

**RAGGED FORTUNES AND SWASHBUCKLING THRILLERS;  
OR,  
RECREATING THE VICTORIAN IN YOUNG ADULT FICTION  
1985–2011**

**By  
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## ABSTRACT

The Victorian era has become a fashionable setting for contemporary young adult fiction. Studies of the contemporary pseudo-Victorian novel have focussed almost entirely upon fiction for adults. Scarcely any attention has been paid to their young adult equivalents — the subject of this thesis. Despite being marketed as “historical” fiction, these works do not adopt actual Victorian history as its basis but are influenced by the literature of the time instead. The chief inspirations are authors such as Dickens and Conan Doyle rather than Victorian children’s classics.

After demonstrating the appropriation of Victorian literature in the young adult novels of Pullman, Bajoria, Updale, and Lee, I discuss the function of this Victorian dimension. The nineteenth-century “essential” categories under study here — London, prostitutes, opium dens, orphans, detectives — once embodied Victorian anxieties regarding class, social upheaval, gender politics, colonial guilt, and nationalism. But when contemporary writers evoke Victorian ghosts, they are putting forth their own world view.

Consequently, these texts are doubly haunted. Heavy with Victorian ideologies, they simultaneously propagate new fears (for instance, terrorism) and appeal to contemporary sensitivities (particularly feminism). Where Victorian values do not align with the authors’ own, they are challenged and “updated”. Whenever they are made to agree, the reader is confronted with assumptions and prejudices that echo disturbingly through the centuries.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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## INTRODUCTION

Young adult novels set in the Victorian era emerged in the late 1980s. I first encountered the genre through Philip Pullman's *Sally Lockhart* series (1985–1994), the popularity of which is evident from its re-issue (by Scholastic) in 2004. Indeed, Philip Pullman can be considered the first major author of modern young adult “Victorian” literature (just as John Fowles was of modern adult “Victorian” literature with his 1969 novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman*). Realising Pullman was not always aiming at a genuinely historical depiction of the Victorian era, I investigated other authors whose work was similarly packaged. I wanted to establish the extent, and limits, of their debt to Victorian literary tradition, and to interpret their often very free adaptation of Victorian material.

Neo-Victorian novels proliferated at the beginning of the millennium, the young adult versions coinciding with the adult novels such as *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), *Affinity* (1999), and *Fingersmith* (2002) by Sarah Waters, Michel Faber's *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002) and Lee Jackson's oeuvre. The young adult texts include the *Eddie Dickens* series (2000–2007) by the Scottish writer Philip Ardagh, and *The Mad Misadventures of Emmaline and Rubberbones* series (2006–2008) by the English author Howard Whitehouse (the former being particularly interesting in its use of irony). Jane Eagland, Linda Newbery, Marthe Jocelyn, Catherine Webb, and Anna Godbersen have also contributed to this field. The genre also includes a fantasy strand: Paul Steward and Chris Riddell's *Barnaby Grimes* stories (2008–2010) include zombies and wolf-men, and G.P. Taylor's *Mariah Mundi* books (2007–2009) could also be included. Philip Reeve's interesting *Larklight* series (2006–2008) can be classified as “steam-punk” as it offers a mechanized version of the nineteenth-century.

The following study is, however centred on realist (but purely fictional) examples. It embraces Pullman's work — the *Sally Lockhart* series (1985–1994) — as seminal, along with a selection of “core” works published between 2003 and 2011. These include Eleanor Updale's *Montmorency* series (2003–2006), Paul Bajoria's *Printer's Devil* trilogy (2004–2007), Brian Keaney's *Nathaniel Wolfe* (2008–2009) mysteries, and Y.S. Lee's *The Agency* books (2009–2011). In addition, I refer to Libba Bray's *Gemma Doyle* (2003–2007) stories, Nancy Springer's *Enola Holmes* (2006–2010) books, Mary Hooper's *Fallen Grace* (2010), and Michael Ford's *The Poisoned*

*House* (2010). Updale, Bajoria, Keaney, Hooper, and Ford are all English; Lee is Canadian; Bray and Springer are American.

These texts can be seen as a discrete genre not only because of the similarities they share — explored in this thesis — but also because they distinguish themselves from other works with Victorian elements. The aforementioned adult neo-Victorian novels exemplify what Linda Hutcheon defines as “historiographic metafiction”, which works to alert the reader to both history and fiction as “discourses, human constructs” (93). While some of these young adult fictions contain occasional metafictional features, their agenda is far from the adults’ one. Indeed, by invoking what looks like history, they endow what is essentially fantasy with an aura of realism. In addition, as this thesis will demonstrate, since they are not dedicated to an accurate factual portrayal of the era, they cannot be categorized as historical fiction. It is also important to understand that these texts are specifically young adult works, something evident in the tone and in the topics treated (sex, prostitution and drugs, for example). This distinguishes them from Leon Garfield's fiction. They may be distinguished, too, from mid-century earlier children’s fiction with Victorian settings: they do not offer alternative history, as Joan Aiken's *The Wolves of Willoughby Chase* (1962); nor are they portal fantasies, such as Penelope Lively's *A Stitch in Time* (1976).

The question arises as to why writers for young adults should be attracted to the Victorian genre. Its educational aura (given its alignment with the standard means of conveying history to children by setting stories about children living in the historical period at stake) may be a factor. There is, too, an overlap between the Victorian (imagined or authentic) and “the Gothic” as popularized by rock since the early 1970s and 80s — such as Nick Cave, and The Cure (Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic* 8) — and subsequently embraced by an adolescent sub-culture. This sub-culture still exists. In addition, there is what might be described as “Gothic for the mainstream” — as epitomized by Francis Ford Coppola’s *Dracula* (1992), Kenneth Branagh’s *Frankenstein* (1994), *Buffy* (1997–2003), and *Scream* and its sequels (1996–2011). It will be evident, however, that such answers pose further questions. Moreover, to pursue them remains beyond the scope of this present study which focuses on the trend rather than on its causes, however interesting they may be.

