disorder, the clock fails either to function as a commodity or to

discipline labor. Dicky's first attempt at robbery involves stealing a watch from a bishop

who has come to the Jago to open a new wing of the "East End Elevation Mission and

Pansophical Institute." The narrator satirizes the mission: "The triumphs of the East End

Elevation Mission and Pansophical Institute were known and appreciated far from East

London, by people who knew less of that part than of Asia Minor" (9).[27] After stealing

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[27] Morrison is satirizing philanthropic efforts like the People's Palace here. The People's Palace was the vision of Walter Besant and opened in 1887 with the support of Edmund Currie and the philanthropic organization, the Beaumont Institute. The People's Palace was modeled after Besant's "Palace of Delight," which he described in his 1882 novel, *All Sorts and Conditions of Men*. Morrison was a clerk to the trustees administering to the People's Palace and in 1889 became sub-editor to *The Palace Journal*. He was also a close friend to Besant. Morrison resigned from the Palace in 1890 before writing *A Child of the Jago*. The Palace was devoted to providing middle-class culture and recreation for the poor of the East End. The People's Palace included an art gallery, a gymnasium, a concert hall, and a variety of other recreational opportunities, which the organizers believed could draw slum dwellers away from other sorts of East End amusements. William Morris and others openly criticized the Palace for not addressing the causes of poverty and the material conditions of East End life.

the bishop's watch, Dicky triumphantly returns home to his parents: "Mother—father—look! I done a click! I got a clock—a red 'un!" (14). (A "click" is a robbery, and a "red clock" is a gold watch.) While Dicky's mother is worried that Dicky will not grow up to be respectable, Dicky's father scolds him for other reasons: "I'll give you somethink, you damn young thief. [. . .] You'd like to have us all in a stir for a year or two, I s'pose; goin' thievin' watches like a growed-up man" (15). For Josh Perrott, stealing is not immoral or disrespectable, but it is a job for men, not boys whose inexperience and lack of caution might put the entire family in peril. Dicky's father takes the watch to a "fence" (a person who pays for stolen goods), and although Dicky's mother is unhappy that Dicky has stolen something, she is happy to live on the money from what he has stolen. She counsels Josh on taking the watch to a fence: "[Y]ou won't let Weech 'ave it, will ye, Josh? 'E—'e never gives much" (15). Josh Perrott sells the watch that Dicky has stolen and uses the money to get drunk. Soon after, Dicky gets involved with the fence Weech, stealing things and delivering them to Weech for cake, coffee, and pennies. Dicky's life parallels his father's, but the activities of father and son do not work in tandem. There is no shared effort to better the condition of the family. Rather, the parents' secrecy and individual agendas work to keep the family in its degraded state, or rather to increase its degradation.

The Ropers, who temporarily fall into the underclass and are forced to move into the Jago before being rescued by Father Sturt, live across the landing in the same building as Dicky and his family and provide a contrast to the culture of the Jagoites:

> Roper was a cabinet-maker fallen on evil times and out of work. He had a pale wife, disliked because of her neatly-kept clothes, her exceeding use of soap and water, her aloofness from gossip. She had a deadly pale baby; also there was a pale hunchbacked boy of near Dicky's age. Collectively the Ropers were disliked

as strangers: because they furnished their own room, and in an obnoxiously complete style; because Roper did not drink, nor brawl, nor beat his wife, nor do anything all day but look for work; because all of these things were a matter of scandalous arrogance, impudently subversive of Jago custom and precedent. (32-33)

Disliked because of their cleanliness and work ethic, the Ropers also own a clock, and Dicky's second attempt at theft occurs when he sees the Ropers's door open with no one inside and a clock on the mantelpiece: "The clock attracted him again. It was a small cheap, nickel-plated, cylindrical thing, of American make, and it reminded him at once of the Bishop's watch. It was not gold, certainly, but it was a good deal bigger" (33). The theft of this clock does not prove to be any more profitable than stealing the Bishop's watch. When Dicky takes the clock to Mr. Weech, the baker/fence, Dicky finds himself indebted to Mr. Weech. After eating what Weech offers him, Weech tells Dicky, "Bloater's a penny, bread a 'a'peny, cafy a penny, cake a penny. You'll owe thrippence 'a'peny now" (34). Having stolen the clock to relieve an earlier debt to Weech for having eaten cake at his store, Dicky is perplexed when turning over the stolen clock to Weech only creates a larger debt:

> Dicky came moodily back from his dinner at Mr Weech's plunged in mystified computation: starting with a debt of twopence, he had paid Mr Weech an excellent clock—a luxurious article in Dicky's eyes—had eaten a bloater, and had emerged from the transaction owing threepence halfpenny. [. . .] As Mr Weech put it, the adjustment of accounts would seem to be quite correct; but the broad fact that all had ended in increasing his debt by three halfpence, remained and perplexed him. (36)

Not only does the theft of the clock put Dicky in further debt, but it also causes him to regret his actions after seeing Mrs. Roper:

> He had some compunctions in the matter of the clock now. [. . .] [S]ince he had seen the woman's face in the jamb of the door, he felt a sort of pity for her—that she should have lost her clock. No doubt she enjoyed its possession, as, indeed, he would have enjoyed it himself, had he not taken it instantly to Mr Weech. And

his fancy wandered off in meditation of what he would do with a clock of his own. [. . .] It would stand on the mantelpiece, and raise the social position of the family. People would come respectfully to ask the time, and he would tell them, with an air. Yes, certainly a clock must stand eminent among the things he would buy, when he had plenty of money. He must look out for more clicks: the one way to riches. (41)

A clock is in Dicky's mind the utmost possession, a source of social prestige, an object that could immediately raise his family's position. Dicky decides that he must give Mrs. Roper another clock, "or if not a clock, something that would please her as much. He had acquired a clock in the morning; why not another in the afternoon? Failing a clock, he would try for something else, and the Ropers should have it" (41). Later that day Dicky steals a music box from a basket in front of a shop. He is tempted to keep it for himself: "The thing acquired at such a cost of patience, address, hard flight, and deadly fear was surely his by right—as surely as the clock had been. And such a thing he might never touch again. But he put by the temptation manfully. [. . .] He would look no more on the music box, beautiful as it was: he would convey it to the Ropers before temptation came again" (46). Yet Dicky's effort to make amends for stealing the Ropers' clock does not go unpunished. The Ropers leave the Jago with the help of Father Sturt, who believes that "the Jago was no place for them" (48). Sturt finds the Ropers a place to live in the nearby and slightly more respectable Dove Lane and helps them pack their things in a truck. Dicky slips the music box into the back of the truck, only to be accused by the hunchback of trying to steal something. Later, when the Ropers discover the music box, they assume that it has been placed in the truck to frame the Ropers for theft. The episode ends with Dicky in possession of neither clock nor music box.

Four years after Dicky steals the clock from the Ropers, the clock strangely returns to Dicky's family. When his father takes a large parcel of stolen tobacco to

Weech and Weech fails to give Josh the desired number of shillings, Weech compromises

"by throwing in a cheap clock" (71). The clock turns out to be the same one that Dicky

had stolen from the Ropers. When Dicky sees the clock in his home, he is bothered by it:

"When Dicky came home and recognised the clock on the mantelpiece, being the more

certain because his mother told him it had come from Weech's, the thing irritated him

strangely. Through all those four years since he had carried the clock to Mr Weech, he

had never got rid of the wretched hunchback" (73). The clock returns to Dicky, as does

its original owner, but the possession of the clock does not carry any value with it.

Instead, the commodity, emptied of any exchange value, maintains in Dicky's mind the

value of a fetish. Originally a status symbol, the clock returns as a reminder of his

inability to penetrate the system of exchange. Along with that reminder, the clock carries

with it the reminder of the hunchback, who for four years has managed despite his

physical inferiority to terrorize Dicky:

> If ever a teacher mysteriously found out that it was Dicky who had drawn his
> portrait, all nose and teeth, on the blackboard, the tale had come from Bobby
> Roper. Whenever Dicky, chancing upon school by ill luck on an afternoon when
> sums were to be done, essayed to copy answers from his neighbor's slate, up shot
> the hunchback's hand in an instant, the tale was told, and handers were Dicky's
> portion. Once, dinnerless and hungry, he had stolen a sandwich from a teacher's
> desk; and, though he had thought himself alone and unseen, the hunchback knew
> it, and pointed him out, white malice in his thin face and eager hate in his thrust
> finger. [. . .] The hunchback's whole energies—even his whole time—seemed
> to be devoted to watching him. (73-74).

Again, energy is associated with harming fellow Jagoites rather than with productive

labor. It is in the institutional setting, not in the street, where the hunchback can harm

Dicky. Once in the street, Dicky pays back the hunchback with violence: "Dicky did not

wait for specific provocation: he 'clumped' Bobby Roper, or rolled him in the gutter, as a

matter of principle, whenever he could get hold of him" (74).

Clocks return in many forms from the time Dicky steals the watch from the Bishop, and they continue to be a source of misfortune for Dicky and his family. While the nickel-plated clock remains on the Perrott's mantelpiece to remind Dicky of his inability to capitalize on the object's exchange value, clocks also fail to serve Dicky's father Josh. When Josh gets injured in one of the many street brawls between the Ranns and the Learys, he finds himself unable to steal enough for his family. Deciding to leave the Jago, Josh heads for the suburbs in search of a good click, and after finding nothing in his wanderings, he comes across a seemingly empty house with a ladder against it leading to a back window. Although he is able to take a watch and chain from the house, he is discovered by its owner, whom Josh throws down the stairs before narrowly escaping. At first, Josh is triumphant about what he has stolen: "He took a peep as he passed under a street lamp, for all watches and chains are the same in the dark, and the thing might be a mere Waterbury on a steel guard. But no: both were gold, and heavy: a red clock and slang if ever there was one. And so Josh Perrott hobbled and chuckled his way home" (109). Josh, like Dicky, is pleased when he is able to steal a "red clock," and it is important that Dicky's first "click" is also a "red clock." Moreover, Josh's "red clock," like Dicky's, brings him no reward, for Josh has unwittingly stolen from a member of the High Mob, who puts the word out to both the fences and the police that his watch has been taken. It is Mr. Weech, the fence who exploits Dicky, who is also responsible for Josh's subsequent imprisonment. Josh finally takes the watch to Weech after trying to sell the watch to several other fences, who refuse it. Weech is the only fence who alerts the police.

After Josh is sentenced to five years penal servitude, the clock which he received from Weech (and which Dicky stole from the Ropers) takes on new meaning for Dicky's mother: "Whatever was pawnable had gone already, of course, except the little nickel-plated clock. That might have produced as much as sixpence, but [Dicky's mother] had a whim to keep it. She regarded it as a memorial of Josh, for it was his sole contribution to the family appointments" (128). Dicky's mother is not aware that the clock has circulated from the Ropers, to Dicky, to Weech, and to Josh, failing to bring a benefit to any of them: not even Weech is able to sell the clock. Yet for Dicky's mother the clock is a fetish—it stands in for her husband. The clock never serves any of its intended purposes in the Jago. It has neither use nor exchange value; it does not provide anyone with status; it doesn't promote disciplined labor; it is not even represented as indicating the time. Instead, it is fetishized as a lost husband or, in Dicky's case, as a reification of his inability to enter into the system of exchange.

When Josh Perrott returns after several years of imprisonment, he promptly stabs Weech to death and is sentenced to the gallows. During his trial, time seems to speed up for Josh, rendering the world incoherent: "Ever since they had taken him he had been oppressed by this plague of galloping thought, with few intervals of rest, when he could consider immediate concerns" (149). Throughout the trial, Josh has a vexed relationship to time. Like the circulating clocks which structure the plot, Josh's experience of the trial is characterized by repetition, rather than progression:

> But presently the judge began to sum up. They were coming to something at last. But it was merely the thrice-told evidence once more. The judge blinked at his notes, and went at it again; the policeman with his whistle, and the other with his lantern, and the doctor, and the sergeant, and the rest. It was shorter this time, though. Josh Perrott turned and looked at the clock behind him, with the faces over it, peering from the gallery. But when he turned to face the judge again, he

had forgotten the time, and crowded trivialities were racing through the narrow gates of his brain once more. (151).

Josh's conception of time is confused, and he is unable to register clock time. While the courtroom proceedings seem repetitive and dilatory, Josh experiences a sort of accelerated internal pace of thinking.

Immediately after Josh is hanged, a neighbor reports to Father Sturt that Josh's family has sat up all night kneeling around a chair with their clock on it. Again, the clock stands in for father and husband: both once held the promise of bringing the family out of misery, but both failed to operate successfully in the system of capitalist economy. A week after his father is hanged, Dicky walks out into the Jago: "Dicky walked that morning in a sort of numb, embittered fury. What should he do now? His devilmost. Spare nobody and stop at nothing. Old Beveridge was right that morning years ago. The Jago had got him, and it held him fast. Now he went doubly sealed of the outcasts: a Jago with a hanged father. Father Sturt talked of work, but who would give *him* work?" (156). Moments later, Dicky joins a street brawl against the Dove Lane neighborhood, only to be stabbed to death by former Jagoite, Bobby Roper, the hunchback from whom Dicky filched the family's clock.

The clocks in *A Child of the Jago*, then, suggest a vexed relationship between London's underclass and the notions of historical progress and disciplined time that underwrite the system of capitalist economy. As objects these clocks, like the form of Morrison's narrative, challenge the viability of disciplined, diachronic development for the group of people that had come to be known as "the residuum." Morrison's text emphasizes that the relationship between work and waste is entropic, that in the closed system of the slum, energy is converted into waste rather than work, or by extension, in

the system of capitalist economy, the underclass is the waste of the bourgeoisie, waste that will only increase over time. The laws of thermodynamics indicate that a closed system both conserves and wastes, progresses and declines, changes over time and maintains equilibrium. Similarly, Morrison's narrative is neither linear nor circular, but structured by diachronic shifts which are layered with stasis, repetition, and regression. Morrison, in effect, replaces the bourgeois narrative of capitalist progress with a thermodynamic narrative that emphasizes a complex relationship between labor and waste, progress and decline, diachrony and synchrony.

Trois mille six cents fois par heure, la Seconde
Chuchote: *Souviens-toi!* — Rapide, avec sa voix
D'insecte, Maintenant dit: Je suis Autrefois,
Et j'ai pompé ta vie avec ma trompe immonde!

Remember! Souviens-toi! prodigue! *Esto memor!*
(Mon gosier de métal parle toutes les langues.)
Les minutes, mortel folâtre, sont des gangues
Qu'il ne faut pas lâcher sans en extraire l'or!
—Charles Baudelaire, "L'Horloge" (1861)[1]

Chapter Three:
Recursion:
The City of Dreadful Night and the Eternal Present

I.   Recursion and Time

Published under the pseudonym B.V. (Bysshe Vanolis[2]) in three parts in *National*

Reformer between March and May of 1874, James Thomson's *The City of Dreadful*

Night follows an unnamed speaker through the streets of an unnamed city at night. In the

second canto, the speaker describes following a man whom he sees wandering through

the streets of the city. The man first visits a cemetery and murmurs to himself, "Here

Faith died, poisoned by this charnel air" (II.12). The speaker then follows the wanderer

to a villa and hears the man mutter, "Here Love died, stabbed by its own worshipped

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[1] ["Three thousand six hundred times per hour the Second-hand whispers: *Remember!*—
Rapidly, with its insect voice, Now says: I am Long Ago, and I have sucked dry your life
with my filthy proboscis!
  Remember! Souviens-toi, prodigal! *Esto memor!* (My metal throat speaks all
languages.) Minutes, playful mortal, are the ore which you should not chuck before
extracting the gold!" (Trans. Waldrop 108)].
[2] Bysshe Vanolis was a tribute to Shelley and an anagram of the pseudonym (Novalis) of
German poet Friedrich Leopold von Hardenberg. The poem was not published with
Thomson's name until 1880.

pair" (II.18). The man next wanders to a "squalid house" and says, "here Hope died,

starved out in its utmost lair" (II.24). After following the man to the third site, the

speaker asks him, "When Faith and Love and Hope are dead indeed, / Can Life still live?

By what doth it proceed?" (II.29-30). The man answers the speaker,

> Take a watch, erase
> The signs and figures of the circling hours,
> Detach the hands, remove the dial-face;
> The works proceed until run down; although
> Bereft of purpose, void of use, still go.

The image of the watch working without hands or dial-face as a figure for life without

faith, love, or hope reflects the repetition and purposelessness of the man's wanderings.

The watch suggests meaningless mechanization. The clock's mechanism still works

without its hands and face, but it cannot be read. The narrator then follows the man back

to his first site, the cemetery, where the man repeats, "Here Faith died, poisoned by this

charnel air" (II.42). The narrator reports,

> I ceased to follow, for the knot of doubt
> Was severed sharply with cruel knife:
> He circled thus forever tracing out
> The series of the fraction left of Life:
> Perpetual recurrence in the scope
> Of but three terms, dead Faith, dead Love, and dead Hope.

The stanza (and the section) ends with Thomson's footnote: "Life divided by that

persistent three = LXX / 333 = .210" (II.*n*). Thomson's strange footnote generally has

been ignored by critics,[3] though some have attempted to make sense of it. Valeria

Tinkler-Villani, for example, claims that the formula brings together religious and

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[3] The Blackwell *Victorian Poetry: An Annotated Anthology* (ed. Francis O'Gorman) does not include Thomson's footnote. Thomson wrote two footnotes to the poem: one at the end of section one and this one at the end of section two. The Blackwell anthology reprints the first footnote but not the second.

scientific systems: "Thomson conflates two systems: the semi-religious idea of man's allotted lifespan of threescore years and ten (in Roman numbers LXX) and a repetition of the numerological three, the number of the spirit. At the same time there is the scientific concept of the formula. [. . .] What Thomson's footnote says is that a combination of the two systems of signification—religion and science—produces no comprehensible result" (130). Critics have failed to note that Thomson's persistent three—faith, love, and hope—is an allusion to the Biblical triad commonly found in Paul's letters: "And now, faith, love, and hope abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love" (1 Cor 13.13).[4] In Thomson's poem what persists is not faith, love, and hope, but the death of the three, which are materially present in the city. The man whom the speaker follows is compelled to continually revisit the sites of the death of these ideals: a cemetery, a villa, and a squalid house. And at each site, the ideals do not just die, but are murdered. Faith is poisoned, love is stabbed, and hope is starved. Yet although faith, love, and hope are dead, they continue to "persist" in "dividing" life. In the footnote the three ideals are each represented by the number three. Together they are the "persistent three," but each is also "3." The circling man and the footnote serve as reflections of each other. The man persists in visiting the sites while his own life is repeatedly divided by the three.