The standard classification of these books (in popular sites such as *Amazon* or *Good Reads*) as “historical fiction” is associated with marketing that promotes their supposed authenticity. The blurbs declare that “the sights and sounds of late-

nineteenth-century London” are drawn “beautifully” in the *Enola Holmes* adventures. Bray’s *Gemma Doyle* trilogy is “[s]et against the rich backdrop of Victorian London, a place of shadows and light, in a time of strict morality and barely repressed sensuality”. Nathaniel Wolfe’s supernatural stories take place “among the winding streets of Victorian London”. *Set in Stone* “[e]xactly captures genteel Victorian diction”. Lee’s first book in her “Victoria detective trilogy” takes place on May 1858, while “a foul-smelling heat wave paralyses London”, thus making use of London’s historical Great Stink. Updale is praised for “a fascinating visit to the Victorian era” (*Montmorency’s Revenge*). As for Pullman, the covers of three of the Sally Lockhart adventures claim they are set in “Victorian London” or are “Victorian thrillers”. He goes so far to preface the books with “Certain Items of Historical Interest”: factual data centred on the year the book takes place in (1872, 1878, 1881, and 1882).

Despite this claims of historical authenticity and research, the tradition within which these books truly lie is, in fact, a literary one. The blurb of Updale’s *Montmorency* claims that she “effortlessly inherits the mantle of John Buchan and R. L. Stevenson”, while Linda Newbery’s *Set in Stone* (2006) “[c]alls to mind the Brontë sisters”. Pullman has in fact acknowledged this. In a 1992 article, subsequently published as a chapter of *Historical Fiction for Children: Capturing the Past* (2001), he discloses that the inspiration for *The Ruby in the Smoke* was merely an Edwardian postcard.<sup>1</sup> On his website, he discusses the Sally Lockhart books in a similar vein:

*Historical thrillers*, that's what these books are. Old-fashioned Victorian blood-and-thunder. Actually, I wrote each one with *a genuine cliché of melodrama* right at the heart of it, on purpose: the priceless jewel with a curse on it — the madman with a weapon that could destroy the world — the situation of being trapped in a cellar with the water rising — the little illiterate servant girl from the slums of London who becomes a princess ... And I set the stories up so that each of those stock situations, when they arose, would do so naturally and with the most convincing realism I could manage. (“The Sally Lockhart quartet”, italics mine)

Pullman’s representation of the stories as founded upon “clichés” and “stock situations”, and his criterion of being convincing “enough”, certainly places the stories

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<sup>1</sup> Regardless, the abstract for the article talks about Pullman’s “historical trilogy” (102).



outside the scope of historical fiction.<sup>2</sup> Dennis Butt has remarked how Pullman “often gently reminds his reader that he or she is reading a story, not simply looking at a mirror of the world” (85).<sup>3</sup> In an article on Bajoria, published in 2007, Christopher Ringrose shrewdly acknowledges that “making sense of the past is difficult to separate from a tendency to pastiche the texts of the past” (215), and touches on the self-conscious functionality of *The Printer’s Devil*.

It should be noted that even where fictional precedents are acknowledged as such, they may be no more authentic than the fictionalised “history”. At the end of *Fallen Grace*, Hooper includes “Some Historical Notes from the Author” (297). The notes under the heading of Charles Dickens inform the reader that:

Dickens selected the steps on London Bridge to be the setting of the brutal murder of Nancy, the girl who befriends Oliver, by Bill Sykes, the most evil character in the book. The steps immediately became a tourist attraction, and even nowadays on a walking tour of Southwark one will be told about ‘Nancy’s Steps’. (305–06)

This account seriously contradicts *Oliver Twist*. Nancy can hardly be said to “befriend” the orphan but, more significantly, Sikes kills Nancy in the lodgings they share. It is only in the musical version — Lionel Bart’s *Oliver!* (1960) — that Nancy is killed on the bridge. In other words, Hooper inadvertently employs the popular musical as if it was the original.

A significant number of scholarly articles and critical books have been published on twentieth and twenty-first century “Victorian” novels. But these have been dedicated, for the most part, to adult fiction. They include John Kucich and Dianne F. Sadoff’s *Victorian Afterlife: Postmodern Culture Rewrites the Nineteenth Century* (2000), Christine L. Krueger’s *Functions of Victorian Culture at the Present Time* (2002), Cora Kaplan’s *Victoriana: Histories, Fictions, Criticism* (2007), Simon Joyce’s *The Victorians in the Rearview Mirror* (2007), and Louisa Hadley *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us* (2010). In addition, the University of Swansea started publishing the on-line journal *Neo-Victorian Studies* in 2008. Margaret D. Stetz ends her recent (2012) article by remarking that “ironic,

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<sup>2</sup> At another point in the article Pullman again refers to his “research” as something done “to invent convincingly” (104).

<sup>3</sup> Such instances help the reader to further question the relationship between history and story, reality and fiction.

playful, appreciative, and/or traumatic versions of Victorianism abound in literature for younger readers” and that “they deserve critical attention” (345). The following study is intended to fill some of the gap identified by Stetz.

### **Entering the Victorian: Paratextual Portals**

Alice’s falling head-first “Down, down, down” (Carroll 10) a rabbit hole to find herself in Wonderland is a classic image of children’s literature, as is the moment when Lucy steps inside the wardrobe and emerges into the winter woods of Narnia. Alice and Lucy each take the reader into the fantasy with them in one swift motion. In time-slip narratives where the other world is, supposedly, the past, the transition tends to take the form of a specific event. In Philippa Pearce’s, Carnegie Medal winning, *Tom’s Midnight Garden* (1958), the said hour reveals to Tom a beautiful garden in Victorian times where his uncle’s small backyard usually is. In the similarly popular *Green Knowe* series (1954–1976), characters are either told stories about the former inhabitants of the manor house of Green Knowe, or actually experience time shifts themselves, as Roger does in *The Stones of Green Knowe* (1976).<sup>4</sup>

In the narratives under study here, the clear-cut differentiation between the characters’ world and the past they gain access to is absent. The starting point of these tales is Queen Victoria’s England. It is the format (the cover colors, the typography, and the illustrations) that stands in for the portal or portal moment, signaling to the reader that these stories take place in the past — the book itself becomes the portal. Victorian models are transformed into “faux” Victorian objects. This packaging gives the illusion that by opening the book, the reader is indeed crossing a time gap and entering the Victorian era. Publishers tend to use the soft and sober colours of the Victorian era on the covers (see fig. 1).<sup>5</sup> Lining these new books together creates an amalgam of dark and earthy hues. The 2004 Scholastics edition of Pullman’s *Sally Lockhart* texts (see fig. 2) presents us with dull, subdued tones of burgundy, purple, green and blue (one colour per book). The 2009 and 2010 Walker Books editions of Lee’s *Agency* series are similar (see fig. 3).<sup>6</sup> The cover in the series’ first book comes in

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<sup>4</sup> Lucy M. Boston wrote six books in this series, which explore the lives of people in different periods: under the reign of Charles II, the English Regency, and the Norman Conquest.

<sup>5</sup> Figures are placed at the end of their corresponding chapters.

<sup>6</sup> Lee’s books have recently been re-issued. This new edition (2011–12) features covers where the protagonist poses in Victorian clothing against Victorian backgrounds.

a dark red which fades into a black background towards the edges, while the spine is mainly dark. The second is almost monochrome, dominated by blues and blacks. Both of the Orchard Books editions of *Nathaniel Wolfe*'s adventures are also in light — and dark — blue tones interspersed with black, and the 2006 Scholastics editions of Updale's *Montmorency* series once again use a dull palette: the covers are images in the vein of Victorian photographic prints, in shaded black-and-white, sepia, or greenish tones.<sup>7</sup> The Delacorte Press editions of Bray's *Gemma Doyle* trilogy adopt blue, reddish, and green Victorian wallpapers for their backgrounds, while the backdrops of the Macmillan editions of Jane Eagland's *Whisper my Name* and *Wildthorn* are in murky dark browns and black.<sup>8</sup>

Most young adults would, I think, recognize the covers of these books as “old-fashioned”, but, for those who would not, there are other paratextual cues that could be recognized — albeit instinctively. The typography on the covers is mainly an embellished and ornate lettering. There are at least three different typefaces used in Pullman's covers, but all look “old-fashioned”: one imitates calligraphy, while others have bold or curved letters with serifs and cusps. The Victorian factor is reinforced by the ornamental Art Nouveau square vine designs which frame both front and back covers.<sup>9</sup> Lee's books also feature attempts at visually old-fashioned titles, while the lettering on the cover of Hooper's *Fallen Grace* is complemented by ornamental fillets surrounding the image. The covers of Eagland's *Whisper my Name* and *Wildthorn* feature delicate golden vines surrounding the title, with the ends of the letters curled up.

The illustrations are the most prominent element that locates the books within the Victorian period. Each of the Pullman covers includes an image depicting intense action, including elements borrowed from the illustrations of Victorian “penny dreadfuls”.<sup>10</sup> *The Ruby in the Smoke* cover has the hero, Fred, facing the ruffian, Mr Berry. They are both dressed in Victorian clothes; in addition Fred is positioned in a

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<sup>7</sup> Updale's *Montmorency* series has had several editions, all with different covers. The initial ones in 2003 were very simple and not as Victorian. In newer editions, the Victorian aspect of the books has been increasingly emphasised.

<sup>8</sup> Similar covers can be found in Anna Godbersen's Penguin edition of her Victorian *Luxe* series. The series is not discussed in this thesis because the action takes place in New York, but the covers also feature young women wearing beautiful Victorian full-skirt dresses which flow from the front covers to the spine and back while the backgrounds are covered in Victorian wallpaper.

<sup>9</sup> This style developed during the last decade of the nineteenth-century and the first decade of the twentieth, a later period than the one the stories are located in (the last book in Pullman's series takes place in 1882). This is of special importance in relation to the trend exhibited by these books — recreating a Victorian rhetoric and aesthetic that is not necessarily historically accurate.

<sup>10</sup> Penny dreadfuls' illustrations were mostly black and white; while they captured the impression of action and movement, their backgrounds were minimal, a marked difference from Pullman's examples.

pugilistic fashion while Mr Berry holds a long stick. The background cements the idea that this is *not* the present time: they are by the wharf, with sail boats, Tudor-style houses and chimneys in the background, all under the atmospheric glow of a lamplight (see fig. 5). These echo numerous penny dreadful illustrations. *The Wild Boys of London; or, The Children of the Night* (1866), for instance, contains an engraving of two characters about to fight, one dressed like Fred and adopting the same boxing posture (see fig. 7) (201), while in *The Poor Boys Of London; or, Driven to Crime* (1866) we find Mr Berry's double, complete with a stick and the fierce expression that marks them both as villains (see fig. 6) (61). The *Montmorency* covers, which are "antique" photographs, also combine an atmospheric "Victorian" scene with characters dressed in period costumes. The man on the cover of *Montmorency* wears a top hat and carries a walking stick. These Victorian details are complemented by, in the background, the Tower of London illuminated by gaslight but obscured by fog (see fig. 11).