Henry Paolucci associates the footnote and the entire canto with Book XII of Augustine's *City of God*, as well as with one of Thomson's own epigraphs to the poem from Leopardi (158). The section, footnote, and indeed the poem in its entirety are closely related to the first of two epigraphs by Italian poet Giacomo Leopardi (1798-

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[4] Paul's triad, faith, love, and hope, also appears in Romans (5.1-5), Galatians (5.5-6), and Thessalonians (1.3).

1837). The epigraph, from Leopardi's *Canto notturno di un pastore errante dell'Asia* (1831), reads,

> Then out of such endless working, so many movements
> Of everything in heaven and earth,
> Revolving incessantly,
> Only to return to the point from which they were moved;
> From all this, can I imagine
> Neither purpose nor gain.[5]

The speaker in Leopardi's poem is a nomadic Asian shepherd, who describes his life as meaningless and painful wandering. Leopardi's purposeless yet endlessly revolving heavens and earth are represented in the figure of the watch with no hands or face and in the man who circles the city visiting the same places where Faith, Love, and Hope died. In this way, the second canto is a recursive structure that doubles back on itself endlessly: the circling man, the watch without dial, the allusions to Leopardi's nomad, and the cryptic footnote are analogues that reflect each other and the poem. They instantiate their own content. In other words, they both describe termless recurrence and are themselves recurrences of each other.

In this chapter I argue that James Thomson's *The City of Dreadful Night* posits an experience of time as excess, as an eternal present in which past and present exist in a recursive structure. Like two facing mirrors, past and present create infinite reflections of each other. Thomson's poem, I argue, both thematizes recursion and employs it as a structure. As a narrative poem, *The City of Dreadful Night* follows a speaker over time, but the speaker's experience of time in the urban environment is neither cyclical nor

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[5] Trans. Edwin Morgan. Thomson's epigraph is in the original Italian: ["Poi di tanto adoprar, di tanti moti / D'ogni celeste, ogni terrena cosa, / Girando senza posa, / Per tornar sempre là donde son mosse; / Uso alcuno, alcun frutto / Indovinar non so."]

linear. Instead, the poem develops a notion of time that in the process of looking

backward creates excess by multiplying itself infinitely. The poem's backward

orientation is demonstrated in terms of form (allusion and ekphrasis) and in terms of

theme (personal pasts, history, evolutionary degeneration). This notion of a recursive

temporality, moreover, is symptomatic of urban modernity and is, as I will show, closely

associated with nineteenth-century commodity culture.

Recursion is a mathematical term which refers to the repeated application of a

function to the yielded result of the same function. An example is the Fibonacci numbers

(0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21 . . .), a sequence in which each number is the sum of the

previous two. In computer science, recursion is a problem-solving process by which a

function, in order to accomplish a task, invokes itself with some part of the task.

Recursion is a particular form of repetition, which can be described as *mise en abyme* or

pattern inside pattern. The visual figure often employed to demonstrate recursion is two

mirrors infinitely reflecting each other. Moreover, recursion is essentially self-reflexive

and self-multiplying.

When the term recursion is used outside of mathematics or computer science, it is

often employed imprecisely to refer to embedded structures. For example, frame-tale and

the play within the play are commonly described as recursive. Douglas R. Hofstadter

defines recursion as "(Stories inside stories, movies inside movies, paintings inside

paintings, Russian dolls inside Russian dolls (even parenthetical comments inside

parenthetical comments!))" (127). Hofstadter offers an example from daily life: when

listening to a news report on the radio, the broadcast might switch to a foreign reporter,

who in turn switches to a local reporter. Hofstadter describes this as "go[ing] down three

levels" (128). Lawrence J. Starzyk claims, "Artistic recursion involves the repetition, usually in the form of mirroring or echoing, of analogous elements" (57).

Yet, recursion is not simply a structure of embedding or repetition of elements. Rather, recursion carries the possibility of infinite generation because it is self generating. A classic literary example of recursion comes from Jonathan Swift's "On Poetry: A Rhapsody":

> So, naturalists observe, a flea
> Hath smaller fleas that on him prey,
> And these have smaller fleas to bite 'em
> And so proceed *ad infinitum*. (633)

Swift's structure is recursive and not simply an example of embedding if one imagines that smaller fleas exist on each successive level of fleas and that this can go on infinitely. Stephan Mussil's definition of literary recursion is closer to the mathematical meaning than many literary uses of the term (though he interestingly describes all literary practice as essentially recursive):

> By 'recursion' I mean an operation that is repeatedly applied to its result so that it generates, at least partially, its own distinctive basis: an object, representation, or reason. [. . .] These entities have a difficult status because they cannot be separated from the operations that operate on them, and because of them: the existence of types depends on the use of tokens, implicit rules cannot be conceived apart from rule-following behavior, numbers belong to arithmetic, values to their pursuit, and selves to acts of personal self-reference. (787)

Recursion is a function whereby—in the case of literature—a representation creates its own representation and the possibility that this process of self-generating representations might continue infinitely. Ursula K. Heise points to the essentially temporal structure of recursion, defining recursion as

> a means of articulating a temporal interval through a narrative that is not its own, but that of another moment in time: that is, of giving it a structure of meaning while "at the same time" leaving it semantically empty as an interval of pure

chronology, since nothing can happen in the frame narrative while the framed story is being told. Recursion figures the moment as what is not, replacing it by the story of another moment; somewhat paradoxically, it becomes narrative by not being narrated. (61)

Alan Warren Friedman claims, "Recursion simultaneously repeats and parodies, validates and subverts, whatever is taken as primary reality" (269). In other words, recursion is a form of imperfect repetition which simultaneously creates and transgresses several diegetic levels.

Applying theories of recursion to Thomson's poem of 1874 might appear anachronistic. The *Oxford English Dictionary* traces the usage of the word "recursion" back to the early seventeenth-century, but until the twentieth century the word meant simply a backward movement or return. It was not until the 1930s that "recursion" was used in mathematics as developed by Kurt Gödel. The term "recursion" appeared in the field of computer science in the 1950s to denote a procedure for problem solving or simplification whereby a problem is divided into sub-problems of the same type. What unites the different disciplinary definitions of recursion is the idea that infinite generation can be produced out of a backward movement. Although these theories were developed after the Victorian period, they serve, I argue, as heuristic tool for thinking about Victorian representations of time. A function or procedure is described as recursive if one of the steps that is a part of the procedure requires rerunning the procedure. Literary representations can be said to be recursive if the narrative movement forward triggers a backward feed. Or, in other words, part of the representation stalls forward movement while simultaneously generating infinite forward versions of itself.

One of the major commonplaces in theorizations of modernity is that the experience of the modern involved new notions of the relationship between past and

present. For Fredric Jameson, modernity is a "catastrophe" that "dashes traditional

structures and lifeways to pieces, sweeps away the sacred, undermines immemorial habits

and inherited languages, and leaves the world as a set of raw materials to be reconstructed

rationally and in the service of profit and commerce, and to be manipulated and exploited

in the form of industrial capitalism" (84). Modernity, according to Jameson, has

distinctly altered the experience of time:

> What happens in the West to the existential [. . .] can most instructively be
> observed in the realm of time, which on the one hand is seized upon in its
> measurability (the working day, that struggle within the factory for possession of
> the chronometer or timepiece itself, which Edward Thompson has so vividly
> described), and on the other becomes the deep bottomless vegetative time of
> Being itself, no longer draped and covered with myth or inherited religion. It is
> this new and unadorned experience of time that will generate the first expressions
> of the modern in the West—in the crucial year of 1857, the year of the poems of
> Baudelaire and of Flaubert's first published novel. (84)

In the middle of the nineteenth century, time becomes simultaneously disciplined by the

exigencies of industrial capitalism and rendered infinite by the discovery of geological

time. In other words, time becomes both measured and immeasurable. Jürgen Habermas

similarly describes modernity as characterized by a new sense of time and as emerging in

the middle of the nineteenth century:

> The aesthetic of modernity begins to take shape clearly with Baudelaire and with
> his theory of art, influenced as it was by Edgar Allen Poe. [. . .] This mentality
> is characterized by a set of attitudes which developed around a transformed
> consciousness of time. It is this consciousness that expresses itself in the spatial
> metaphor of the avant-garde—that is, an avant-garde that explores hitherto
> unknown territory, exposes itself to the risk of sudden and shocking encounters,
> conquers an as yet undetermined future, and must therefore find a path for itself in
> previously uncharted domains. But this forward orientation, this anticipation of
> an indefinite and contingent future, the cult of the New which accompanies it, all
> this actually signifies the glorification of a contemporariness that repeatedly gives
> birth to new and subjectively defined pasts. [. . .] The new value which is
> accorded to the ephemeral, the momentary and the transitory, and the concomitant
> celebration of dynamism, expresses precisely the yearning for a lasting and

immaculate present. As a self-negating movement, modernism is a "yearning for true presence." (40)

For Habermas, the aesthetic of modernity valorizes the present and in the process creates a number of pasts: it is thus "self-negating" because it craves presence but gives rise to the past. Yet Jameson's and Habermas's accounts of the experience of time in modernity, I argue, are not sufficiently complex to explain the representations of time in Thomson's poem. For both Jameson and Habermas, modern time is characterized by a struggle between, for Jameson, deep geological or evolutionary time and disciplined industrial time, and for Habermas, forward orientation and the inevitability of creating pasts. Habermas's notion of the modern as "repeatedly giving birth to new and subjectively defined pasts" is not simply "self-negating." Rather, this is the recursive structure I have identified, which in looking backward, infinitely re-represents itself.

The desire to look backward, to create new pasts, is a symptom of the mid-nineteenth century's increasing urbanization and commodity culture. In *Present Past* Richard Terdiman argues that across Europe during the period between 1789 and 1920 "people experienced the insecurity of their culture's involvement with its past, the perturbation of the link to their own inheritance, as what I want to term a 'memory crisis': a sense that their past has somehow evaded memory, that recollection had ceased to integrate consciousness. In this memory crisis the very coherence of time and of subjectivity seemed disarticulated" (3-4). This crisis involved a growing sense that memory cannot serve to make sense of the present, that the past was radically different from the present, and that increasing urbanization as a result of industrial capitalism created a space in which memory had to function in different ways. Describing mid-nineteenth-century Paris, Katherine Elkins notes, "The crisis of memory, then, emerges

first in large urban areas where the rapid disappearance of the present provokes fears that

memory may be unequal to the task of preserving what has disappeared. Gone are the

community and the constant, relatively unchanging atmosphere of people and places that

normally serve as memory-triggers" (52). For Terdiman, the memory crisis of the

nineteenth century is closely associated with capitalist economy: "[O]ne of the most

powerful reflections on the problematic character of reality in the capitalist period itself

turns squarely on memory. [. . .] [C]ommodities determine, and are reciprocally

determined by, a systematic perturbation in the realm of memory. Essentially 'reification'

is a memory disturbance: *the enigma of the commodity is a memory disorder*" (11-12).

Terdiman is referring here to Marx's famous description in *Capital* of the ways in which

commodity fetishism transforms social relationships:

> Since the producers do not come into social contact until they exchange the
> products of their labour, the specific social characteristics of their private labours
> appear only within this exchange. In other words, the labour of the private
> individual manifests itself as an element of the total labour of society only
> through the relations which the act of exchange establishes between the products,
> and, through their mediation, between the producers. To the producers, therefore,
> the social relations between their private labours appear as what they are, i.e. they
> do not appear as direct social relations between persons in their work, but rather
> as material [*dinglich*] relations between persons and social relations between
> things. (165-66)

Commodities, thus, conceal social relations; or rather, social relations are transposed onto

material things because the labour involved in producing a commodity is not evident

except in the act of exchange. Relations between people become material, and material

things become endowed with a sort of value that is independent of use-value. The value

associated with a commodity is not connected with the actual physical properties of the

thing. Terdiman explains that commodity fetishism essentially is a process of abstracting

objects from the history of their production, and this "subversion of memory" is

surprising because normally objects aid rather than subvert memory: "Through their

associations, they play a familiar triggering or anchoring role in the mnemonic process. [

. . .] [I]t is astonishing when somehow the mnemonic potential of the objects

fundamental to an entire social formation turns up radically disrupted or disabled" (13).

Benjamin similarly claimed that in the nineteenth century the reifying representations of

history created phantasmagorias of existence which sentence humanity to a "mythic

anguish" (15). In "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century" (1935), Benjamin describes

"a feeling of vertigo characteristic of the nineteenth-century's conception of history. It

corresponds to a viewpoint according to which the course of the world is an endless

series of facts congealed in the form of things" (14). If the urban centers of the

nineteenth century supported commodity cultures that subverted memory and disrupted

the coherence of time, then recursive time is both symptom and response in its obsessive

backward glance which infinitely reproduces itself.

        While Victorian novelists are known for their depictions of the city, Victorian

poetry is more frequently associated with life in the country or in the mythological past.

A few critics have challenged this notion that Victorian poets had little to say about life in

the city. William B. Thesing's *The London Muse: Victorian Poetic Responses to the City*

surveys urban poetry (both canonical and lesser-known poets) from the Romantics to the

nineties, illuminating the widespread and varied poetic responses to the Victorian city.[6]

Still, although nineteenth-century poets did write about city life, critics and readers have

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[6] Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* is, of course, a classic example of
criticism that demonstrates the widespread interest of poets in urban themes and settings.
Also see R.A. Forsyth's *The Lost Pattern: Essays on the Emergent City Sensibility in
Victorian England.*

long focused on the fictional rather than the poetic depictions of the city. Thesing

conjectures this is because fiction as a form better corresponds to the exigencies of

depicting the city: "Fiction is the mode of the actual, the literary form of the middle class

uniquely suited to capture the social, moral, and psychological tensions of the city" (xv).

Because the best-known Victorian poets have generally avoided representing the city, or

depicted the city in only parts of much longer poems,[7] there has been a critical tendency

to identify the first representations or expressions of modernity outside of England. Ivan

Kreilkamp asks,

> [W]hy do we have no English Charles Baudelaire, no mid-nineteenth-century poet
> whose work participates, explicitly and consciously, in the early theorization of
> modernity occurring at the time in France and Germany and America? Is it
> possible that this lack is at least in part a byproduct of the questions we ask of
> Victorian poetry? Even if we will not discover our own Baudelaire, might we still
> find, in the great poets we do have, more sustained (if sometimes encoded)
> investigation into the problem of the modern than we have yet discovered? (605)

While Kreilkamp does not look to English urban poetry to answer these questions, he

does point to the ways in which Victorian poetry has been excluded from narratives about

the emergence of modernity in the nineteenth century. Isobel Armstrong notes that

despite the fact that modernist poets tended to distance themselves from the Victorians, to

"repress whatever relations the Victorians may seem to bear to twentieth-century writing"

(1), the Victorians

> saw themselves as modern. 'Modern,' in spite of its long history, has a
> resurgence as a Victorian term—the 'modern' element in literature (Arnold),
> 'modern' love (Meredith), a 'modern' landlord (William Allingham). To see
> yourself as modern is actually to define the contemporary self-consciously and
> this is simultaneously an act which historicizes the modern. Victorian modernism

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[7] For example, William Wordsworth's *The Prelude* (1799, 1805, 1850) (Book VII),
Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856), and Alfred Tennyson's *Maud* (1855)
and *In Memoriam* (1849) include important sections in London, but these poems are in
large part set outside of London.

sees itself as new but it does not, like twentieth-century modernism, conceive itself in terms of a radical break with the past. Victorian modernism, as it emerges in poetics, describes itself as belonging to a condition of crisis which has emerged directly from economic and cultural change. (3)

Armstrong points to the way in which the Victorian theorization of modernity, rather than

articulating a break with the past, sought to define what it meant to be modern without

dispensing with history.   Lynda Nead, like Armstrong, locates modernity in Victorian

London and describes modernity as tied to the past because of the visual reminders of the

past within the city:

> There can never be a pure, clean modernity, for the discourses that constitute that historical temporality bear the ghosts of the past, of modernity's own other. The past may be rejected or repressed by the language of improvement, but it returns to disturb and unsettle the confidence of the modern. The present remains permanently engaged in a phantasmatic dialogue with the past. This is the nature of representations of modernity in mid-Victorian London. The spaces of improvement were caught up in a ceaseless exchange with the spaces of the city's historical past. London's past had to be endlessly rewritten and re-imagined. (7-8)

Nead claims that Victorian London was haunted by the past—not just in terms of the

material realities of improving the city, but also in terms of the discourses surrounding

representations of the past. The recursive structure, I argue, is a response to the idea that

the present could not dispense with the past, that the past haunts the present, that the

present must account for the past. Imagining a recursive temporality in the city is an

attempt to overcome the crisis of memory by repeatedly, infinitely defining itself in terms

of its past.

The City of Dreadful Night is composed of twenty-one numbered cantos. The

even-numbered cantos follow an unnamed speaker who wanders an unnamed city at

night.[8] The speaker describes not the crowded and constantly moving city that is so
common among Victorian representations of London; rather, Thomson's speaker
navigates the city at night, where he encounters only a few other people with whom he
rarely interacts. Most of the speaker's encounters with others involve watching or
overhearing others express their own despair. At one point, the speaker enters a cathedral
and hears a sermon in which a preacher proclaims that there is no God and endorses
suicide. The odd-numbered cantos often take the form of lyrical ruminations on the city,
many of which describe the inhabitants of the city as phantoms, the living dead, and
express a longing for death.