Nathaniel Wolfe is depicted on the covers of Keaney's books as a Victorian working lad — in a cap, a loose-fitting shirt, and coat (see fig. 8). The night-time settings are foggy and gaslit. The Sleuth Philomel editions of Springer's *Enola Holmes* adventures depict Enola in Victorian garments and lace-up boots. She is usually walking the cobbled streets, lamp in hand (while rats sit on barrels and ledges). Horse-drawn carriages and gentlemen in top hats complete the backgrounds (see fig. 9). The original Walker Books covers of *The Agency* (discussed above) eschew characters, concentrating instead on the atmosphere. The background for *The Agency: A Spy in the House* (2010) is an old-fashioned blackened map which fades into darkness towards the edges. The style is reminiscent of Charles Booth's poverty maps (1889-1903) which described different levels of poverty in London (see fig. 3 and 4) — a topic I return to in Chapter One. Two "Victorian" objects are incorporated: a pair of women's silk gloves and an ornate worn metal key. On its re-release in September 2010 the dark outline of a Victorian-style mansion was added. The cover of the first sequel, *The Body at the Tower*, also relies on a dark outline — that of the Houses of Parliament and Big Ben. The Candlewick editions of both books do depict the book's heroine, Mary Quinn, in full Victorian garb, bonnet included, while the background is provided by typical Victorian buildings, accompanied by darkened skies and countless gaslight lamps.

These new covers align themselves with another trend that has become popular for underlining the Victorian aspect of the texts. Indeed, all these scenes qualify as “Gothic” — as in the tradition of *Dracula*, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, and *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. The cover of Hooper’s *Fallen Grace* features a youth, along with the dark outline of a cemetery with crosses and statues. The covers of Bray’s Gemma Doyle trilogy (see fig. 10) and Eagland’s *Whisper my Name* and *Wildthorn* depict young girls in lace or corsets — the latter is considered, in the twenty-first century, to be “an archetypally Gothic garment” (Spooner, *Fashioning Gothic Bodies* 16).<sup>11</sup>

The blurbs — sometimes styled in the title’s typography — are equally important to the construction of the book as a “material” portal. Each of Pullman’s front-cover illustrations is adorned with a ribbon characterising the contents as “[a] gripping mystery from the depths of Victorian London” (*The Ruby in the Smoke*) or “[a] terrifying adventure set in the back-alleys of Victorian London” (*The Shadow in the North*). Most of these works have similar formulas in their blurbs. The back cover of Lee’s *Agency* describes it as “The first book in a riveting *new Victorian* detective trilogy” (*italics mine*).<sup>12</sup> Hooper’s *Fallen Grace*’s summary emphasises the darker aspects of its Victorian settings: discussing how “Each day Grace must find a new way of earning enough money to pay the rent for the bleak cold room that she and her sister live in, and to buy them enough — just — to eat”. Bajoria’s *The Printer’s Devil* (2005) adopts a similar format, with the back cover summarising the thrills ahead:

Convicts, murderers and the shady inhabitants of the London underworld are part of daily life for 12-year-old printer’s devil, Mog Winter — after all, Mog prints their WANTED posters... But a face-to-face encounter with a real crook leads to Mog becoming enmeshed in an ingenious theft, a series of mistaken identities and a murder hunt... all connected to a recently docked ship from the Indian subcontinent, and Mog’s own mysterious past.

The twenty-first century blurbs underlining the “Victorian” aspect of these tales attempt to do so in a Victorian way. They read like the advertisements that used to be

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<sup>11</sup> As fashion historian Valerie Steele has traced in several of her books, much of the Goth subculture clothing aesthetics originate in Victorian mourning fashion. This is a sub-cultural style that is associated with teenagers, to whom high-street shops cater, selling “deconstructed Victorian blouses” (Spooner, *Contemporary Gothic* 133).

<sup>12</sup> This proves that, although *The Agency* is supposed to be made up of spies, the story is a detective fiction, which makes Mary Quinn a detective, something that is discussed in Chapter Five.

published in penny dreadfuls like *The Poor Boys of London; or, Driven to Crime* (1866) or boys' magazines such as *Bits for Boys, A journal for Young Britons* (1893). The blurb for *The Boy Rover; or, The Smuggler of the South Seas* (1866) promotes it as follows:

Comprising the most thrilling Adventures, Blood-thirsty passions, hair-breadth escapes, and desperate encounters, both by land and sea, and placing clearly and prominently before the reader the Life and History of the Youngest and most daring Smuggler that ever sailed the deep. (17)

Such features not only declare a book to be *about* the past, but suggest that the book *itself* is old. Pullman's covers imitate penny dreadfuls. A typical device is the "weathered" effect, as used by the Walker Books editions of the *Agency* stories. These have fake rubbing and fading along the covers' edges, joins, and spines, and the covers (most noticeable in *The Body at the Tower*) appear "foxed" (see fig. 3). The photographs in the covers of *Montmorency* are criss-crossed by multiples lines and cracks (see fig. 11). There are fake blotches and signs of fading on the cover of *Fallen Grace* (see fig. 12). The hardcover editions of Bray's books even come with apparently cut pages.

We see, then, how their covers, with their promise of easy access to the past, stand for the "portals" of fantasy. They imply their own authenticity. Significantly, however, they are in many respects quite unlike the real Victorian children's books. As Joyce Whalley and Tessa Chester note in *A History of Children's Book Illustration*, early books seem, by comparison with their contemporary equivalents, "dark and uninteresting" (115). The spines of early Victorian children's books were blank and the cover served merely a means to protect the pages of the text (it was not until the passing of the Education Act in 1872 that books started to be mass-produced, incorporating glossy chromolitho-printed pictures). By the end of the nineteenth century, the design of children's books was dominated by Crane, Caldecott, and Greenaway (Whalley and Chester 125). But their covers, though attractive, were very different from the ones I have just described. Greenaway's colour-printed designs, Crane's gold-blocked ornamented covers, black outline drawings, and elaborately designed motifs, and Caldecott's sometimes-muted displays are not what contemporary publishers of pseudo-Victorian young adult books have chosen to echo. As Whalley notes, it was unusual for

books to have relevant pictures on the covers, even as late as the mid-nineteenth century (123–124). As for penny dreadfuls, these cheap magazine-type publications lacked formal covers and, more often than not, their illustrations, as E.S. Turner remarks, were unrelated to the stories within (32). Today, however, as Cat Yampbell has observed, cover art is a key to the success of the books (349).

What follows is an investigation of the nature and function of young adult “Victorian” novels. This is a genre, I argue, defined by its tropes. Therefore each chapter deals with one of these defining features: the city of London, prostitutes and fallen women, the opium den, the street Arabs, detectives and criminals; while the last chapter shows how the same tropes can be used by authors to support different (and at times conflicting) ideologies. Each chapter begins with a brief historical section. Its purpose is to give a context for the development of the tropes, but also to expose the lack of historicity in the young adult texts. The next segment focuses on the characteristic fictional sources (generally Victorian) used by the authors. The final and most substantive section of each chapter treats the young adult texts, analyzing and comparing the adaptations, re-presentations and modifications entailed in their portrayal of the Victorian era. My goal, in relation to this under-studied genre, is to some extent comparable with that of Matthew Sweet’s *Inventing the Victorians* (2002). Like Sweet, I examine the misrepresentations that surround the Victorians. Isolating each of the most favoured tropes of the genre (as noted immediately above), I investigate its historical and literary origins. I then examine how it has been mediated by a range of contemporary authors. Sweet has interpreted our own period’s fascination with Victorian culture as a product of our need to “satisfy our sense of ourselves as liberated Moderns” (ix). This might seem to suggest a simple dichotomy that opposes us, free-thinking liberals, against them, the repressed Victorians. However, Sweet’s study looks at the ways the Victorians have been distorted over time, questioning if we have truly “escaped their influence” (ix). He implies such distortions arise from our need to prove how different we are from our nineteenth-century ancestors, even though their attitudes and prejudices are closer to ours than we would like them to be. As we shall see, I tend to concur. I find Sweet’s interpretation compelling vis à vis my own distinct group of texts, not least because we may infer from it a certain lack of conviction on the part of the authors, an anxiety that may account for what, as we shall see, is the confused and contradictory nature of their Victorian evocations. While these texts certainly support a

“liberated” vision in their open treatment of sex, the prevalence of strong female protagonists, and the criticism of imperial politics, to give a few examples; other aspects, such as the portrayal of the East End and its gangs of street Arabs, the demonization of the criminals and the poor, and the stereotyped depiction of foreigners, reveal their complicated relationship to Victorian ideas. We find in these authors’ work both nostalgia for and criticism of a supposed past.



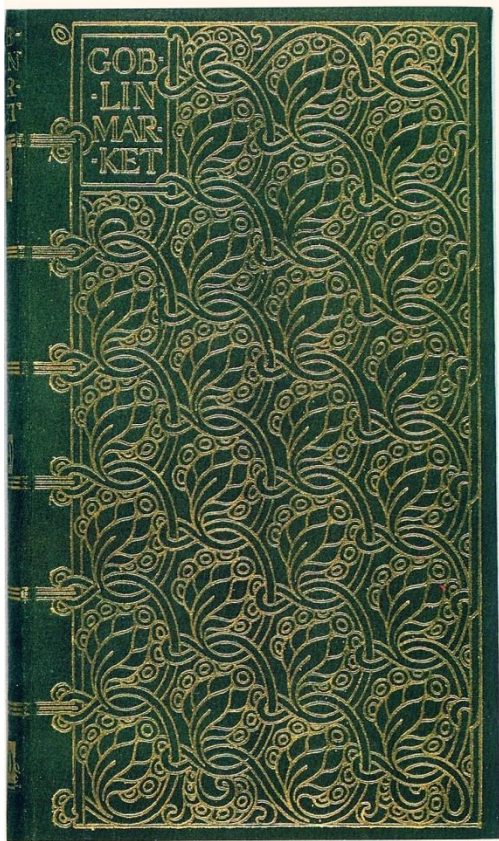
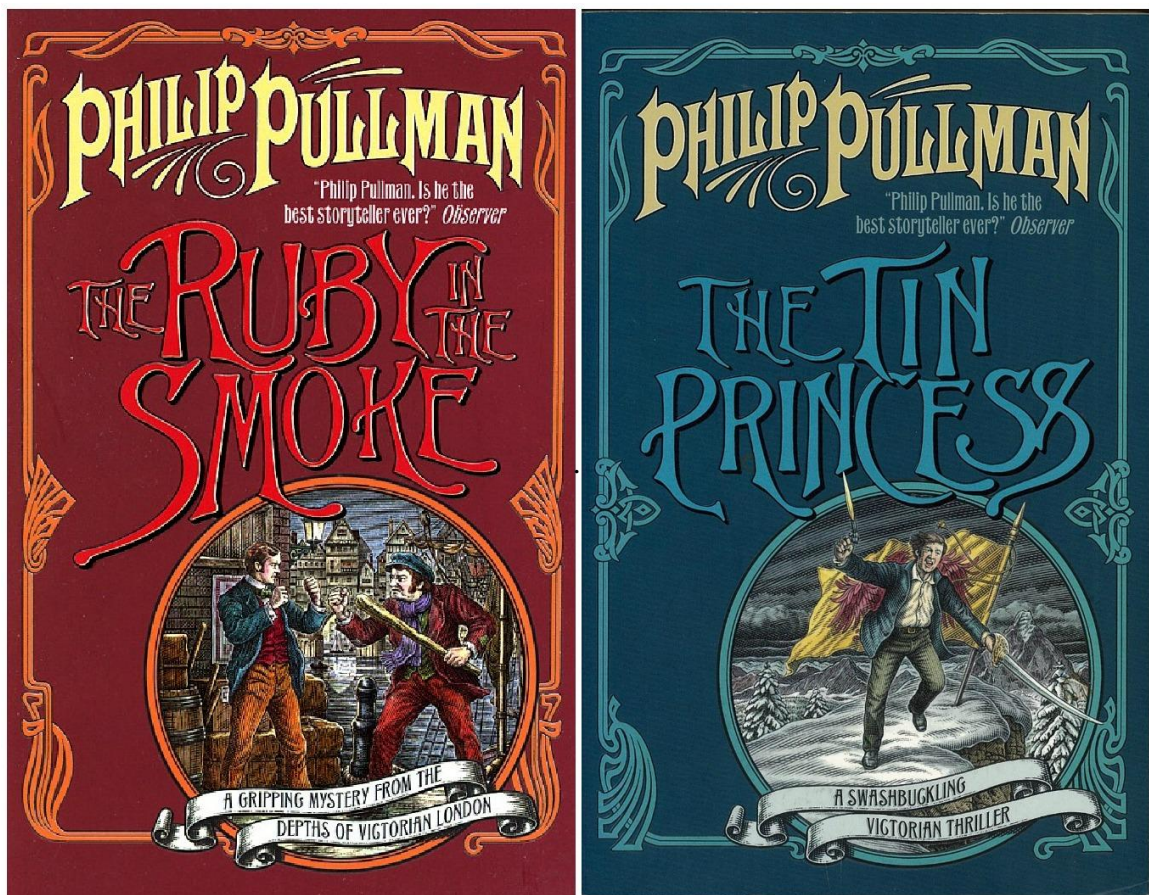