Since Thomson's death in 1882, critics have often offered biographical readings
of the poem, which serve to reduce it to a reflection of the poet's poverty, alcoholism,
and insomnia at the end of his life. Those who have been willing to move beyond simple
biographical readings have tended to treat *The City of Dreadful Night* as deploying a
proto-Modernist poetics of urban experience. In his 1897 *Studies in Two Literatures*,
Arthur Symons claimed, "He was ahead of the fashion in aiming at what we now call
modernity; his work is, in a certain sense, more modern than that of any other
considerable writer in verse" (232). Raymond Williams claims,

> What is significant in Thomson [. . .] is that his city is projected and is
> significantly total: it is a symbolic vision of the city as the condition of human
> life. [. . .] This powerful vision brings together, in an immensely influential

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[8] Most critics associate Thomson's "city" with London because he lived and wrote in
London. Chu-Chueh Cheng, however, claims that the topography of the city described in
the first canto of the poem does not match London: "The 'trackless wilderness' stretches
neither to the north nor to the west of the city. The River Thames, though running
through London, does not girdle its south and west. Moreover, London's dense population
and rapid growth leave no room for 'mountains,' 'moorland,' 'marshes,' 'savannahs,' or
'lagoon.' Maps of Victorian London immediately prove improbable the assumption that
Thomson's city is London" (n.pag).

though not often acknowledged structure, the fact of the city and of the new anguished consciousness. Struggle, indifference, loss of purpose, loss of meaning—have found, in the City, a habitation and a name. For the city is not only, in this vision, a form of modern life; it is the physical embodiment of a decisive modern consciousness. (236, 239)

Williams is not alone in associating Thomson's poem with an emerging modernity. Valeria Tinkler-Villani, for example, claims that Thomson deploys the tropes and techniques of the Modernists: "The distrust of the lyric mode, the lack of authority of the authoritative figures presented, the rhythms of the voices—it is these elements that knit the poem into one unit in the Modernist manner of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*" (134). For Dafydd Moore, Thomson's vision of the city is quintessentially late-Victorian in terms of its vision of the breakdown of stable identity in attempting to articulate the city: "The narrator of Thomson's *The City*, and the narrative he produces, can be seen within this context of the fissuring of the confident flâneur tradition on the second half of the century" (123). Isobel Armstrong claims that Thomson's aim is to

> construct single-handed a new symbolic language and a wholly new mythological system [. . . .] to construct a new imaginative and ideological world, redefining history and consciousness. But this reconstructed modern myth had to be made out of existing forms of thought, images and language, above all Christian language and the cosmology of Dante's *Inferno*. The shock of *The City of Dreadful Night* [. . .] is its use of the traditional language of spiritual experience to overturn it, a language overturned by its own oppressive weight. (461)

Similarly, David Seed reads the poem as simultaneously deconstructing and participating in the Christian symbolic system: "Since the symbolic system which Thomson is destabilising is always larger than any of his individual utterances he is compelled into recurrent exercises in deconstruction which enact the impulses within his scepticism but which always retain the melancholy traces of the very system under attack" (104). Thomson's vision of modern urban experience is distinctly modern, I argue, not just

because it prefigures modernist techniques or creates a new symbolic system to replace

the Christian one. Rather *The City of Dreadful Night*'s modernity lies in its depiction of

the urban experience as engaging with a new and particular sense of time, an experience

of time as recursive.

More than just a heuristic tool, recursion is perhaps a way of describing new

conceptions of time that were being formulated during the nineteenth century. I propose

that Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of "eternal recurrence" is one such articulation of time

as recursive. Nietzsche first describes the concept of "eternal recurrence" in section

341of *The Gay Science* (1882):

> What, if some day or some night a demon were to steal after you into your
> loneliest loneliness and say to you: "This life as you now live it and have lived it,
> you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be
> nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and
> everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in
> the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between
> the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence
> is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!
>   Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon
> who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you
> would have answered him: "You are a god, and never have I heard anything more
> godly." If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are
> or perhaps crush you. (274)

The concept of eternal recurrence reappears in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-85).

Zarathustra describes having a vision in which a dwarf perched on his shoulder

proclaims, "all that is straight lies. [. . .] All truth is crooked; time itself is a circle"

(158). Zarathustra replies,

> [A] long eternal lane leads *backward*: behind us lies an eternity. Must not
> whatever *can* walk have walked on this lane before? Must not whatever *can*
> happen have happened, have been done, have passed by before? And if
> everything has been there before—what do you think, dwarf, of this moment?
> Must not this gateway too have been there before? And are not all things knotted
> together so firmly that this moment draws after it *all* that is to come? Therefore—

itself too? For whatever *can* walk—in this long lane out *there* too, it *must* walk once more. (158)

Zarathustra rebukes the dwarf's notion of cyclical time because Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence is not circular, but rather an endless repetition. The pathway stretches forward and backward eternally. Yet, although the concept of eternal recurrence is not circular, it is also not a linear or teleological sense of time.[9] David C. Wood provides an interpretation of Nietzsche's eternal recurrence that is essentially recursive:

> It seems to be possible to think of eternal recurrence as a loopy arrow, as a single temporal series of a strange loopy shape. And yet, without departing from seriality, Nietzsche has thereby generated a structure that threatens it. When one talks of a loopy shape, one thinks representationally of something like a coil, a spring shape. On such a model there is a way of distinguishing between the different cycles even if there were no clear point at which one cycle begins and ends. (19)

Although Wood does not use the term "recursion," his description of eternal recurrence as loopy or like a coil suggests the structure of recursion in which seriality, or forward movement, triggers backward feed.

While my reading of Nietzsche's eternal recurrence might seem to run counter to the interpretations of Frankfurt School thinkers who linked eternal recurrence to the commodity culture that emerged in the nineteenth century, my sense is that recursion is intimately tied to commodity culture. For both Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin, Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence is a result or symptom of modernity and commodity culture. In *Minima Moralia* Adorno writes, "The cult of the new, and thus

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[9] Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence has been variously interpreted by scholars. Some believe it was meant to be a cosmological or scientific theory of the universe. This understanding has largely been rejected by philosophers. Other scholars have considered the concept to be either an existential view of the self or as a theory of the meaning of being. For my purposes, it is not entirely necessary to choose a strict interpretation. Rather, my interest is in Nietzsche's desire to find a substitute for Christian notions of history as progressive or teleological.

the idea of modernity, is a rebellion against the fact that there is no longer anything new.

The never-changing quality of machine-produced goods, the lattice of socialization that

enmeshes and assimilates equally objects and the view of them, converts everything

encountered into what always was, a fortuitous specimen of a species, the *doppel-gänger*

of a model" (235). Like Adorno, Benjamin associates eternal recurrence with modernity

by pointing out,

> It is to be demonstrated with every possible emphasis that the idea of eternal
> recurrence intrudes into the world of Baudelaire, Blanqui and Nietzsche at
> approximately the same moment. With Baudelaire the accent is on the new which
> is won with heroic effort from the "ever- always-the-same"; in Nietzsche it is on
> the "ever-always-the-same" which man faces with heroic composure. Blanqui is
> much closer to Nietzsche than to Baudelaire, but with him resignation prevails. In
> Nietzsche this experience projects itself cosmologically in the thesis: there will be
> nothing new. ("Central Park" 43)

Closely related to commodity culture and mass production, the concept of eternal

recurrence, according to Benjamin, is a way of understanding history that is symptomatic

of capitalism: "The idea of eternal recurrence transforms the historical event itself into a

mass-produced article" (*Arcades* 340). The mass-produced article, I want to suggest, is a

recursive object. Adorno's use of the phrase "*doppel-gänger* of a model" to describe the

commodity is telling. It is not that everything is identical, but, rather, that everything is a

reproduction. Patrick O'Donnell describes the commodity as existing in two temporal

registers:

> [Commodities] are reproduced, but as reproductions; they are haunted by an
> "excess"—that which exceeds their "use-value," their posited origin. [. . .] The
> very form of the "thing" caught up in capitalism—and it should be clear that
> "thing" can stand for any formation, including those of self or nation, that gains
> identity within the symbolic order of exchange—invokes time. Its production and
> exchange calls up both the temporality of desire that motors capitalism (the
> system of time delays between the initiation of desire and its ever partial
> satisfaction via acquisition of the object) and the "pastness" of the object itself,
> always an iteration of its "first" appearance in the present tense of its origin,

always removed from and haunted by that posited origin that is deconstructed by its very nature *as* object. (41)

While O'Donnell does not use the term "recursion," his notion of the complex temporality of the commodity fits this structure. Not only does it invoke the temporality both of desire and that of its origin, it is also "haunted by an excess." In other words, the commodity is recursive in that it simultaneously embodies past and present (and future), and in embodying these different temporal registers it produces something—an excess.

The City of Dreadful Night above all else is concerned with the urban subject's experience of time.[10] The speaker's encounter with the city is characterized by time confusion, and the structure of the poem reflects this confusion. The poem's twenty-one cantos are written in iambic pentameter, creating a rhythmic regularity. Yet, the cantos alternate between even-numbered cantos, which are narrative and follow the speaker's movements through the city, and odd-numbered cantos which are more lyrical and appear static compared to the narrative cantos.

Thomson's city is characterized by a kind of synchrony in which remnants of the past are discernable in the present:

> The city is not ruinous, although
> Great ruins of an unremembered past,
> With others of a few short years ago
> More sad, are found within its precincts vast. (I.78-81)

Although the ruins are part of the city, they do not promote memory or provide knowledge of the past. Instead the ruins function simultaneously as excess and lack: they

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[10] Unlike many critics who read the speaker of *The City of Dreadful Night* as someone peculiarly ill-equipped to cope with modern urban life (an expression of Thomson's personal difficulties), I postulate that Thomson's speaker is an archetype, an allegorical version of the urban Everyman.

indicate a past, but they also serve as a reminder that the past has been forgotten and

cannot be recovered through what remains.

The first canto establishes the city as a place of perpetual night in which dreams

and reality are indistinguishable:

> The City is of Night; perchance of Death,
> But certainly of Night, for never there
> Can come the lucid morning's fragrant breath
> After the dewy dawning's cold grey air;
> The moon and stars may shine with scorn or pity;
> The sun has never visited that city,
> For it dissolveth in the daylight fair.
>
> Dissolveth like a dream of night away;
> Though present in distempered gloom of thought
> And deadly weariness of heart all day.
> But when a dream night after night is brought
> Throughout a week, and such weeks few or many
> Recur each year for several years, can any
> Discern that dream from real life aught? (I.43-56)

The speaker describes the city as a place which is experienced as phantasmagoric

recurrence. Time is figured as dreamtime, which the speaker paradoxically perceives to

be both endless recurrence and unceasing change:

> For life is but a dream whose shapes return,
> Some frequently, some seldom, some by night
> And some by day, some night and day: we learn,
> The while all change and many vanquish quite,
> In their recurrence with recurrent changes
> A certain seeming order; where this ranges
> We count things real; such is memory's might. (I.57-63)

The "shapes" of life return, yet they also "all change." The city is characterized by a

system in which repetition and variation occur together to create what appears to be

order. What is "real" is simply the power of memory to discern the patterns of recurrence

and change. And recognizing these patterns, according to the speaker, is the means of

distinguishing between dream and reality—though the speaker suggests that what is

"real" is no more than the desire to discern order in the paradox of recurrent change.

Charles Baudelaire's "Les Sept Vieillards" (1859/1861) similarly describes a city

in which recurrence is troubling to the urban dweller. The poem's speaker walks through

the streets of Paris one morning when he sees a ragged man:

> Tout à coup, un vieillard dont les guenilles jaunes
> Imitaient la couleur de ce ciel pluvieux,
> Et dont l'aspect aurait fait pleuvoir les aumônes,
> Sans la méchanceté qui luisait dans ses yeux,
>
> M'apparut. On eût dit sa prunelle trempée
> Dans le fiel; son regard aiguisait les frimas,
> Et sa barbe à longs poils, roide comme une épée,
> Se projetait, pareille à celle de Judas. (13-20)[11]

As the speaker watches, the old man appears to multiply:

> Son pareil le suivait: barbe, oeil, dos, bâton, loques,
> Nul trait ne distinguait, du même enfer venu,
> Ce jumeau centenaire, et ces spectres baroques
> Marchaient du même pas vers un but inconnu.
>
> À quel complot infâme étais-je donc en butte,
> Ou quel méchant hasard ainsi m'humiliait?
> Car je comptai sept fois, de minute en minute,
> Ce sinistre vieillard qui se multipliait! (29-36)[12]

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[11] ["Suddenly an old man, his grimy rags aping the color of rainy skies, whose appearance would have brought showers of charity if his eyes had not gleamed so wickedly,

hove in sight. His eyeballs, you could see, were steeped in bile; his gaze made the frost keener and his long beard, stiff as a sword, stuck out like Judas's" (Trans. Waldrop 117).]

 Although the poem in the original French is written in metrical rhymed verse, I have chosen to use Keith Waldrop's prose translation of "Les Sept Vieillards" because it remains close to the original in meaning. (Trans. Waldrop 117).

[12] ["His likeness followed him: beard, eye, back, stick, tatters, no distinguishing trait, from the same hell, centennial twin—and these baroque specters marched in step toward an end unknown.

The speaker watches as six more exact likenesses of the old man appear. The

doppelgangers march along toward an unknown goal, and their appearance gives rise to

the very rare hepta-accentual line:

Son par<u>eil</u> le sui<u>vait</u>: / <u>barbe</u>, <u>oeil</u>, <u>dos</u>, bâ<u>ton</u>, <u>loques</u>[13]

Form and content echo each other here, and although the poem is comprised of rhyming

alexandrines, the unusually accented lines and frequent enjambments depart from

traditional form. The hepta-accentual line, in particular, creates a staccato rhythm that

mirrors the repeating appearances of the likeness of the old man. David Evans claims

that the line "creates an unbearable cacophony for those for whom poetry equals

rhythmical equilibrium. [. . .] [E]xact regularity provokes existential terror rather than

rhythmical ecstasy" (55). Indeed, the multiplication of the old man, which the speaker

considers to be a personal plot against him, causes the speaker's mental breakdown at the

end of the poem:

Aurais-je, sans mourir, contemplé le huitième,
Sosie inexorable, ironique et fatal
Dégoûtant Phénix, fils et père de lui-même?
— Mais je tournai le dos au cortège infernal.

Exaspéré comme un ivrogne qui voit double,
Je rentrai, je fermai ma porte, épouvanté,
Malade et morfondu, l'esprit fiévreux et trouble,
Blessé par le mystère et par l'absurdité!

Vainement ma raison voulait prendre la barre;
La tempête en jouant déroutait ses efforts,

To what foul plot was I then the butt, or what mischance conspired to humiliate to me? For seven times, by my count, from moment to moment, this sinister dotard multiplied!" (Waldrop 118).]
[13] I rely on David Evans's scansion, 55.

Et mon âme dansait, dansait, vieille gabarre
Sans mâts, sur une mer monstrueuse et sans bords! (41-52)[14]

The speaker imagines that had he stayed to watch the procession, the old man might have

multiplied infinitely, recalling Adorno's notion of the subject's experience in commodity

culture in which everything becomes "the *doppel-gänger* of a model." There is no

original in modernity, not even a model once removed from the original. Instead,

everything becomes a doppelganger of a model of the original. Yet, the multiplication of

the old man is also recursive: the speaker calls the old men "fils et père de lui-même"

["all-in-one son and father"]. He is a self-multiplying figure, and the speaker believes

that the multiplication might continue infinitely. Although she never specifically refers

to "Les Sept Vieillards," Elissa Marder claims that *Les Fleurs de Mal* envisions time as

"eviscerated past, empty present, and endless future" (37). "Les Sept Vieillards," rather

than describing an "endless future," depicts the experience of time in the city as an

eternal and recursive present.

II. Ekphrastic Recursion

The last four cantos of *The City of Dreadful Night* involve several ekphrastic

episodes which serve to develop and complicate the notions of time, memory, and history

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[14] ["Would I, without dying, have witnessed an eighth—inexorable double, ironic and
mortal, disgusting phoenix, all-in-one son and father?—But I turned my back on the
hellish procession.
     Exasperated, like a drunk seeing double, I went home, locked my door in terror,
sick, chilled to the bone, my mind confused and feverish, wounded by mystery and the
absurd!
     Vainly my reason tried to hold steady; the rollicking storm threw all efforts off
course, and my soul danced, danced, an old ship without a mast, on a monstrous,
boundless sea!" (Trans. Waldrop 118).]

that are thematized in the previous cantos. Canto XVIII follows the speaker into "a

suburb in the north" (879) where he encounters what at first appears to be a wounded

creature:

> After a hundred steps I grew aware
> Of something crawling in the lane below;
> It seemed a wounded creature prostrate there
> That sobbed with pangs in making progress slow,
> The hind limbs stretched to push, the fore limbs then
> To drag, for it would die in its own den.
>
> But coming level with it, I discerned
> That it had been a man: for at my tread
> It stopped in its sore travail and half-turned,
> Leaning upon its right, and raised its head,
> And with the left hand twitched back as in ire
> Long grey unreverend locks befouled with mire. (891-902)

 Beginning with George M. Harper's 1953 publication "Blake's *Nebuchadnezzar* in 'The

City of Dreadful Night,'" a number of critics have associated Thomson's crawling

creature with William Blake's monotype color print of the Babylonian king who is

described in the Book of Daniel as losing his sanity and living in the wild for seven years

as an animal before his reason is returned to him. While it is not clear that Thomson had

Blake's *Nebuchadnezzar* in mind, Thomson did admire Blake. In 1864 he wrote an essay

entitled, "The Poems of William Blake," in response to the publication of Alexander

Gilchrist's two-volume *Life of William Blake*. Gilchrist's volumes included selections of

Blake's poetry and illustrations (including a sketch of *Nebuchadnezzar* [figure 4]),

making a major portion of Blake's work available for the first time to the Victorians.[15]

The 1880 edition of Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake* (published after *The City of*

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[15] Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake* was supplemented by W.M. Rossetti's "Annotated
Lists of Blake's Paintings, Drawings, and Engravings," which, as Harper points out,
included descriptions of two versions of *Nebuchadnezzar* (Harper 72).

Dreadful Night) replaced the sketch of *Nebuchadnezzar* with a black-and-white version

of the well-known color print which was part of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1795)

(figure 5).

Figure 4 William Blake's sketch of Nebuchadnezzar in Alexander Gilchrist's 1863 *Life of William Blake* (1:89).

NEBUCHADNEZZAR (1795)
Colour-printed

Figure 5 Black-and-white copy of William Blake's color print *Nebuchadnezzar* as it appeared in Alexander Gilchrist's 1880 edition of *Life of William Blake* (1:90).

For Harper and many other critics, Thomson's crawling creature reflects Thomson's skepticism toward Blake's visionary notions of spiritual transcendence. Francis O'Gorman, for example, footnotes Canto XVIII by claiming, "Thomson is alluding to William Blake's *Nebuchadnezzar* (1795), a picture of the long-bearded king crawling as if half animal. Thomson's crawling man struggling to find 'Eden's innocence in Eden's clime', is a parody and metonymic rejection of Blake's ideas, which Thomson had earlier admired" (417, n95). Dafyyd Moore also describes Thomson's creature in connection with Blake's *Nebuchadnezzar* and, like O'Gorman, understands *The City* to be a rejection of Blake: "Thomson's antipathy towards the solipsistic mystic life that denies the common—and useful—lot, brings us to the Nebuchadnessar [sic] figure [. . .] Thus the figure encountered in XVIII pays the price for being 'Blake', for the Romantic refusal to interact with the world, and for his pre-emptive scorning of pity and solidarity" (129). While these accounts have been useful in identifying the ekphrastic nature of Thomson's creature, they do not note the ways in which Thomson employs ekphrasis in the service of the theme of the urban subject's experience of time as recursive.

While ekphrasis has been variously defined, many critics accept James A. W. Heffernan's definition of ekphrasis as "the verbal representation of visual representation [. . .] [I]t explicitly represents representation itself" (3, 4).[16] W.J. T. Mitchell associates ekphrasis with otherness: "Ekphrasis is stationed between two 'othernesses,' and two forms of (apparently) impossible translation and exchange: (1) the conversion of the visual representation into a verbal representation, either by description or ventriloquism;

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[16] Alexandra Wettlaufer provides a useful history of the ways ekphrasis has been theorized from ancient Greece to the present, 60-64. See also Margaret Helen Pirsin, 14-20.

(2) the reconversion of the verbal representation back into the visual object in the reception of the reader" (164). Although ekphrasis is an ancient mode and has been defined synchronically, Heffernan and others have attempted to provide diachronic definitions of the mode. Heffernan's own *Museum of Words*, subtitled *The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery*, is one such study. For Heffernan, the history of ekphrasis is a history of the contest between word and image. In the Greek epic ekphrasis serves to demonstrate the mastery of the masculine word over the feminine image. In Heffernan's formulation the authority of word increasingly gives way, and postmodern ekphrasis is characterized by an "intensifying struggle for mastery between the language of interpretation and the impenetrable silence of what Ashbery calls 'the strict / Otherness of the painter in his / Other room'" (8). Heffernan points out that contemporary ekphrastic poetry often represents works of art within the museum surrounded by the words of the title and the curatorial notes on the museum wall: "[T]he museum signifies all the institutions that select, circulate, reproduce, display, and explain works of visual art, all the institutions that inform and regulate our experience of it—largely by putting it into words" (139). These later ekphrastic poems (with Browning's "My Last Duchess" as a precursor) reveal the ways language seeks and ultimately fails to dominate the image. Margaret Helen Persin's definition of ekphrasis is particularly useful because it highlights the ways in which verbal and visual are mutually disruptive within the ekphrastic structure. She terms ekphrastic "a poetic text that makes reference to a visual work of art, whether real or imagined, canonized or uncanonized, and thus allows that art object, in truth the object of (artistic) desire, to 'speak for itself' within the problematically ruptured framework of the poetic text" (17-18).

While I do not intend to provide a new definition or history of ekphrasis, I do want to suggest that one important aspect of the mode that has been undertheorized is that it is a structure of conflicting temporalities and that it is an essentially recursive structure. As a representation of a representation, according to Heffernan, ekphrasis simultaneously demonstrates forward movement and stasis: "Because it verbally represents visual art, ekphrasis stages a contest between rival modes of representation: between the driving force of the narrating word and the stubborn resistance of the fixed image" (6). In his seminal essay, Murray Krieger highlighted the ways in which ekphrasis transforms temporality: "The object of imitation, as spatial work, becomes the metaphor for the temporal work which seeks to capture it in that temporality" (107). More than just staging the conflict between the temporality of narrative and that of description, ekphrasis embodies a form of temporality in which past and present intermingle. Moreover, this intermingling temporality produces something else: in representing something that was previously represented, the ekphrastic structure is self-multiplying, self-reflexive, and recursive.

The episode with the crawling man in Canto XVIII, then, employs the complex time-space structure of ekphrasis in order to thematize the urban subject's experience of time as recursive. The crawling man is a representation of Blake's *Nebuchadnezzar*, which is a representation of the Biblical king, which is a representation of the historical king. After the speaker encounters the crawling man, the man addresses the speaker:

> Have pity on me! it is mine alone.
> If you could find it, it would avail you nought;
> Seek elsewhere on the pathway of your own:
> For who of mortal or immortal race
> The lifetrack of another can retrace?

> Did you but know my agony and toil!
> Two lanes diverge yonder from this lane;
> My thin blood marks the long length of their soil
> Such clue I left, who sought my clue in vain:
> My hands and knees are worn both flesh and bone;
> I cannot move but with continual moan.
>
> But I am in the very way at last
> To find the long-lost broken golden thread
> Which reunites my present with my past. (915-929)

The crawling man's aim, he claims, is to bring his past back together with his present, and he seeks to do this by finding a "golden thread." Harper claims that the words the man speaks allude to lines from Blake's *Jerusalem*, which Harper admits Thomson likely had not seen in its entirety. The lines did, however, appear at the beginning of the second volume of Gilchrist's *Life* along with a sketch (figure 6). The lines from *Jerusalem* to which Harper refers involve a golden string:

> I give you the end of a golden string:
> Only wind it into a ball,
> It will lead you in at Heaven's gate
> Built in Jerusalem wall. (pl.77, E 231)

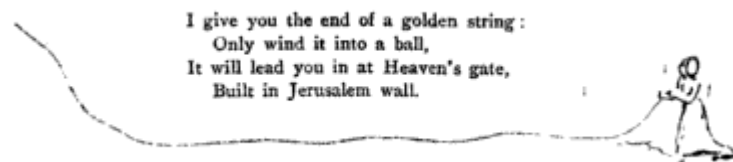**Figure 6** Lines from William Blake's *Jerusalem* and sketch as they appeared in Alexander Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake* (2:2).

For Harper the allusions to Blake in Thomson's poem reveal differences in the perspectives of the two periods:

> The Victorian saw *with* the eyes; the Romantic saw *through* them. One, looking forward, saw only a "city of dreadful night"; the other, looking backward,

remembered "Jerusalem builded here among these dark Satanic mills." Canto XVIII reveals, in Thomson's examination and rejection of Blake's "Golden String" as a means of escape from the dark night of his dreadful city, an irreconcilable difference not only in the basic philosophy of two artists but perhaps in the thought patterns of two periods as well. (80)

Yet, Thomson's crawling creature cannot simply be read as a refusal of Blake and of the past. The creature seeks his past: "the long-lost broken golden thread / Which reunites my present with my past" (928-29). Harper does not acknowledge the very complex experience of time that the creature represents. Not only is the creature seeking to reunite his present with his past, he is also a figure of evolutionary degeneration, another form of backward looking. Barely recognizable as human, or, rather, as the speaker notes "it had been a man," the crawling creature represents the possibility of human atavism, or evolutionary degeneration. It might also be noted that as an ekphrastic representation of Blake's *Nebuchadnezzar,* the creature is a depiction of the Babylonian king who went mad and lived in the wild like an animal for seven years. The Book of Daniel describes his fall: "He was driven away from human society, ate grass like oxen, and his body was bathed with the dew of heaven, until his hair grew as long as eagles' feathers and his nails became like birds' claws" (4 Dan. 33).[17] In *The Descent of Man* (1871), Darwin not only claimed that humans evolved from ape-like creatures, but also suggested the possibility that humans had degenerated from some other primate: "We do not know whether man is descended from some small species, like the chimpanzee, or from one as powerful as the gorilla: and therefore, we cannot say whether man has becomes larger and stronger, or smaller and weaker, than his ancestors" (65). Darwin also noted that the characteristics

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[17] Although it would be anachronistic to claim that the Biblical Nebuchadnezzar is a figure of evolutionary degeneration, he does seem an apt figure for many of the fears the Victorians had surrounding evolutionary theory and reversion.

of other primates occasionally appear in humans: "Certain structures, regularly occurring in the lower members of the group to which man belongs, occasionally make their appearance in him, though not found in the normal human embryo; or, if normally present in the human embryo, they become abnormally developed, although in a manner which is normal in the lower members of the group" (38). While Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) popularized the notion of deep time that had been exposed by the geological proof presented in Charles Lyell's *Principles of Geology* (1830-33), *The Descent of Man* offered a version of deep time that might also move backward. So, in seeking to reunite his past with his present and simultaneously serving as a figure of pre-history, the crawling man/creature exists in a sort of excessive time in which he is trapped in an eternal present but longs for a past which cannot be recovered. At the same time, however, he is an embodiment of a dark subhuman past, or as the speaker says, "An infamy for manhood to behold" (904). The creature explains to the speaker his reasons for attempting to recover the broken thread:

> It leads me back
> From this accursed night without morn
> And through the deserts which have else no track,
> And through vast wastes of horror-haunted time,
> To Eden innocence in Eden's clime:
>
> And I become a nursling soft and pure
> An infant cradled on its mother's knee,
> Without a past, love-cherished and secure;
> Which if it saw this loathsome present Me,
> Would plunge its face into the pillowing breast,
> And scream abhorrence hard to lull to rest. (934-944)

The creature seeks an escape from the eternal present ("this accursed night without morn"). The present is notably haunted: that is, the "vast wastes" of time are "horror

haunted." Traces of the past remain in the eternal present, but they signify nothing more than horror.

A second ekphrastic episode occurs in Canto XX as the speaker sits against a pillar outside of a cathedral. Opposite the speaker are two statues: a sphinx and an angel holding a sword:

> Two figures faced each other, large, austere;
> A couchant sphinx in shadow to the breast,
> An angel standing in the moonlight clear;
> So mighty by magnificence of form,
> They were not dwarfed beneath that mass enorm.
>
> Upon the cross-hilt of a naked sword
> The angel's hands, as prompt to smite, were held;
> His vigilant intense regard was poured
> Upon the creature placidly unquelled,
> Whose front was set at level gaze which took
> No heed of aught, a solemn trance-like look. (999-1009)

The speaker's encounter with the statues is at once an encounter with time, history, stasis, and movement. The lapidary figures suggest stasis and timelessness just as the structure of the ekphrastic moment halts the narrative movement. Yet, at the same time, the sphinx and angel are metonymic figures of two different conceptions of history: Christian eschatology and evolutionary/geological timelessness.

Oscar Wilde staged a similar ekphrastic battle between a sphinx and Christian religious symbol in his 1894 "The Sphinx":

> False Sphinx! False Sphinx! By reedy Styx old Charon, leaning on his oar,
> Waits for my coin. Go thou before, and leave me to my crucifix,
> Whose pallid burden, sick with pain, watches the world with wearied eyes,
> And weeps for every soul that dies, and weeps for every soul in vain. (171-74)

While Wilde's speaker apostrophizes a small statue in his room which he eventually

rejects in favor of his more empathetic, but ultimately powerless, crucifix,[18] Thomson's

sphinx is an enduring part of the city even after the angel crumbles. While Thomson's

speaker sits opposite the two statues, he falls asleep three times, waking each time when

he hears "a sharp and clashing noise" (1014). And each time he is awakened, part of the

statue of the angel has broken:

> The angel's wings had fallen, stone on stone,
> And lay there shattered; hence the sudden sound:
> A warrior leaning on his sword alone
> Now watched the sphinx with that regard profound:
> The sphinx unchanged looked forthright, as aware
> Of nothing in the vast abyss of air. (1016-21)

The speaker is awakened twice more, and each time a portion of the statue of the angel

has fallen to the ground until it has completely crumbled. All the while the sphinx stares

on unchanged. The sphinx, of course, is the figure of enigma, and like the crawling man,

it is part human, part animal creature. But most importantly, the sphinx is a recursive

figure. Hegel offered a perfectly recursive definition of the figure: "The works of

Egyptian art in their mysterious symbolism are therefore riddles; the objective riddle *par

excellence*. As a symbol for this proper meaning of the Egyptian spirit we may mention

the Sphinx. It is, as it were, the symbol for the symbolic itself" (360). As a riddle with an

indeterminate meaning, the sphinx is a figure for anything. The sphinx is thus essentially

self-referential and capable of the infinite production of meaning. As such, it destroys the

teleology that the angel represents.

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[18] Wilde's sphinx is, of course, much more complicated than this. I have quoted only the
end of the poem. Much of the rest of "The Sphinx" details the speaker's fantasies of the
female sphinx's transgressive sexuality, which includes killing and maiming the objects
of her desire. My point here is that Thomson is not alone among the Victorians in
presenting the figure of the sphinx in contradistinction to Christian metonyms.

In the poem's final canto, Thomson presents one last ekphrastic episode which is based on Albrecht Dürer's engraving *Melencolia I* (1514) (figure 7). Thomson transforms Dürer's engraving into a bronze statue which sits above and watches over the city. The speaker names the image at one point in the canto (line 1081) and also explicitly refers to the statue as existing previously in the form of a "sketch":

> Words cannot picture her; but all men know
> That solemn sketch the pure sad artist wrought
> Three centuries and threescore years ago,
> With phantasies of his peculiar thought:
> The instruments of carpentry and science
> Scattered about her feet, in strange alliance
> With the keen wolf-hound sleeping undistraught;
>
> Scales, hour-glass, bell, and magic-square above;
> The grave and solid infant perched beside,
> With open winglets that might bear a dove,
> Intent upon its tablets, heavy-eyed;
> Her wings as of a mighty eagle,
> But all too impotent to lift the regal
> Robustness of her earth-born strength and pride. (1054-67)

The ekphrastic rendering of the image underscores, as Kevin Mills claims, a "mimetic crisis" (82). For, Thomson's speaker is representing verbally a statue that is a representation of an engraving. In effect, the nonexistent statue mediates the verbal description of the engraving. It brings—imperfectly—a remnant of the sixteenth century into the present. The meaning of the Dürer's notoriously ambiguous *Melencolia* has been debated for centuries. Dürer's engraving features a brooding winged woman—an allegorical figure for melancholy, one of the four humors (and yet another part-human and part-animal figure). In her hand she holds a compass and scattered around her are other geometric tools. Next to the woman is a cherub, and a dog sits at her feet. Behind her is the sea, and some sort of "snaky imp," in Thomson's words, flies in the sky above

carrying a banner that reads "Melencolia I." Thomson mentions almost all of the elements of the original engraving, including, notably, a magic square on the wall behind the winged woman (figure 8).

Figure 4 Albrecht Dürer, *Melencolia I*. Engraving, 1514.

Figure 8 Albrecht Dürer, detail from *Melencolia I*. Engraving, 1514.

16	3	2	13
5	10	11	8
9	6	7	12
4	15	14	1

Figure 9 Reproduction of Dürer's magic square.

A magic square is an arrangement of numbers in a square so that the sums of each row, column, and diagonal are the same. In Dürer's engraving, thirty-four is the sum of every row, column, diagonal, quadrant, of the center four squares, the middle two entries of the two outer columns and rows, and the four outer squares. The middle squares of the bottom row give the date of the engraving: 1514. The magic square requires the *viewer* to engage in a recursive process, returning to the square to sum the numbers in as many directions and quadrants as possible. Each process of summing the numbers is not repetition, for the numbers that make each sum are different. It is only the process or function that is repeatedly applied.

       The City of Dreadful Night ends with the statue of *Melencolia* overlooking the

city:

> Titanic from her high throne in the north,
> That City's sombre Patroness and Queen,
> In bronze sublimity she gazes forth
> Over her Capital of teen and threne,
> Over the river with its isles and bridges,
> The marsh and moorland, to the stern rock-ridges,
> Confronting them with coeval mien.
>
> The moving moon and stars from east to west
> Circle before her in the sea of air;
> Shadows and gleams glide round her solemn rest.
> Her subjects often gaze up to her there:
> The strong to drink new strength of iron endurance,
> The weak new terrors; all, renewed assurance
> And confirmation of the old despair. (1110-23)

After describing Dürer's engraving at length, the speaker returns to the bronze statue

which represents the engraving. The statue is described as embodying a sort of

timelessness: like the eternal sphinx, she is as old as the city's river, marshes, moors, and

rocks. And like the sphinx, the statue signifies variously to the city's inhabitants. While

she provides "renewed assurance" of "the old despair" to all, the inhabitants read her

meaning recursively, or self-reflexively. For the weak, she signifies terror; for the strong,

she symbolizes endurance.

       The three ekphrastic episodes that comprise the final cantos of Thomson's

poem—the crawling man, the sphinx and the angel, and the statue of *Melencolia*—in

addition to embodying individual recursive structures, work together to create recursion.

The three episodes are analogues of each other—representations of representations of

each other—which reflect themselves and each other in an infinite recursion. The

crawling man, the sphinx, and the statue are all figures of degeneration, excess of

meaning, and multiply allusive. Each figure reproduces something (or multiple figures)

that came before it, and in doing so, each figure reproduces itself. In other words, the

final cantos of the poem are instantiations of the man endlessly circling the city in search

of dead faith, love, and hope.

III. Epilogue: The Impressionistic Moment

If Thomson's *The City of Dreadful Night* proposed recursion as a response to the

mid-nineteenth-century crisis of time in urban commodity culture, by the 1880s

impressionist poetry offered another response: the moment. The literary impressionism

that became popular in England near the end of the century was influenced both by

French Impressionist painting (and the French poetry that shared, in part, its aesthetic)

and by Walter Pater's writing on impressions. As Arnold Hauser claims, impressionist

art (both visual and literary) often took up the city as its subject:

> Impressionism is an urban art, and not only because it discovers the landscape
> quality of the city and brings painting back from the country into the town, but
> because it sees the world through the eyes of the townsman and reacts to external
> impressions with the overstrained nerves of modern technical man. It is an urban
> style, because it describes the changeability, the nervous rhythm, the sudden,
> sharp but always ephemeral impressions of city life. (111)

The focus on subjectivity of experience and the emphasis on ephemeral moments are

central to most accounts of impressionism. In *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*,

first published a year before Thomson's *City of Dreadful Night*,[19] Walter Pater famously

described human experience as a series of subjective impressions:

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[19] Although *The Renaissance* was first published in 1873, it was the generation of artists
and writers after Pater and Thomson who were most influenced by Pater's
impressionism. At least partially, this is due to Pater's own hesitation about aestheticism

> At first sight experience seems to bury us under a flood of external objects, pressing upon us with a sharp an importunate reality, calling us out of ourselves in a thousand forms of action. But when reflexion begins to play upon those objects they are dissipated under its influence; the cohesive force seems suspended like some trick of magic; each object is loosed into a group of impressions—colour, odour, texture—in the mind of the observer. And if we continue to dwell in thought on this world, not of objects in the solidity with which language invests them, but of impressions, unstable, flickering, inconsistent, which burn and are extinguished with our consciousness of them, it contracts still further: the whole scope of observation is dwarfed into the narrow chamber of the individual mind. (187)

Pater rejects empirical uncertainty and replaces it with the individual subjective viewpoint as being at the center of art, one's responses to art, and art criticism.