Fig. 1. Example of a Victorian cover — *Goblin Market*, 1893 (Whalley and Chester 114)

Fig. 2. Scholastic Children's Books, 2004





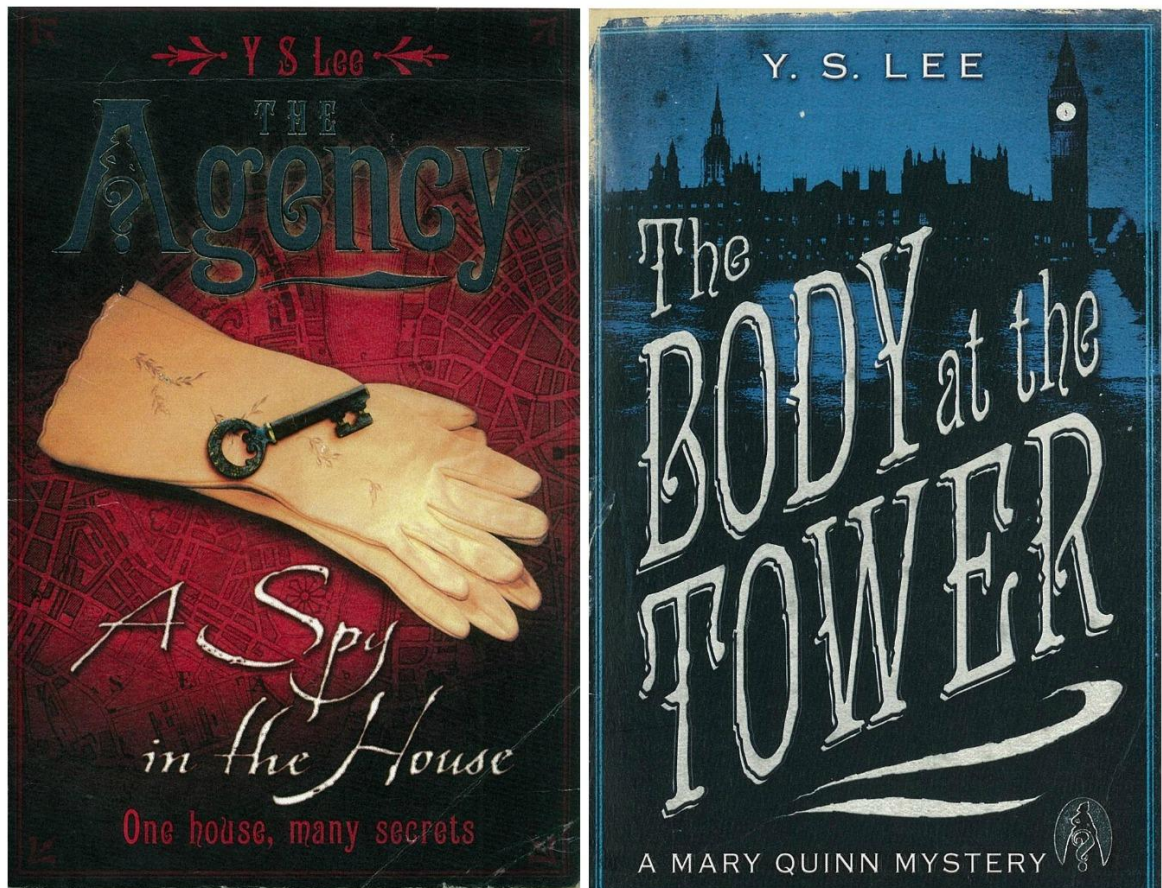
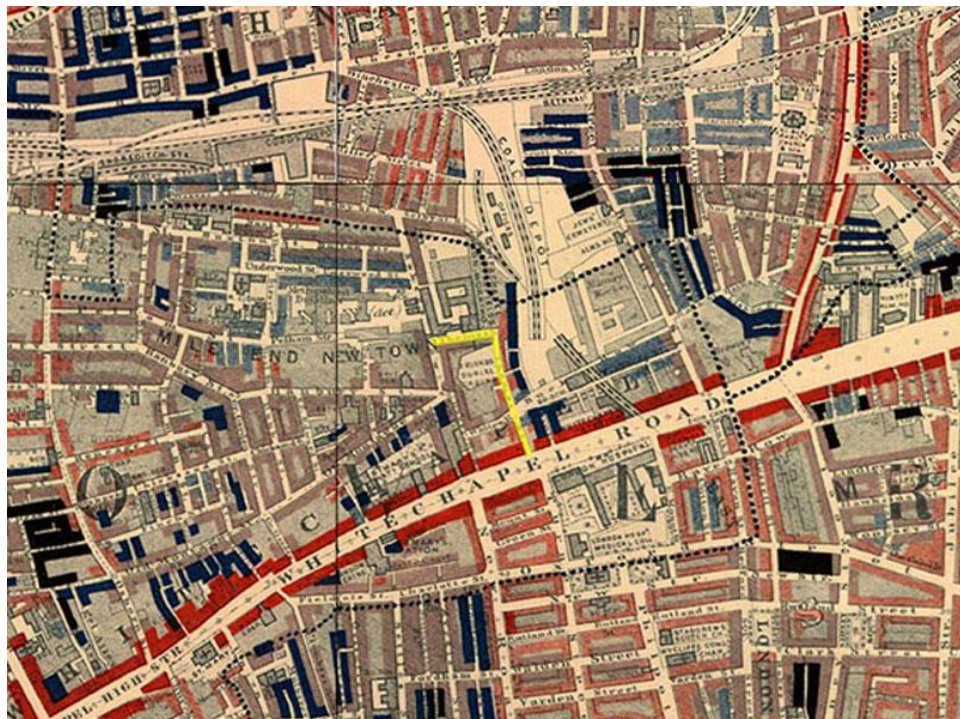