Moreover, human experience of the world in Pater's account is not fixed but, rather, contradictory and ephemeral. The moment is at the center of Pater's formulation:

> Analysis goes a step further still, and assures us that those impressions of the individual mind to which, for each one of us, experience dwindles down, are in perpetual flight; that each of them is limited by time, and that as time is infinitely divisible, each of them is infinitely divisible also; all that is actual in it being a single moment, gone while we try to apprehend it. (188)

Human experience is a series of impressions, moments that are constantly disappearing, but of which we attempt to grab hold. This, Pater suggests, is the whole of the human experience of the world: subjective, momentary, incomplete.

At nearly the same time as *The Renaissance* appeared, French Impressionist painting began to gain popularity. In the 1870s artists such as James Abbott McNeill Whistler[20] and Claude Monet rejected painting realistic detail in favor of evoking fleeting, partial impressions. In 1874 Monet's *Impression: Soleil Levant* was exhibited in

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and his decision to remove the conclusion to *The Renaissance* for the second edition of 1877, only to restore it in an altered form for the third edition of 1888.

[20] Whistler is generally not considered to be an impressionist, but he was associated during this period with the French impressionists and their tendency to move away from mimetic accuracy. Whistler and Monet also spent time together in London in 1887, and both painted London scenes.

Paris, and term "impressionism" was first coined (derisively) in a review of the painting

by Louis Leroy. During the 1880s and 90s, writers such as Oscar Wilde, Arthur Symons,

and W.E. Henley sought to translate the fleeting visual impression into poetry. Nicholas

Freeman claims that impressionism offered writers a new means of dealing with the

difficulties of representing London: "By abandoning any pretensions to represent London

beyond how it appeared to the individual, impressionist writers were able to reconfigure

the city in ways that celebrated its surprising beauty, and on occasion, its reckless

dynamism" (145). More than just an escape from realism, however, impressionist

writing also offered an escape from the city's excesses. The impressionist moment and

its relativism freed the city-dweller from the social and political realities of the city—and

from the sort of temporal crises which were part of Victorian consciousness and which

are expressed in Thomson's poem in the form of recursion. If the subjective experience

of the moment is all that is possible, then the conflicts between different notions of

time—evolutionary time and Christian eschatology; universal, industrial time and

personal time; and Victorian modernity and the haunting past—are subsumed into the

moment.

Oscar Wilde's "Symphony in Yellow," like *The City of Dreadful Night*, associates

itself with visual art. But unlike Thomson's poem, "Symphony in Yellow" employs

visual art to evoke a momentary, rather than endless, present. Wilde's title, "Symphony

in Yellow," evokes Whistler's *Symphony in White*, but it is synaesthetic rather than

ekphrastic. As I have argued above, as a representation of a representation, the

ekphrastic structure is self-multiplying, self-reflexive, and recursive. Synaesthesia, by

contrast, is characterized by synchrony. Synaesthesia is the "metaphorical device of

evoking one sensory experience in terms of another" (Anderson 191). Rather than representing a representation as in the case of ekphrasis, synaesthesia involves synchronizing the senses. In Wilde's poem, the vision of a moment on streets of London is analogous to listening to a symphony, and in another allusive layer, Wilde's words are analogous to the visual experience of Whistler's painting which is itself analogous to a musical experience:

> An omnibus across the bridge
> Crawls like a yellow butterfly
> And, here and there, a passer-by
> Shows like a little restless midge.
>
> Big barges full of yellow hay
> Are moved against the shadowy wharf
> And, like a yellow silken scarf,
> The thick fog hangs along the quay.
>
> The yellow leaves begin to fade
> And flutter from the Temple elms,
> And at my feet the pale green Thames
> Lies like a rod of rippled jade.

While the poem is largely visual, the title suggests that the experience of viewing all of yellow objects at this particular moment in London is akin to listening to a symphony. The poem enacts what Wilde famously described as the proper aim of the critic: "to see the object as in itself it really is not" ("The Critic as Artist" 240). The omnibus is likened to an insect, humans behave like insects, the fog appears as a scarf, and the Thames looks like a rod of jade at the speaker's feet—and together, these objects are a symphony. The poem substitutes rather than reproducing representations of itself (as in the recursive structure of ekphrasis), and in doing so it offers a synchronic vision of a London in which the unlike—the impression—can be simultaneously visual and symphonic.

> Il n'est pas donné à chacun de prendre un bain de multitude: jouir de la foule est un art; et celui-là seul peut faire, aux dépens du genre humain, une ribote de vitalité, à qui une fée a insufflé dans son berceau le goût du travestissement et du masque, la haine du domicile et la passion du voyage.
>
> —Charles Baudelaire, "Les Foules" (1869)[1]

Chapter Four:
Replication:
The Celebratory Crowd and Urban Proliferation

I. Unproductive Expenditure

In *The Accursed Share* (1949), Georges Bataille compares the study of economics to the study of physics, pointing out the restricted scope of economics. He asks, "Shouldn't productive activity as a whole be considered in terms of the modifications it receives from its surroundings or brings about in its surroundings? In other words, isn't there a need to study the system of human production and consumption within a much larger framework?" (*AS* 20). Bataille attempts to overcome the limitations of economics by theorizing what he calls a "general economy" "in which the 'expenditure' (the 'consumption') of wealth, rather than production [is] the primary object" (9). Bataille's

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[1] ["It is not given to every man to take a bath of multitude; enjoying a crowd is an art; and only he can relish a debauch of vitality at the expense of the human species, on whom, in his cradle, a fairy has bestowed the love of masks and masquerading, the hate of home and the passion for roaming" ("Crowds" 20).]

general economy is a sort of transhistorical, solar economy in which organisms and

enterprises (and, by extension, energy and wealth) are analogous:

> The living organism, in a situation determined by a play of energy on the surface
> of the globe, ordinarily receives more energy than is necessary for maintaining
> life; the excess energy (wealth) can be used for the growth of a system (e.g., an
> organism); if the system can no longer grow, or if the excess cannot be
> completely absorbed in its growth, it must necessarily be lost without profit; it
> must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically. (21)

Energy thus operates at a cosmic level and through all phenomena, and the inevitable

excess that must be expended is "the accursed share."[2] In "The Notion of Expenditure"

(1933), Bataille distinguishes between two forms of human consumption. One form of

consumption involves using the minimum necessary to preserve life and continue some

form of work activity. The second form of consumption is what Bataille calls

"unproductive expenditures: luxury, mourning, war, cults, the construction of sumptuary

monuments, games, spectacles, arts, perverse sexual activity (i.e., deflected from genital

finality)—all these represent activities which, at least in primitive circumstances, have no

end beyond themselves" ("Expenditure" 118). While the former mode of consumption

serves as a means to the end of production, the latter one, according to Bataille, is an

unconditional expenditure. This kind of unproductive expenditure involves the loss or

waste of what is held or produced in excess and is a necessary form of consumption. For,

if excesses are not put to work or squandered unproductively, then these excesses

threaten to destroy the system, in the form, for example, of war: "[I]f we do not have the

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[2] Although Bataille intended for his general economy to be transhistorical, in many ways
the differences between *The Accursed Share* written after WWII and his earlier essay,
which also deals with excess, "The Notion of Expenditure," written during the financial
crises of the 1930s, point to the ways in which these texts respond to the issues of their
times. For a fuller discussion, and for an analysis of Bataille's support of the Marshall
Plan, see Noys 103-124.

force to destroy the surplus energy ourselves, it cannot be used, and, like an unbroken animal that cannot be trained, it is we who pay the price of the inevitable explosion" (*AS* 24). In other words, not all energy or wealth can be put to productive use or used for the growth of the system, and if this excess is not wasted peacefully in extravagant spectacles, arts, or games, it will be wasted violently or even apocalyptically: "Mankind is at the same time—through industry, which uses energy for the development of the forces of production—a manifold opening of the possibilities of growth and an infinite capacity for wasteful consumption" (*AS* 181). The industrialized world, because of its emphasis on utility and conservation, has given up most forms of social expenditures like festivals, spectacles, and games which were more common in pre-industrialized societies: "Everything that was generous, orgiastic and excessive has disappeared. [. . .] The representatives of the bourgeoisie have adopted an effaced manner; wealth is now displayed behind closed doors, in accordance with depressing and boring conventions. In addition, people in the middle class—employees and small shopkeepers—having attained mediocre or minute fortunes, have managed to debase and subdivide ostentatious expenditure, of which nothing remains but vain efforts tied to tiresome rancour" ("Expenditure" 124).

Although Bataille suggests that there are few examples of ostentatious expenditure in the industrialized world, the two texts that are the focus of this chapter, texts by foreign visitors to London, who describe life in the East End of the city, also depict events of spectacular expenditure. I focus on *London: A Pilgrimage* (1872) written by English author Blanchard Jerrold and illustrated by French artist Gustave Doré and an account of an American writer's experiences posing as a sailor stranded in London

in 1902, Jack London's *People of the Abyss*. *London: A Pilgrimage* includes visual and verbal representations of many areas of London, from the docks on the Thames to the West End to Whitechapel, though most critics then and now have focused almost exclusively on Doré's engravings of the East End. In the middle of the text, four chapters containing more than 30 engravings are devoted to events that occurred in London once yearly: the annual race between the Oxford and Cambridge crew teams and Derby Day at Epsom Downs. In *The People of the Abyss*, Jack London chronicles his experiences moving into the East End, donning a disguise and interacting with East Enders in the streets, the workhouse, and coffee shops. He also describes a trip to the country to pick hops, and most of the second half of the text offers criticisms of the British economic system and solutions for the condition of the poor. Near the center of the book, London describes witnessing the spectacle of the coronation of Edward VII.

The emphasis given to the sporting events in *London: A Pilgrimage* and the coronation in *The People of the Abyss* is unusual among texts of the period that purported to document everyday London. In addition to occurring only occasionally, these events of spectacular expenditure are characterized by extremely large crowds. For the foreign visitor, London's crowds were, indeed, spectacular. Throughout the nineteenth century, London was Europe's largest city. By the 1870s, the population of London was well over three million, and at the turn of the century, the city's population grew to over six and a half million (two and a half times larger than Paris at the turn of the century). The population of Paris in the mid nineteenth century was just over one million, and the population of New York City did not reach one million until around 1880. By the end of the century, New York City grew to nearly three and a half million inhabitants (just over

half the size of London at the turn of the century). All three cities were growing rapidly during this period, but London dwarfed all other European and American cities until well into the twentieth century. It is no wonder, then, that Londoners and foreign visitors alike were enthralled by the spectacle of the city's crowds. But the crowds of *London: A Pilgrimage* and *The People of the Abyss* are not the crowds that could be seen daily on London's streets, nor are they politically motivated crowds. Instead Doré and Jerrold and London depict the unusual crowds of the sporting event and the coronation, crowds which gathered to witness ostentatious expenditure. These crowds provide not just a contrast to the representations of poverty in the East End, they also suggest a sense of the pressure of London's excesses, excesses which are figured as threatening and potentially destructive.

Both *London: A Pilgrimage* and *The People of the Abyss* employ visual and verbal images of the crowd in order to offer a vision of London in which the excesses of the city open up spaces for proliferating meanings and subjectivities. In other words, the London crowd is a metonym for a London whose excesses offer multiplying possibilities. Yet, the crowd is also a symbol of the pressures of urban subjectivity, which carry the potential for ruin. The crowds depicted in *London: A Pilgrimage* and *The People of the Abyss* are not same kind of crowds that had often appeared in literature of the first half of the century. A good deal of scholarship has been done on the crowds of popular revolt during the early-Victorian period. Both George Rudé and John Plotz have identified the period between the late-eighteenth century and 1850 as the period during which crowds materialized in London and Paris in new ways. Rudé and Plotz link the appearance of demonstration crowds to the growth of the city. Plotz explains that during the period

between 1800 and 1850 two new kinds of crowds appeared in London, the random crowd

and the organized demonstration:

> Mundane outdoor life came to include random encounters with strangers,
> inexplicable aggregations, sudden eruptions of violence, and permanent sites for
> encountering others *en masse.* [. . .] And from the 1819 Peterloo massacre of
> peaceful working-class demonstrators to Chartism's nationwide simultaneous
> assemblies in the late 1830s, the working classes showed themselves capable of
> lodging representative claims in a newly expanded public arena. (1)

Scholars such as Plotz and Nicholas Rogers have sought to historicize the crowd and

disprove essentialist claims about crowd psychology that originated with Gustave Le

Bon's influential *Les Foules* (1895). While the nineteenth century has long been called

the era of the crowd, more recently, critics have sought to move beyond the equation

between crowds and modernity by examining crowds in postindustrial societies. *Crowds*,

edited by Jeffrey T. Schnapp and Matthew Tiers (2006), includes essays on everything

from the rhetoric of medicalization in twentieth-century Spanish crowd theory to the

behavior of crowds in financial markets. This chapter augments this work on crowds by

examining the celebratory crowds of Victorian London in order reveal the ways in which

the Victorians imagined the crowd as creating both room for multiplicity and pressure

toward ruin.

This chapter posits that *London: A Pilgrimage* and *The People of the Abyss*

visually and verbally represent celebratory crowds as instantiations of the yearning to

transgress the utilitarian system of productive consumption. Both texts describe a

dialectic of productive consumption and unproductive expenditure. The urban poor,

though they participate in the celebrations and are part of the crowds, are also depicted as

removed from the dialectic of consumption and expenditure. The expenditure of the

celebratory crowd is used to contrast various forms of withholding in each text. The

crowd as a symbol of excess opens up the possibility for other forms of excess at the

same time as suggesting a pressure toward dissolution. Bataille's notion of unproductive

expenditure as a mechanism for the release of excess is depicted in each text in the form

of the celebratory crowd. Yet these celebrations only temporarily stave off ruin, as the

London poor are ultimately allowed neither the release of the crowd nor the sustenance of

consumption.

The crowds of *London: A Pilgrimage* and *The People of the Abyss* are allegories

for the pressures and possibilities of an economic system in which excesses coexist with

abjection. Bataille employs the crowd as a metaphor for the pressure exerted by excess:

> Imagine an immense crowd assembled in expectation of witnessing a bullfight
> that will take place in a bullring that is too small. The crowd wants badly to enter
> but cannot be entirely accommodated: many people must wait outside. Similarly
> the possibilities of life cannot be realized indefinitely; they are limited by the
> space, just as the entry of the crowd is limited by the number of seats in the
> building.
>   A first effect of the pressure will be to increase the number of seats on the
> bullring. If the security service is well organized, this number is limited precisely.
> But outside there may be trees and lampposts from the top of which the arena is
> visible. If there is no regulation against it, there will be people who will climb the
> trees and lampposts. [. . .] But the lack of room can have another effect: a fight
> may break out at the entrance. If lives are lost the excess of individuals over the
> number of seats will decrease. ("General Economy" 191)

For Bataille the bullring is analogous to restricted economy, and the crowd represents the

excesses produced. The first response to the excess is to expand by increasing the

number of seats or by making use of the trees and lampposts. However, there are limits

to expansion, and the entire crowd cannot be accommodated. If the remaining excess is

not dealt with through some sort of planned expenditure, then an unplanned expenditure

such as a fight will occur in order to destroy the excess. The unproductive expenditures

represented by the sporting events in *London: A Pilgrimage* and the coronation in *The*

People of the Abyss, though they suggest a desire to release excess, ultimately cannot relieve the abjections created by London's economic system. The crowds thus suggest pressure rather than release, but they also provide an experience of a destabilizing sublimity, opening up the possibility for the multiplication of meanings and subject positions.

II. *London: A Pilgrimage*

"We are Pilgrims, wanderers, gipsy-loiterers in the great world of London—not historians" (1).[3] Thus begins the introduction to *London: A Pilgrimage*. The text, which originally appeared in thirteen parts and was published as a single volume in 1872, is the product of the collaboration of the English writer Blanchard Jerrold and the French artist Gustave Doré. The text includes twenty-one chapters written by Jerrold and more than 180 wood engravings produced by Doré. In his prose, Jerrold figures the two men as "pilgrims" journeying into a holy land. Both the prose and the engravings rely on literary tropes to illustrate the "real" London. From the time of its publication, Doré's engravings were the major selling point, and critics have focused almost solely on the engravings, for the most part ignoring Jerrold's prose. A 2004 Dover edition completely excises Jerrold's prose, reproducing only Doré's engravings. The reason for the focus on Doré's engravings rather than Jerrold's prose is, perhaps, because Jerrold's prose adds little to the already large body of Victorian prose of urban investigation, and at times, Jerrold's aim seems to be to congratulate his middle-class readers on their benevolence to

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[3] Because the 2005 Anthem edition of the text does not include several of the engravings from the original text, including "Whittington at Highgate," "Inside the Docks," "Lambeth Gas Works," "The New Zealander," and "Infant Hospital Patients," I have chosen to cite the 1970 Dover edition.

London's poor. The text was a commercial success despite an unfavorable critical reception, aimed mainly at Doré's engravings. Doré was well known in England by 1872, for he had illustrated the works of Byron in 1853 and Rabelais in 1854. In 1863 Doré illustrated a French edition of Cervantes's *Don Quixote*, and in 1866 he illustrated an English Bible and Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Peter Ackroyd points out that due in part to his illustrations of Byron, Doré came to be associated in England with the Romantic poets and was even called "the last of the Romantics" (xviii). Even in *London*, a text which purported to offer documentary illustration, Doré's images are often exaggerated and grotesque.

Critics (both Doré's contemporaries and more recent critics) have either tended to defend the realism of Doré's engravings or to attack them for not faithfully representing London. A critic for the *Art Journal*, for example, claimed that Doré's London engravings were inaccurate: "He was compelled to invent where his sole business was to copy—to copy that is to say, as loftier minds always do, with only such improvements as shall not deteriorate the actual, and be no obvious departure from truth" (qtd. in Woods 343). Doré's biographer, Blanche Roosevelt, said of the *London* engravings,

> I must call attention to one peculiarity, which seems to me almost a prevalent defect in Dore's work, and a great one from an Anglo-Saxon point of view. His characters are for the most part un-English. Their original conception was not at fault, but the artistic execution was. The hand of the great French draughtsman had too long been accustomed to draw the types of his own country and continental faces, to change his method in a trice and suddenly display current proficiency in depicting a new and totally different race. (367)

On the other hand, more recently, Nigel Gosling has claimed that Doré's London engravings represent his first foray into accurate, realistic representation: "The dead-beat and dishonest characters, the leaden pressures of poverty, the smell, even the slow pulse

of this monstrous leviathan are caught in a set of images which puts 'the last of the

Romantics' among the first and finest exponents of realism" (93). Kathleen Pyne

similarly claims that Doré "offered the first visual images to convey a sense of the

hellish, claustrophobic environment East London had become" (68). Alan Woods

critiques this position, arguing, "The *London* illustrations are increasingly regarded not as

works of art but as evidence; and their 'realism' has been taken for granted. [. . .]