Fig. 3. Walker Books, 2010.

Fig. 4. Detail of Charles Booth's colour-coded poverty map, 1889.





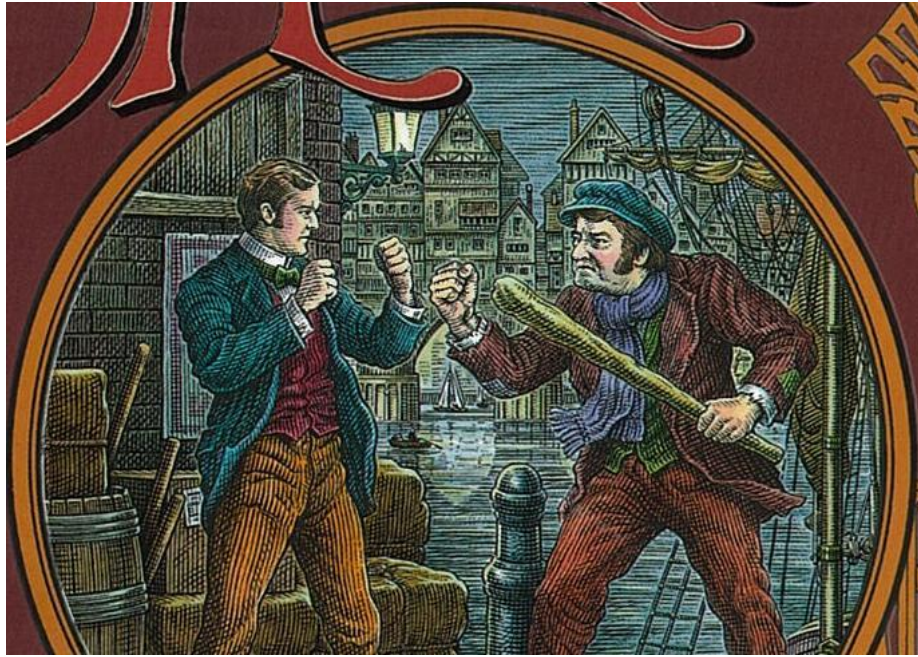


Fig. 5. *The Ruby in the Smoke*. Scholastic, 2004.



Fig. 7. 1866 Penny dreadful illustration (*Wild Boys* 201).



Fig. 6. 1866 Penny dreadful illustration (*Poor Boys* 61)