Drawing on his established vocabulary of Gothic romanticism [Doré] used his art to

express his immediate emotional reaction to the scenes he had witnessed in London"

(341, 356). Ira Bruce Nadel insists that Doré's engravings must be read as both accurate

and symbolic representations of London: "Concentrating on detail and observation, the

engravings by Doré present a view of London that is simultaneously real and

transcendent, literal and symbolic. In his art, detail—the pursuit of certainty associated

with the desire for scientific accuracy—becomes symbol" (152-53). Similarly, Lynda

Nead claims that the text "maps the social life and customs at the beginning of the

1870s," but she also describes the London that the engravings represent as "a place of

myth; consumed by the viewer in terms of pleasure and danger, empathy and sympathy"

(212). For Brigitte Bailey, Doré's engravings depict the energy and inclusivity of

London by "sliding from typology to allegory" (213).

      While the nineteenth-century critical reaction against what was understood to be

Doré's inaccuracy might be understood in terms of the established conventions of urban

investigation and social reporting, the tendency of more recent critics to dwell on the

extent to which Doré's engravings are faithful representations of London seems

unwarranted. The text's frontispiece makes it clear that Doré was not as invested in

verisimilitude as his critics were and are. The frontispiece (figure 10) shows the

allegorical figure Father Thames sitting next to a lion, symbol, of course, of the English

throne. By mid-century, the iconography that Doré employs in his engravings was

clichéd and often the target of ridicule. Father Thames had by this point come to be

associated with the Great Stink and London's sanitation problems. A series of

illustrations in *Punch* in the 1840s and 1850s employed the figure of Father Thames to

point out the unsanitary condition of the river. An illustration titled "Dirty Father

Thames" (figure 11), for example, appeared in *Punch* in 1848. In 1858—the year of the

Great Stink—*Punch* published an illustration titled "Father Thames introducing his

offspring to the fair city of London" (figure 12).[4] In both illustrations from *Punch*, Father

Thames is filthy and monstrous. In the first illustration from *Punch*, Father Thames is

figured as a scavenger, perhaps a rag picker or bone collector, underneath the water,

which contains all manner of refuse. In the second *Punch* illustration, Father Thames

presents his "offspring" to a woman, an allegorical figure of London. The children are

named from left to right: diphtheria, scrofula and cholera, and animal carcasses float in

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[4] The song beneath the illustration reads,

Filthy river, filthy river,
    Foul from London to the Nore,
What art thou but one vast gutter,
    One tremendous common shore?

All beside thy sludgy waters,
    All beside thy reeking ooze,
Christian folks inhale mephitis,
    Which thy bubbly bosom brews.

All her foul abominations
    Into thee the City throws;
These pollutions, ever churning,
    To and fro thy current flows.

And from thee is brewed our porter -
    Thee, thou gully, puddle, sink!
Thou, vile cesspool, art the liquor
    Whence is made the beer we drink!

Thou , too, hast a conservator,
    He who fills the civic chair;
Well does he conserve thee, truly,
    Does he not, my good Lord Mayor?

the water around them. Numerous illustrations linking Father Thames to pollution and

filth appeared in periodicals through the end of the century, along with poems, songs, and

prose pieces, which apostrophized Father Times, lamenting the condition of the river.[5]

By the time that Doré's engravings appeared in 1872, then, the figure of Father Thames

had long been associated with filth, waste, and the degradation of the river. Although

Doré's Father Thames is not monstrous or filthy, the river and city which he overlooks

are dark and shadowy. He is pictured under a bridge, which looks very similar to another

illustration that appears near the end of the text, depicting a scene under a bridge

commanding much the same view of the river and masts: "Under the Arches" (figure 13).

In this engraving several crumpled figures are shown sleeping under the bridge. The

illustration of Father Thames anticipates this later engraving, which depicts London's

homeless underclass seeking refuge under the bridge, the arches (presumably the

infamous Adelphi Arches) identical to those under which Father Thames and lion sit in

the earlier illustration. It might be tempting to claim that by the end of the text, allegory

gives way to social realism. But the relationship between allegory, allusion, and fantasy,

on the one hand, and realism, on the other, is more complicated than this.

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[5] For a detailed history of the figure of Father Thames, see Clare Horrocks, "The Personification of 'Father Thames': Reconsidering the Role of the Victorian Periodical Press in the 'Verbal and Visual Campaign' for Public Health Reform."
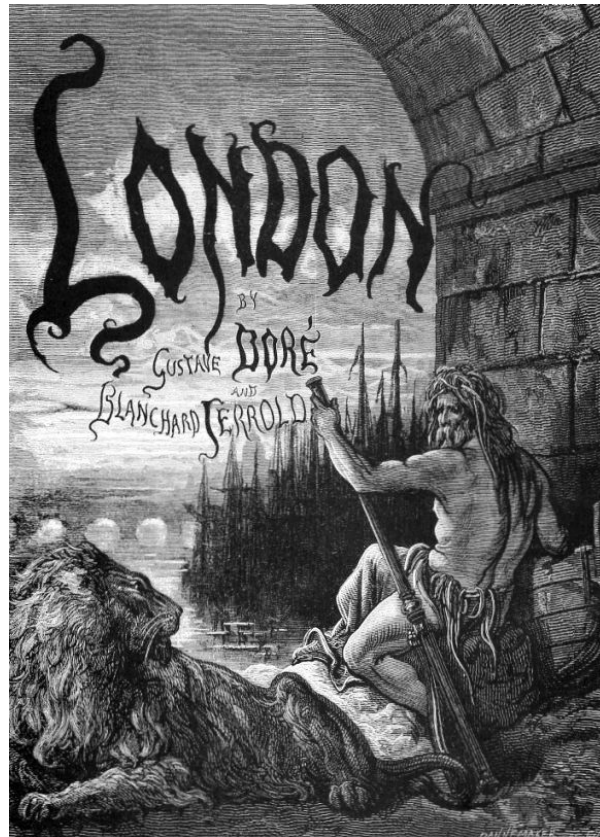
Figure 10 "Father Thames," *London: A Pilgrimage* (1872), frontispiece.

Figure 11 "Dirty Father Thames," *Punch*, Volume 15 (1848): 151.

Figure 12 "Father Thames Introducing His Offspring to the Fair City of London," *Punch,* Volume 35 (1858): 5.
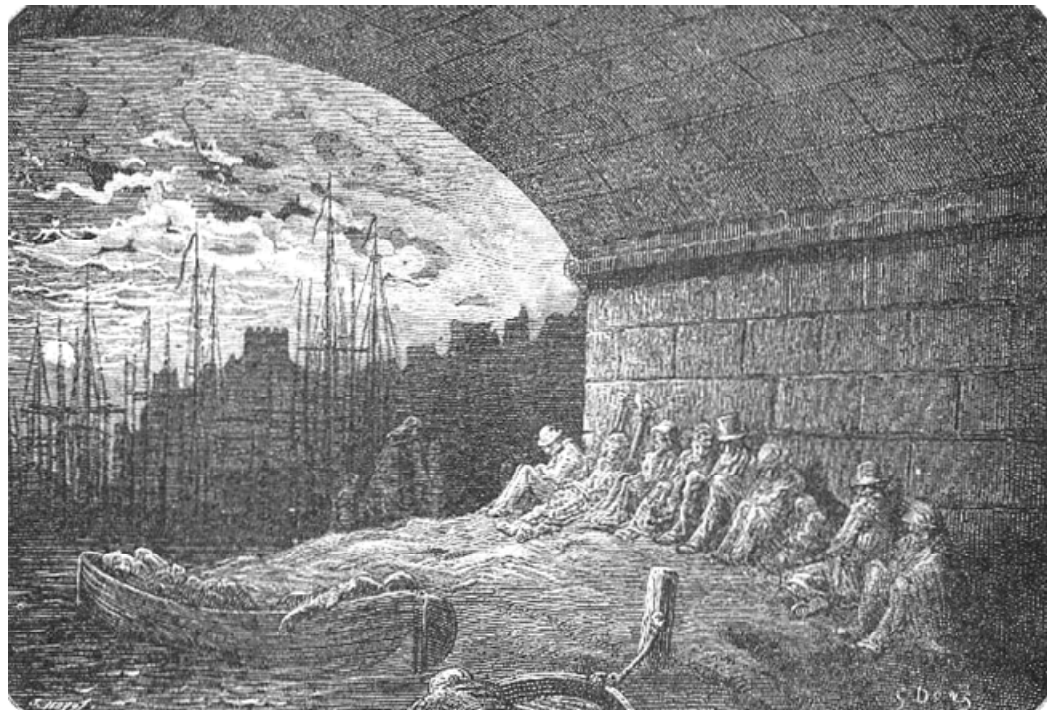

Figure 13 "Under the Arches," *London: A Pilgrimage*, 185.

Doré's engravings, through the repetition of elements and the allusions to other illustrations, offer multiplying images of London that contain proliferating meanings. The Adelphi arches appear in a number of paintings of the period with which viewers of Doré's engravings would likely have been familiar. The arches were throughout the century a notorious underground shelter near the Strand which housed the homeless and served as place to hide from the authorities all kinds of criminal activity. As a number of critics have noted, the Adelphi arches had also long been associated in the popular imagination with female suicide.[6] In the fourth, "extra volume" of *London Labour and the London Poor*, which was written in 1861, nearly two decades later than the articles of the first three volumes, Bracebridge Hemyng (who co-wrote the volume with Henry Mayhew, John Binny, and Andrew Halliday) describes the Adelphi arches in terms of their long-held reputation:

> Many novelists, philanthropists, and newspaper writers have dwelt much upon the horrible character of a series of subterranean chambers or vaults in the vicinity of the Strand, called the Adelphi Arches. It is by no means even now understood that these arches are the most innocent and harmless places in London, whatever they might once have been. A policeman is on duty there at night, expressly to prevent persons who have no right or business there from descending into their recesses. (IV.239)

In addition to the deluge of written reports about the Adelphi arches produced during the middle of the century, there were also several images of the arches that were produced. The most famous of these is Augustus Leopold Egg's (1816-1863) triptych *Past and Present* (1858).[7] The paintings chart a woman's fall from respectability following her adultery, and the final painting shows her homeless under the Adelphi Arches holding a

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[6] See Kate Flint 5; L.J. Nicoletti, "Morbid Topographies" 21-23, and L.J. Nicoletti "Downward Mobility."

[7] The triptych was exhibited untitled in 1858.

child (the product of her affair) (figure 14). Dore's "Father Thames" and "Under the Arches" offer not just conflicting images of the Thames and the arches, but in alluding to other well-known representations of this important public space, Doré's engravings link allegory, cliché, and social realism, thus creating several layers of representation. As a result, meaning is destabilized, and the Thames and the Adelphi arches signify multiply.

Figure 14 *Past and Present*, no. 3 (1858), Augustus Leopold Egg. (Tate Gallery, London).

Perhaps the most striking aspect of many of Doré's engravings is that they are crowded—with people, things, and detail. While most critics have focused almost solely

on Doré's depictions of the poor,[8] many of the engravings include middle-class figures

and scenes from fashionable life. What is common to Doré's engravings of all classes of

London society is the crowd. Doré's crowds are not riotous crowds, the political crowds

associated with the revolutions in France or the social disturbances of the Chartists in

England, though at times they seemingly carry that potential. Given that Doré was

French it might be surprising that his depictions of the London crowds register less

anxiety about violent uprising than the depictions of many English novelists and artists.

Critics have long noted to importance of the French Revolution to the depictions of

crowds by English novelists. Nicholas Visser, for example, contends,

> The interest in crowds shown by novelists was part of a much broader political
> and philosophical concern with collective action which developed through the
> [nineteenth] century, largely in response to recurring social, economic, and
> political crises. [. . .] English novelists and social thinkers in the aftermath of the
> French Revolution developed a sustained and surprisingly cohesive 'theory' or
> discourse of the crowd. Though writers were often responding to immediate
> crises and challenges of the social order—the Napoleonic wars, Peterloo, agitation
> leading up to the first Reform Act, Chartism, and so on—the Revolution remained
> the definitive moment, the watershed. (293)

Doré's crowds are not involved in collective action, nor do they seem to be on the verge

of violence. His crowds are not the mobs of the 1840s and 1850s, the mobs of Dickens's

Barnaby Rudge (1841) and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) or Charles Kingsley's *Alton*

Locke (1848). In fact, many of Doré's crowds depict Londoners of various classes

recreating together. In a chapter titled, "The Derby," Jerrold insists that the Derby Day at

Epsom Downs brings all of London together:

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[8] Many critics claim that Doré's engravings of the poor are superior to the engravings
depicting middle-class and aristocratic life. See, for example, Gosling, who claims, "Not
all the plates are successful; most of the fashionable scenes lack elegance and truth. But
the haunts of the poor unexpectedly draw out the best in his art" (93).

> On the Derby morning, all London wakes at cock-crow. [. . .] Horsey folk issue from every beer-shop and inn on the road. The beggars are in might force; the tattered children take up their stations. Who wants to see samples of all degrees of Cockneys has his golden opportunity today. From the Heir Apparent with his handsome, manly English face, to the vilest of Fagin's pupils. [. . .] The Derby is emphatically, all England's day. (68-69)

Jerrold's depiction of royalty and beggars in attendance at the same event serves to camouflage class divisiveness and the threat of violence that would seemingly accompany the large crowds. Here and elsewhere Jerrold transforms those in attendance into Dickensian characters:

> On the road, and at the Derby, it is Dickens' children you meet, rather than Thackeray's. All the company of Pickwick—Sam Weller and his father, a hundred times: Mr. Pickwick benevolent and bibulous: Jingle on the top of many a coach and omnibus. Pushing through the crowd, nimble, silent and unquiet-eyed, Mr. Fagin's pupils are shadows moving in all directions. The brothers Cheeryble pass in a handsome barouche, beaming on the crowd, and taking any passing impertinence as intended for a compliment. Their clerks are not far behind them, in the latest paletots—their beardless faces shining behind blue and green veils. Tom Allalone offers to dust you down, as you get within the ropes. Mr. Jonas Chuzzlewit has travelled in the congenial company of Scrooge to mark their prey. Mr. Dombey is here, solemn—so that you wonder what on earth can have drawn him to the hurly-burly, and why he has planted himself in the thick of the grand stand. Barkiss [sic] is as willing as ever, planted delightedly next to a buxom country wench, and threading his way through the tangle of vehicles, with a cheery and prosperous audacity; and few if any notice the solemn man who carries aloft a board, on which the wicked are warned to repent in time. (69-70)

Jerrold's decision to transfigure the crowd into fictional characters might seem curious given the project to document "real" London. Jerrold's recourse to Dickensian types pushes against Doré's engravings, which show massed crowds of people who are not individuated. In "The Winner" (figure 15), for example, some of the faces of the crowd are visible in the foreground of the engraving, but the background is amassed with hundreds (thousands?) of outlines of heads and hats. The only body that is individuated from the crowd is that of the winner on the horse. The winner's shadowy back and

profile are visible, but for most of the members of the crowd, little or no body is visible.

Instead, the crowd looks like a sea of disembodied heads. Many of the faces are similar:

open-mouthed and grotesque, the faces are staring dumbly—not at the winner and not at

each other. In Doré's engravings, there are no humorous or easily identifiable

Dickensian types. In his *Life of Gustave Doré*, Jerrold associates Doré's interest in

drawing crowds with rebellion against French authority. Referring to the Revolution of

1848 in France, Jerrold explains, "[T]he young artist watched the tumult, the fighting, the

barricades, the grim processions—not as a partisan, but as a student. He attributed his

early mastery of crowds to the careful observation of Paris streets in that year; as well as

to his boyish enthusiasm over the exploits of Abd-el-Kadr." Jerrold is careful to dismiss

any revolutionary leanings on Doré's part, pointing out that Doré was not a "partisan" of

the 1848 Revolution and describing his interest in Abd el-Kadir as "boyish enthusiasm."[9]

Still, the fact that Doré's interest in depicting crowds stemmed from witnessing

revolutionary violence and reading about violent resistance to French colonial occupation

suggests that Doré's crowds represent, on one level, a symbol of resistance to

governmental authority. Although his crowds are not engaged in violent collective

action, in the same way that revolution threatens to erase social divisions, Doré's crowds

at the Derby and the boat race erase the kinds of social divisions that Jerrold is so anxious

to point out in his prose. In other words, by locating Dickensian types within the crowds,

Jerrold's prose re-inscribes the social divisions that are erased in Doré's engravings. The

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[9] Abd el-Kadir (1807-1883) was the Algerian religious and political leader who battled against the French occupation of Algeria for 15 years. In the Battle of Isly on August 14, 1844, Abd el-Kadir reportedly led 45,000 soldiers against the French. Despite the fact that his forces hugely outnumbered the French, the Algerians were defeated, and Abd el-Kadir was eventually captured.

reader of Jerrold's text is well aware that Mr. Dombey is a wealthy, middle-class business man, that Sam Weller is of the working class, and that Mr. Fagin's pupils are street urchins.

Doré's crowds, more than anything else, register excess. His crowds are not mobs, but rather masses, which reflect the verbal more than the nominative form of the word "crowd": "to press, thrust, force, cram" (*OED*). There is a feeling of pressure in Doré's crowds, a sublimity in the mass of humans which threatens to subsume everything around it. Even in Doré's engraving of the actual race on Derby Day, the crowd is the focus. In "Finish of the Race" (figure 16), the horses are barely visible on the right edge of the engraving, and most of the illustration is comprised of the crowd of observers, which becomes less and less distinct as it recedes from view at the top of the engraving. There is no visible space between the bodies pictured, and in the foreground of the engraving, the crowd is depicted as pushing forward toward the track. Although Jerrold's description of the Derby crowd that accompanies the engravings is generally a cheerful individuation of types within the mass, he does include a long quotation from Hippolyte Taine's description of the Derby, which appeared in the Frenchman's *Notes on England* (1872). The description echoes the feeling of sublimity and movement in the mass that can be seen in Doré's engravings:

> A suppressed hurrah pervades the stands. The frigid faces are on fire; brief,
> nervous gestures suddenly stir the phlegmatic bodies. Below, in the betting ring,
> the agitation is extraordinary—like a general St. Vitus's dance. Picture a mass of
> puppets receiving an electric shock, and gesticulating with all their members like
> mad semaphores. But the most curious spectacle is the human tide which,
> instantaneously and in a body, pours forth and rolls over the course behind the
> runners, like a wave of ink; the black and motionless crowd has suddenly melted
> and become molten; in a moment it spreads itself abroad in vast proportions till
> the eye cannot follow it. (78-79)

Taine describes the crowd as being stirred from a suppressed state, from frigidity and

phlegmatism to spirit and movement. The race shocks the British puppets to life.

Although Jerrold quotes Taine at length, he suggests that Taine does not acknowledge

that the Derby is both impressive and serves a social purpose:

> M. Taine will not admit that there is anything grandiose in the great race-day on
> the Downs. The crowd is an ant-heap: the horsemen and the carriages moving
> about resemble beetles, May-bugs, large sombre drones on a green cloth. [. . .]
> But this Derby-day has its bright—even its useful side too. It gives all London an
> airing, an 'outing'; makes a break in our over-worked lives; and effects a
> beneficial commingling of classes. (78, 80)

For Jerrold, the Frenchman reduces the Derby crowd to insects and fails to see that the

Derby provides "over-worked" Londoners a release from labor. Yet what both Taine and

Jerrold do seem to see in the crowd at the Derby is the expenditure of energy that in

Bataille's sense is not productive. Both authors figure the crowd as providing a sort of

release.

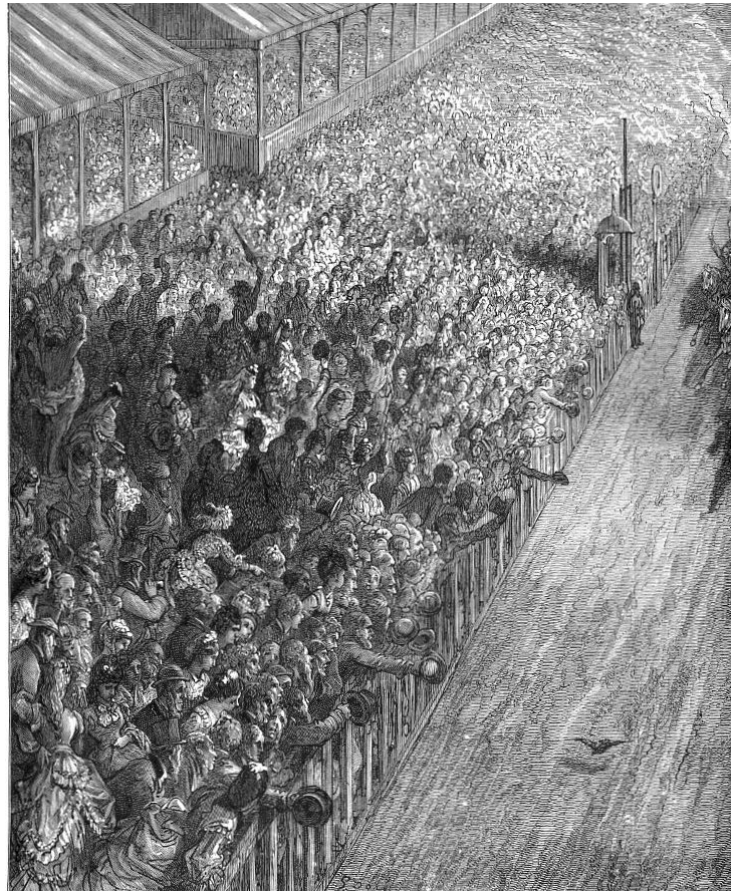**Figure 15** "The Winner," *London: A Pilgrimage*, 75.

Figure 16 "Finish of the Race," *London: A Pilgrimage*, 76.

Crowds also figure prominently in Chapter V: "All London at a Boat-Race." In

this chapter Jerrold describes the race between the Oxford and Cambridge crews on April

6, 1870. Jerrold is again at pains to represent the event as a meeting of different classes:

"If there was anything to regret in this close and prodigious meeting of class with class—

it was not the absence of gaiety" (55). Doré provided eleven engravings for chapters V

and VI, which deal with the race, and in only one small engraving "Barnes Bridge"

(figure 17), can the racing boats be seen in the distance. The focus of the engraving is the

crowd, which frames all the edges of the engraving, from the legs hanging from the

bridge above to the throngs amassed on the boats in the background. In an engraving

titled "The Race" (figure 18) only the ends of the oars of one of the racing boats are visible, while the focus of the engraving is the crowd in attendance. The crowd of people on the bridge in the background is an indistinct mass, as in the previous engraving, but the crowd in the foreground appears to be in motion as the boats pass. Arms are outstretched in all directions from the mass of spasmodic bodies.
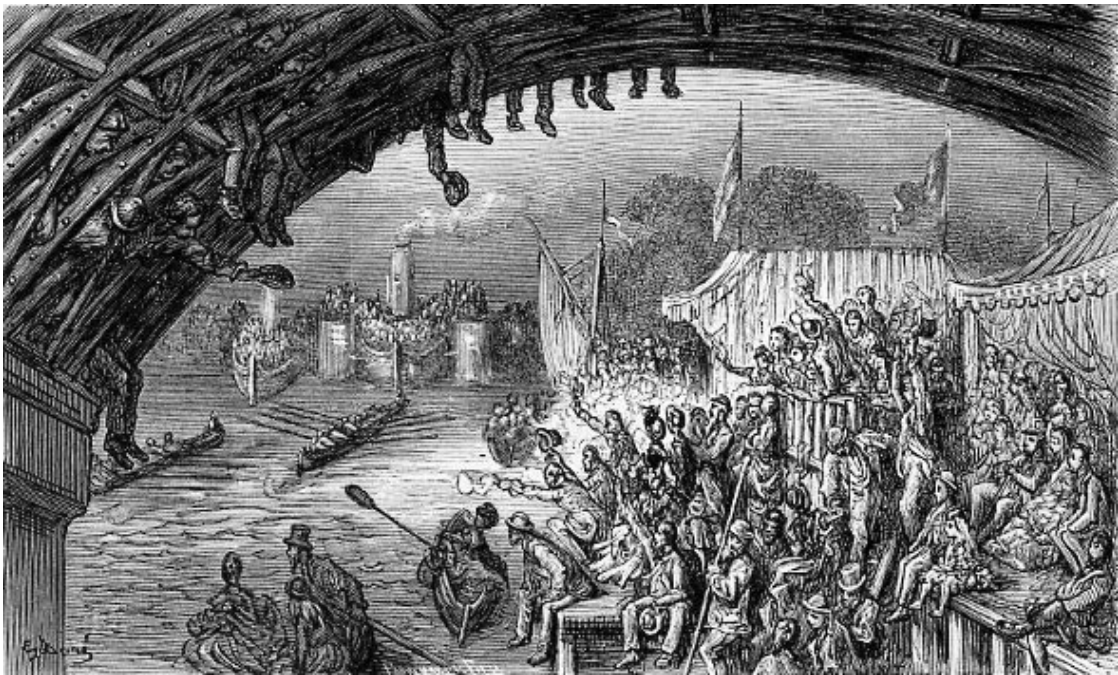
Figure 17 "Barnes Bridge," *London: A Pilgrimage*, 58.

Figure 18 "The Race," *London: A Pilgrimage*, 58.

The four chapters devoted to Derby Day and Race Day in the survey of London put undue emphasis on days of interclass celebration that occur only once yearly. Though it is not clear if the choice to focus on these events was Jerrold's or Doré's, the engravings make it clear that London's crowds made an impression on Doré. Although crowds were a common trope in both visual and verbal representations of London, Doré's

crowds stand out among these depictions because they are sublime in size and density; they are exaggerated, grotesque. This difference becomes pronounced when comparing Doré's London illustrations to those of the well known Victorian painter of crowds, William Powell Frith (1819-1909). Frith offers a crowd comparable to Doré's in his painting, *The Derby Day* (1856-58) (figure 19). Frith's crowd scenes were immensely popular: *The Derby Day* was the sensation of the 1858 Royal Academy exhibition. Frith's crowd is much like Jerrold's crowd of Dickensian types. In Frith's painting every figure is individuated: there are gentleman and prostitutes in the carriage in the center. In front of the carriage kneels an acrobat with his son; on the left there is a thimble rigger. Despite the immensity of Frith's crowd, class and character are visible. Frith's crowds display an atmosphere of conviviality, while Doré's crowds are dark, claustrophobic, and full of indistinct bodies.

Figure 19 *The Derby Day* (1856-58), William Powell Frith, (Tate Gallery, London).

In contrast to the crowds of the sporting events, Chapter XIV of *London a Pilgrimage*, "Work-A-Day London" features crowds at work. "Ludgate Hill—A Block

in the Street," (figure 20) shows an impossibly crowded street. Between the engravings of the sporting events and those of "Work-A-Day London" a dialectic of collectivity and individual, of unproductive expenditure and productive consumption, comes into play. As opposed to the crowds at the Derby or the boat race, the mass of bodies are individuated by the type of work each performs. A butcher on the right, for example, carries an animal carcass over his head. While the crowd of the sporting event seems to move together, the people in this crowd seem to have little relationship to each other: they do not look at or speak to any else. Yet, as with the engravings of the Derby and boat race, there is a sense of pressure in the crowd, a sense that the city is at its capacity and ready to burst at the seams.

Figure 20 "Ludgate Hill—A Block in the Street," *London: A Pilgrimage*, 118.

If the middle and working-class crowds of Ludgate Hill demonstrate productive

consumption and the crowds of the sporting event are involved in unproductive

expenditure, then the crowds of the East End are depicted as removed from this dialectic.

In the engraving "Bluegate Fields" (figure 21), the figures crowd into doorways: some of

the people are crouched down as if they will sleep in the street. Rundown buildings close

out the night sky, creating a claustrophobic, oppressive atmosphere. The woman on the

right with the crossed arms appears to be staring at the viewer with contempt. Above the

figures the only light is from the public house lamp. Jerrold explains, "At the corner of

every tumbledown street is the flaring public-house lamp—hateful as the fabled jewel in

the loathsome toad's head" (138). Doré does not, however, show the people drinking in

the public house. They appear to be precluded from any form of activity or consumption.

The last chapter of the text, entitled "London Charities," describes the various

efforts to alleviate the suffering of the London's poor. The final engraving of the text,

"Infant Hospital Patients" (figure 22), is a sentimental scene depicting the efforts to help

poor children. The engraving immediately preceding this one, "The New Zealander"

(figure 23), offers a very different ending to the pilgrimage. While many of the

engravings depict London's crowds, here is a solitary figure. The New Zealander, by

1872, had become a popular allegory for the impending ruin of the city. The figure

originated in an 1840 review of von Ranke's *History of the Popes* written by Thomas

Babington Macaulay. In his review Macaulay predicted that the Roman Catholic Church

"may still exist in undiminished vigour when some traveller from New Zealand shall, in

the midst of a cast solitude, take his stand on the broken arch of London Bridge to sketch

the ruins of St. Paul's" (228). The religious significance of the New Zealander

disappeared almost immediately as the image gained currency as a figure for London's

fall. By 1865, Mr. Punch issued a proclamation banning the use of the New Zealander:

"The retirement of this veteran is indispensable. He can no longer be suffered to impede

the traffic over London Bridge. Much wanted at the present time in his own country.

May return when London is in ruins" (9). Doré's engraving of the New Zealander offers

a startling contrast to the overcrowded city of the earlier engravings. The dark figure of

the New Zealander sits alone sketching the ruins of St. Paul's. The engraving not only

recalls images of the dome of St. Paul's in the background of earlier engravings, it also

calls forth the text's frontispiece picturing Father Thames and the lion looking out over

the river. But those symbols of Britain are absent. It is as if the pressure exerted by the

crowds finally gives way to the solitary New Zealander.

Figure 21 "Bluegate Fields," *London: A Pilgrimage*, 138.

Figure 22 "Infant Hospital Patients," *London: A Pilgrimage*, 191.

Figure 23 "The New Zealander," *London: A Pilgrimage*, 188.

III. *The People of the Abyss*

If Doré's crowds depict the excesses and waste of the city doomed to dissolution, the crowds of Jack London's *The People of the Abyss* provide the author with a backdrop for creating multiplying images of himself. London constructs a "crowd" of selves within the crowds of the East End. Although the crowd opens up a space for London's multiple selves, it is also a source of horror, which, like Doré's crowd, carries the seeds for the destruction of the city. Walking at night in Whitechapel, London describes the crowd in terms of evolutionary degeneration:

> Much of it is untellable. But in a general way I may say that I saw a nightmare, a fearful slime that quickened the pavement with life, a mess of unmentionable obscenity that put into eclipse the 'nightly horror' of Piccadilly and the Strand. It was a menagerie of garmented bipeds that looked something like humans and more like beasts. (284)

A few paragraphs later, the crowd is more fantastic and monstrous than beastly:

> And there were others, strange, weird faces and forms and twisted monstrosities that shouldered me on every side, inconceivable types of sodden ugliness, the wrecks of society, the perambulating carcasses, the living deaths—women, blasted by disease and drink till their shame brought not tu'pence in the open mart; and men, in fantastic rags, wrenched by hardship and exposure out of all semblance of men, their faces in a perpetual writhe of pain, grinning idiotically. (286-87)

London's description, like many of Doré's, does not distinguish individuals. "Faces and forms" surround him. London warns the inhabitants of the West End that these monstrous poor will destroy the city:

> The dear soft people of the golden theatres and wonder-mansions of the West End do not see these creatures, do not dream that they exist. But they are here, alive, very much alive in their jungle. And woe the day, when England is fighting in her last trench, and her able-bodied men are on the firing-line! For on that day they will crawl out of their dens and lairs, and the people of the West End will see them, as the dear soft aristocrats of Feudal France saw them and asked one another, ''Whence came they?' 'Are they men?' (285-86)

The perambulating zombies, London suggests, will rise up against the West Enders, who are unaware of their existence. The crowd will one day become a revolutionary mob.

After spending a night roaming the streets of London's East End looking for a place to sleep but constantly being awakened by "omnipresent" policemen and told to "move on," Jack London addresses his middle-class reader directly, asking him or her to imagine spending an entire night out on the streets of London:

> O dear, soft people, of meat and blood, with white beds and airy rooms waiting you each night, how can I make you know what it is to suffer if you spent a weary night on London's streets? Believe me, you would think a thousand centuries had come and gone before the east paled into dawn; you would shiver till you were ready to cry aloud with the pain of each aching muscle; you would marvel that you could endure so much and live. [. . .] But when the dawn came, the nightmare over, you would hale you home and refresh yourself, and until you died you would tell the story of your adventure to groups of admiring friends. It would grow into a mighty story. Your little eight-hour night would become an Odyssey and you a Homer. (75-76)

London describes the physical and mental suffering of homelessness, yet by the end of the description, he recasts the experience in literary terms. Any middle-class person, London suggests, can spend a night on the streets and gather fodder for an epic tale. And although London puts the reader in the position of Homer—and it is worth noting that the reader is figured as the writer, Homer, and not the adventurer, Odysseus—and casts his or her hypothetical night on the streets as "an Odyssey," it is Jack London who has spent the night outside and written of his "adventure." And London's adventures do, indeed, "grow into a mighty story": *The People of the Abyss*, London's chronicle of his experiences in 1902 posing as an American sailor stranded in the East End of London. London had come to England briefly for the American Press Association to report on the Coronation of Edward VII on his way to an assignment in South Africa to report on conditions after the end of the Boer War. When the South African assignment was

canceled, London decided to turn his report on the Coronation into a sort of sociological investigation that became *The People of the Abyss*. London does describe the sight of the imperial procession, but it is figured in the text only as a contrast to East End misery. The text includes a narrative of his travels through the slums, the stories of those he meets, a long digression on his beliefs about causes and solutions of urban misery, quotations from newspapers and court cases, as well as 79 photographs of the East End that London claims to have taken himself. London relates that his desire was to "go down into the East End and see things for myself. I wish to know how those people are living there, and why they are living there, and what they are living for. In short, I am going to live there myself" (3). Despite London's depiction of his first-hand experiences of the East End and his photographic "evidence" of what he has seen, his narrative about life in London's slums is complicated by the ways in which he constructs himself as a character within his text. London figures himself as a multiplying reproduction, not unlike the photographs he includes, one of which is of himself (figure 24). The photograph, which London captions, "Bert and the author ready to pick hops," is the only photograph that London includes of himself, and it is part of the text which takes place outside of the city. London reports that during hop harvesting season thousands of London's casual workers go to Kent and Dover to pick hops. London decides to go to the country and experience hop picking for himself. In preparation for the trip, London explains, "I donned my seafaring togs and started out to get a job. With me was a young East London cobbler, Bert, who had yielded to the lure of adventure and joined me for the trip. Acting on my advice, he had brought his 'worst rags'" (172). London never explains how he meets Bert, or if Bert ever believed London to be a stranded American

sailor. As an East London cobbler, Bert is not a person with whom London would have

been acquainted—outside of his forays into the East End—but at this point in the

narrative, London makes it clear that Bert is aware that London is not a stranded sailor.

In fact, Bert is also disguised, wearing his worst clothing in order to pass as someone who

would tramp into the country to look for work picking hops. Though London's

description of his trip to the country and his time picking hops is full of political

commentary, here and elsewhere he describes his motives in terms of adventure. Even

Bert, an East Londoner, is "lured" by the possibility of finding adventure among a group

of people in worse circumstances than himself.

Figure 24 "Burt and the Author Ready to Pick Hops," *People of the Abyss* (1902), 172.

The body of critical writing about *The People of the Abyss* tends to be invested in

either locating it within the tradition of English slum writing or distinguishing it from this

tradition by situating London's perspective within American cultural ideology. Robert

Peluso claims that *The People of the Abyss* serves to legitimize an emerging American

imperialism: "[I]n Jack London's hands, the horrifying conditions in the English world capital certify the success of a politics of abundance in a United States recently emerged from severe economic depression and, more important, attest to the correctness of a newly emerging U.S. foreign policy that had at its core colonizing activities of its own" (72). Kevin Swafford claims that London is not just invested in critiquing British imperialism but capitalism itself: "In light of earlier narratives, *The People of the Abyss* emerges as a revisionary text, in which the limitations and pervasive ideological currents of prior slum narratives are revealed and put into question" (96-97). According to Swafford, London's text accomplishes this by moving from a sensationalist account of the East End at the beginning of the text to "a second level of narration that openly critiques wealth and privilege, ignorance and complacency" (99). By contrast, Dan Bivona and Roger B. Henkle assert, "In the grand tradition of other nineteenth-century reporter/actor/ethnographers [. . .] London's 'descent' comes with all the requisite ethnographic trappings that clearly establish the otherness of the other if only because of the fact that the reporter must take such pains to convince the other that he is not reporting on him. [. . .] The great irony of London's writing on East London is that the humanizing strategies employed to draw the working class back into humanity's fold, end up reifying, dehumanizing, and alienating them even further" (165, 172). Joseph McLaughlin, like Bivona and Henkle, identifies London's employment of ethnographic methods and tropes, but he insists, "London's narrative is neither simply a portrayal of a 'savage' culture within the metropolitan center nor a presentation of the urban adventurer as ethnographer" (104). McLaughlin sees London's text as an act of self-fashioning that

explores the "connections between the American 'London' who writes and the English 'London' that is written" (104).

While critics have been correct in stressing the ways in which the text is concerned with issues of identity—whether masculine, working-class, or American— they have tended not to note the instability of London's self-presentation, an instability that is effected through London's construction of himself as a literary figure within the crowds of London's East End. This is most often accomplished through the inclusion of photographs and literary allusion. London's text is marked by an awareness of the tradition of sociological reporting about street life in London.[10] He includes his own narrative of "slumming"; in a style reminiscent of Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor,* he recounts first-person narratives of vagrants and other people he meets. Like Mayhew and Booth, London also includes statistical information about the East End which he presumably gleaned from newspapers and the reports of social investigators. Earlier writers often included illustrations, and London's text is sprinkled with photographs of the people and places he encounters. London directly refers to earlier texts about the East End. London's accounts are at times contradictory, and his photographs often tell a different story than his words. His tone also changes: London waxes sentimental, while at other points his words carry a bitter, or even playful, irony. He joyfully recounts his adventure picking hops in the country, but later directly

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[10] Seth Koven makes a similar point about the tradition within which *The People of the Abyss* participates, noting the influence of James Greenwood's "A Night in the Workhouse," which was first published in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1866. Koven argues that "A Night in the Workhouse," was a major source of influence for not only Jack London's text, but also Matthew Arnold's essays in social criticism (1866-71), Jerrold and Dore's *London: A Pilgrimage* (1872), and George Orwell's *Down and Out in Paris and London* (1933). 74.

condemns the system of capitalist economy. Moreover, the relative proximity he shares with his subjects is complicated by his disguise as a pauper but also by the fact that he carries a camera and photographs these same subjects. In other words, in order to take photographs of the people he encounters, London would have been forced to give up his disguise.

In preparing to establish himself in the East End, London finds that even Thomas Cook & Son, the well-known travel agents, "are not accustomed to taking travellers to the East End; we receive no call to take them there, and we know nothing whatsoever about the place at all" (3). Likening himself to a colonial explorer, London remarks sardonically, "[U]nhesitatingly and instantly, with ease and celerity, could you send me to Darkest Africa or Innermost Thibet, [sic] but to the East End of London, barely a stone's throw distant from Ludgate Circus, you know not the way!" (3). London asks a cabman to take him "[t]o the East End, anywhere," and eventually locates an old clothes shop where he purchases his disguise: "a pair of stout though well-worn trousers, a frayed jacket with one remaining button, a pair of brogans which had plainly seen service where coal was shovelled, a thin leather belt, and a very dirty cloth cap" (10). The change in clothing results in what London describes as a remarkable change in his experience. On first traveling into the East End but before donning the ragged clothing of an East Ender, London is immediately overwhelmed by the crowd: "[A]s far as I could see were the solid walls of brick, the slimy pavements, and the screaming streets; and for the first time in my life the fear of the crowd smote me. It was like the fear of the sea, lapping about me and threatening to well up and over me" (8). After assuming his costume, however, London claims,

> No sooner was I out on the streets than I was impressed by the difference in status effected by my clothes. All servility vanished from the demeanor of the common people with whom I came into contact. Presto! in the twinkling of an eye, so to say, I had become one of them. [. . .] [I]n the place of the fawning and too-respectful attention I had hitherto received, I now shared with them a comradeship. [. . .] I was gratified to find that the fear of the crowd no longer haunted me. I had become part of it. The vast and malodorous sea had welled up and over me, or I had slipped gently into it. (13-15).

Once London changes his clothing, his fear that the sea will "well up and over" him vanishes as he finds that he already has been assimilated into it. London's subjectivity has been effaced by changing his clothing and becoming part of the crowd, and he is now able to experience new and multiple subject positions.

London's first foray into the East End after securing his ragged clothing is to the home of a detective, whom he calls "Johnny Upright." His errand is to procure information from the detective, who lives on the slightly more respectable fringes of the East End. London explains, "While living, eating, and sleeping with the people of the East End, it was my intention to have a port of refuge, not too far distant, into which I could run now and again to assure myself that good clothes and cleanliness existed" (19). The detective helps London secure a lodging from which he can lead his double life. Before meeting the detective and upon first approaching Upright's home dressed in his disguise, London encounters a "slavey," or maid of all work: "she being my first acquaintance in this portion of the world" (17). He remarks about the woman, "Now, mark you, her condition in life was pitiable and contemptible, but it was with pity and contempt she looked at me. She evinced a plain desire that our conversation should be short" (17). Next to this description he includes a photograph, with the caption "An East-End 'Slavey'" (figure 25). Although the placement of the photograph next to the description of meeting the woman suggests that the photograph is of the person whom he

meets at the detective's home, it is not clear if this is the same woman because the photograph's caption merely describes her as "an" East End slavey. Moreover, the woman is clearly posing for the photograph, but in his description of his encounter with the woman he is dressed in rags posing as someone beneath the social position of a maidservant. In order to have the woman pose for the photograph, London obviously would have had to reveal that he was not whom he claimed to be. But more than just suggesting that the photograph compromised London's disguise, revealing to those whom he photographed that he was not who said he was, the photograph shows not a woman whose "condition in life was pitiable and contemptible," but someone who looks happy. Though the photograph depicts her among the accoutrements of her work, it does not show her suffering from her labor; nor does it evoke pity.

Figure 25 "An East-End 'Slavey,'" *People of the Abyss* (1902), 17.

Figure 26 "The Crawlers," *Street Life in London* (1877), 109.

London's photographs of the "pitiable" East Londoners beg comparison with other photographs of the London poor. Perhaps the best known photographer of these subjects was John Thomson, a Scottish documentary photographer who explored and photographed China from 1862 to 1872. When he returned to London, Thomson photographed street life in the East End and published *Street Life in London* in 1877,[11] which is often credited as the first use of photography for social documentation. While most of his photographs are of various kinds of vendors, costermongers, and street performers, one of the most memorable photographs in Thomson's *Street Life* is of a

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[11] While Thomson took all of the photographs, Adolphe Smith wrote most of the text.

woman described as a "crawler": "Huddled together on the workhouse steps in Short's

Gardens, those wrecks of humanity, the Crawlers of St. Giles's, may be seen both day

and night seeking mutual warmth and mutual consolation in their extreme misery. As a

rule, they are old women reduced by vice and poverty to that degree of wretchedness

which destroys even the energy to beg" (108). Although the prose here was written by

Adolphe Smith, the accompanying photograph (figure 26) supports the content of the

text. While many of London's photographs and Thomson's photographs (including

London's "slavey" and Thomson's "crawler") appear to be posed, the differences

between the two are striking. My sense is not that London was an unskilled photographer

or that he simply failed to find photographic evidence to support his prose. London's

photographs provide something other than evidence of what he reports. They serve to

document London's experience of modern subjectivity in its multiplying reproductions of

the self.

London becomes a literary figure in his own text, a text which London claims in

his preface is a faithful description of his own experiences in the East End: "I was open to

be convinced by the evidence of my eyes, rather than by the teachings of those who had

not seen, or by the words of those who had seen and gone before" (n. pag.). It is striking

that in a text committed to empirical investigation London casts his experiences in

literary terms. In a chapter entitled "Coffee-Houses and Doss-Houses," London

describes the places where the poor of the city obtain inexpensive meals. London

laments that the London coffee house no longer seems to be associated with literary

culture:

> Another phrase gone glimmering shorn of romance and tradition and all that goes
> to make phrases worth keeping. For me, henceforth, 'coffee-house' will possess

anything but an agreeable connotation. Over on the other side of the world, the mere mention of the word was sufficient to conjure up whole crowds of historic frequenters, and to send trooping through my imagination endless groups of wits and dandies, pamphleteers and bravos, and bohemians of Grub Street. (232)

Rather than the coffeehouse society of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele during the eighteenth century, London finds the coffeehouses of 1902 to be "greasy, dirty places [. . .] Tablecloths and napkins are unknown. A man eats in the midst of the débris left by his predecessor, and dribbles his own scraps about him on the floor" (233). London describes the men eating in the coffeehouse: "In the whole room there was hardly a note of conversation. A feeling of gloom pervaded the ill-lighted place. Many of them sat and brooded over the crumbs of their repast, and made me wonder, as Childe Roland wondered, what evil they had done that they should be punished so" (245). London is likely alluding to Robert Browning's "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came" (1855). But the allusion also evokes Edgar's mad song in *King Lear* and the fairy tale upon which Edgar's song is based. London's single allusion evokes fairy tale, medieval quest, Shakespearean tragedy, and Victorian dramatic monologue. In some ways, the allusion to "Childe Roland" is fitting. London figures himself as Childe Roland, the speaker of Browning's poem who travels through a terrible wasteland looking for the illusive Dark Tower. Before finding the tower, Roland sees images of his dishonored comrades: "I fancied Cuthbert's reddening face [. . .] Alas, one's night's disgrace! [. . .] Giles then, the soul of honour—there he stands [. . .] Poor traitor, spit upon and curst!" (91-95, 97-101). Once Roland finds the tower, his "peers" return, and Roland becomes "one more picture":

> There they stood, ranged along the hill-sides, met
> To view the last of me, a living frame
> For one more picture! in a sheet of flame

> I saw them and I knew them all. Any yet
> Dauntless the slug-horn to my lips I set,
> And blew. "*Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came.*" (199-204).

Although Roland finds the tower, the poem concludes not with a description of the tower or an expression of triumph. Instead, Roland sees himself being seen as a picture by his peers whom he earlier saw as pictures. As Lawrence J. Starzyk suggests, "Roland's awareness of himself, and his awareness of others' awareness of him, as the framing device for pictures [. . .] suggests an ekphrastic understanding of selfhood and the poetic process" (15).

In an earlier chapter, London alludes to another of Browning's dramatic monologues, "Fra Lippo Lippi": "Three of us walked down Mile End Road, and one was a hero. He was a slender lad of nineteen, so slight and frail, in fact, that, like Fra Lippo Lippi, a puff of wind might double him up and turn him over. He was a burning young socialist, in the first throes of enthusiasm and ripe for martyrdom" (54). Although Fra Lippo Lippi was an actual person, a painter of the Italian Renaissance, the allusion is to Browning's poem. Fra Lippo Lippi, the speaker of the poem, describes himself as a homeless child before he becomes a monk out of desperation:

> I was a baby when my mother died
> And father died and left me in the street.
> I starved there, God knows how, a year or two
> On fig-skins, melon-parings, rinds and shucks,
> Refuse and rubbish. One fine frosty day,
> My stomach being empty as your hat,
> The wind doubled me up and down I went. (81-87)

Again, the allusion to Browning has more than one referent—to the historical figure and to Browning's representation of the man. This particular section of Browning's dramatic monologue is echoed in another place in *The People of the Abyss*. London describes

walking through the city with two men looking with them for a workhouse with an open

bed:

> *From the slimy sidewalk, they were picking up bits of orange peel, apple skin, and grape stems, and they were eating them. The pits of green gage plums they cracked between their teeth for the kernels inside. They picked up stray crumbs of bread the size of peas, apple cores so black and dirty one would not take them to be apple cores, and these things these two men took into their mouths, and chewed them, and swallowed them; and this, between six and seven o'clock in the evening of August 20, year of our Lord 1902, in the heart of the greatest, wealthiest, and most powerful empire the world has ever seen.* (78, italics original)

London at first does not understand what the men periodically stoop to pick up while they

are walking. When he realizes that they are picking up refuse to eat, he is shocked. The

description of the two men eating scraps off of the sidewalk is strangely similar to Fra

Lippo Lippi's description of eating "refuse and rubbish." More important, though, in

Browning's poem Fra Lippo Lippi is committed to presenting life as it really is. He is

admonished for his realism and told

> Your business is not to catch men with show,
> With homage to the perishable clay,
> But to lift them over it, ignore it all,
> Make them forget there's such a thing as flesh" (179-82).

This allusion to Browning is telling, for it refers to the visual artist's choice between

depicting life as it is or idealizing his human subjects. While London claims a

commitment to the former, his text often seems to play with this tension. He describes

the horrible circumstances of life on London's streets; yet he also casts himself and those

he meets in literary terms.

Moreover, the allusions to the dramatic monologues of Browning are important

because although Browning did not write about poverty or street life, he, like London,

demonstrated a sustained interest in visual representation. Browning is best known for

his dramatic monologues. Many of them deal with questions of aesthetics and morality,
one of which is "Fra Lippo Lippi," but even poems like "Childe Roland" are thoroughly
visual. Jack London's text offers a sort of infinitely expanding series of images through
not only its allusions to Browning, who is already reliant upon allusion, but also through
London's photographs, which tend to fit imperfectly with London's prose. London's
empiricism, his determination "to be convinced by the evidence of my eyes" (n.pag.), is
complicated by both his photographs and his literary allusions. In "The Work of Art in
the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Walter Benjamin discusses the ways in which
photography has changed human sense perception: he points out

> the desire of the contemporary masses to bring things 'closer' spatially and
> humanly, which is just as ardent as their bent toward overcoming the uniqueness
> of every reality by accepting its reproduction. Every day the urge grows stronger
> to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction.
> Unmistakably, reproduction as offered by picture magazines and newsreels differs
> from the image seen by the unarmed eye" (223).

For Benjamin, photographic reproduction tends not to bring the "masses" closer to the
original object; rather the reproduction is stripped of what Benjamin describes as its
"aura"—its presence in time and space. The reproduction thus brings the viewer closer to
something altogether different from the original. In his 1927 essay "Photography,"
Siegfried Kracauer makes a similar argument: "Never before has a period known so little
about itself. In the hands of the ruling society, the illustrated magazines is [sic] one of
the most powerful means of organizing a strike against understanding. [. . .] The
contiguity of these images systematically excludes their contextual framework available
to consciousness. The 'image-idea' drives away the idea. The blizzard of photographs
betrays an indifference toward what the things mean" (58). The significance of
photography, thus, for Benjamin and Kracauer, lies in its ability not to reproduce an

object but in its ability to distance an object from itself. Building on the arguments of

Benjamin and Kracauer, Eduardo Cadava claims, "What makes photography

photography is not its capacity to present what it photographs, but its character as a force

of interruption" (xxviii).

If London's photographs serve as interruptions, then his chapter on the coronation

of Edward VII marks a sustained interruption in his depiction of life in the East End. The

spectacle of the coronation, a form of unproductive expenditure, is certainly more

politically charged than Doré's sporting events. Yet, like the sporting events, the

coronation is depicted as an event marked by a chaotic mixing of classes and spasmodic

displays of emotion: "[A] hurricane of cheers, the crashing of bands—'The King! the

King! God save the King!' Everybody has gone mad. The contagion is sweeping me off

my feet. I, too, want to shout, 'The King! God save the King!' Ragged men about me,

tears in their eyes, are tossing up their hats and crying ecstatically, 'Bless 'em! Bless

'em! Bless 'em!'" (146). Although London is swept into the emotion of the crowd, he

disapproves of such a display in the context of misery and poverty: "They crowned a king

this day, and there has been great rejoicing and elaborate tomfoolery, and I am perplexed

and saddened. I never saw anything to compare with the pageant, except Yankee circuses

and Alhambra ballets; nor did I ever witness anything so hopeless and tragic" (138).

London is perplexed that the ragged men in attendance at the coronation cheer for the

king and revel in the extravagance of the procession and wonders at the debauchery that

follows: "I drift with the crowd out of the square into a tangle of narrow streets, where

the public houses are a-roar with drunkenness, men, women, and children mixed together

in colossal debauch" (46-47). Yet, enthusiasm of the spectators at the coronation, like

Doré's sporting events, can be understood as a yearning for transgression of the utilitarian system. Bataille compares the experience of unproductive expenditure to intoxication: "In their intensified form, the *states of excitation*, which are comparable to toxic states, can be defined as the illogical are irresistible impulse to reject material or moral goods that it would have been possible to utilize rationally (in conformity to the balancing of accounts)" ("Notion of Expenditure" 128).

London ends his text with a chapter titled "Management" in which he argues that the mismanagement of wealth is the reason for England's poverty; "Not only has [the management of England] been wasteful and inefficient, but it has misappropriated the funds. Every worn-out, pasty-faced pauper, every blind man, every prison babe, every man, woman, and child whose belly is gnawing with hunger pangs, is hungry because the funds have been misappropriated by the management" (316). London sees this mismanagement as leading to an inevitable collapse: "The political machine known as the British Empire is running down. In the hands of its management it is losing momentum every day. It is inevitable that this management, which has grossly and criminally mismanaged, shall be swept away" (316). London claims that the waste and misappropriation of resources will result in ruin of the British Empire. Yet his description of the coronation and the crowds in attendance is perhaps the only place in his text when the inhabitants of the East End are depicted to be in a "state of excitation." Elsewhere London depicts passive crowds under the thumb of the authorities of the workhouse or the Salvation Army: "All told, there must have been nearly seven hundred of us who sat down—not to meat or bread, but to speech, song, and prayer. [. .] The adjutant made the prayer, but I did not take note of it, being too engrossed with the

massed picture of misery before me. But the speech ran something like this: 'You will

feast in paradise. No matter how you starve and suffer here, you will feast in paradise,

that is, if you follow the directions'" (131). London includes a photograph of the crowd

of men quietly waiting for hours to be admitted (figure 27). Though the men are there to

receive food from the Salvation Army, London describes hours that are spent in

withholding the food. As opposed to the ostentatious expenditure of the coronation, the

scene at the Salvation Army Barracks is marked by a conspicuous lack of consumption; it

is an exercise in withholding for as long as possible.

Figure 27 "Inside the Courtyard of the Salvation Army Barracks on Sunday Morning,"
People of the Abyss, 124.

While there were many depictions of London crowds produced throughout the

nineteenth century, the crowds of Doré and London appear distinct from many of the

other depictions. It has often been argued that in the nineteenth century the crowd first

became the metonym for modern urban subjectivity, but the crowds of *London: A Pilgrimage* and *The People of the Abyss* might be more aptly described as allegorical representations of the pressures and possibilities of an economic system in which excesses coexist with abjection. These crowds both open up spaces for proliferating meanings and subjectivities and also convey a sense of pressure toward dissolution.

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