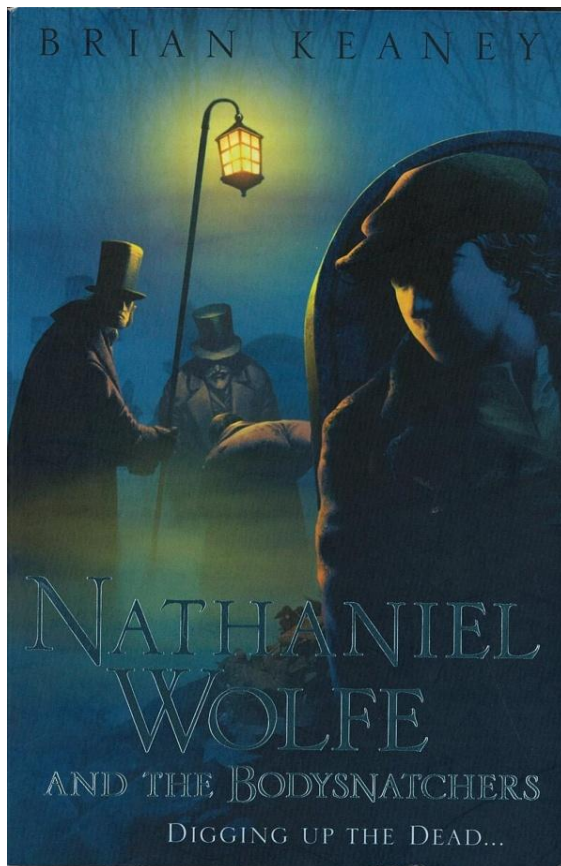
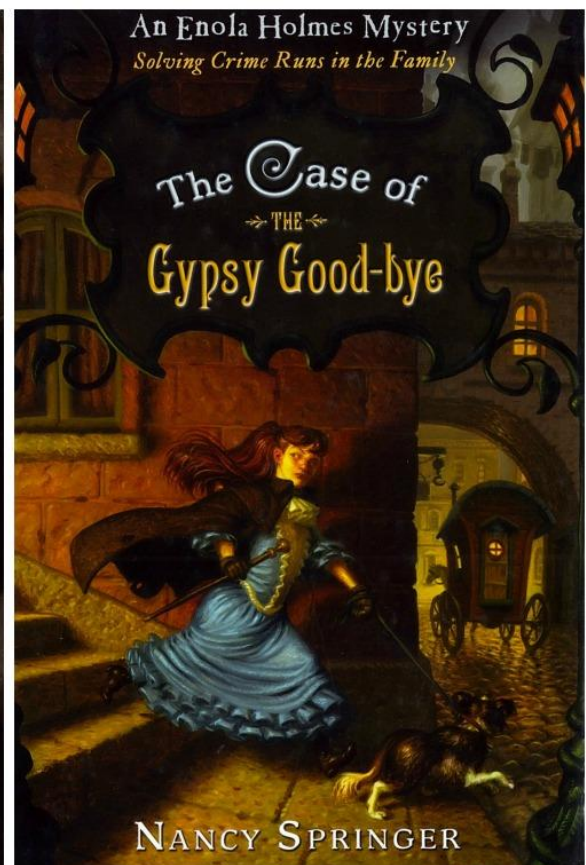
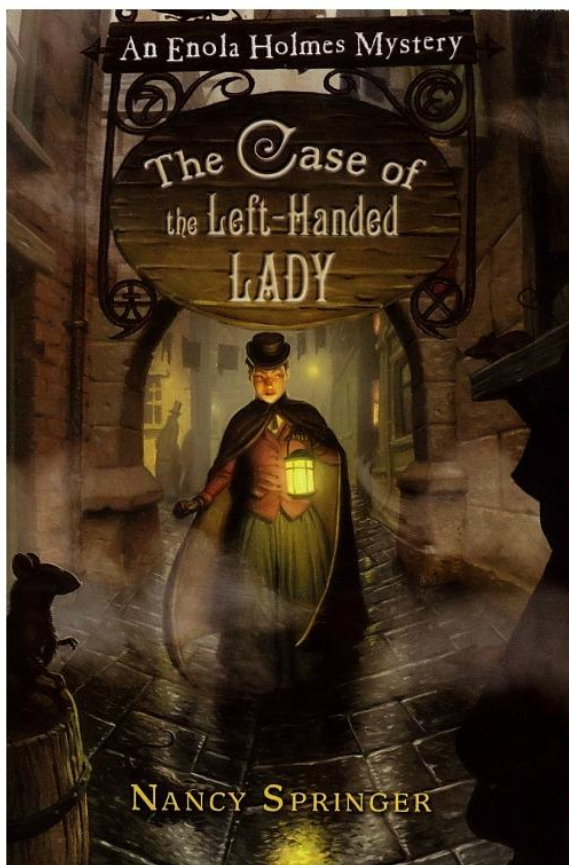


Fig. 8. Orchard Books, 2009.

Fig. 9. Philomel, 2007 and 2010.





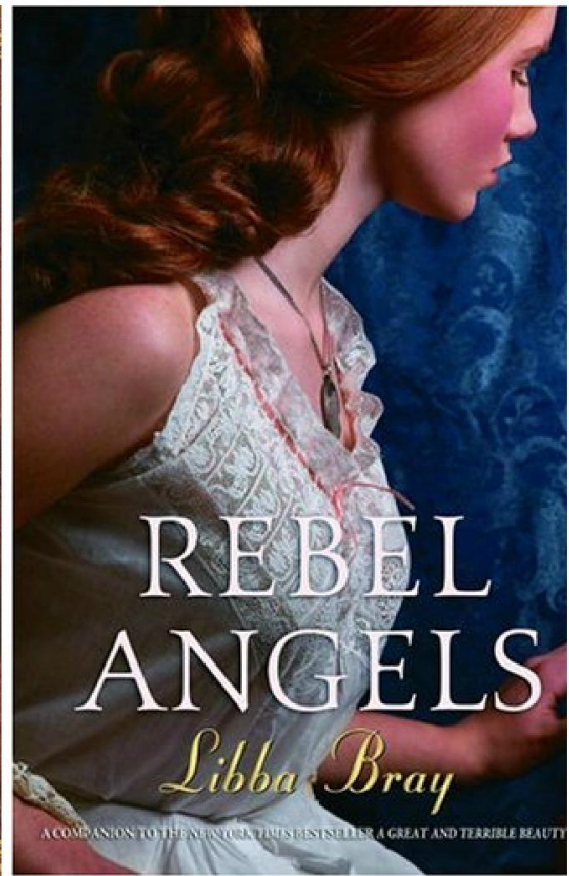
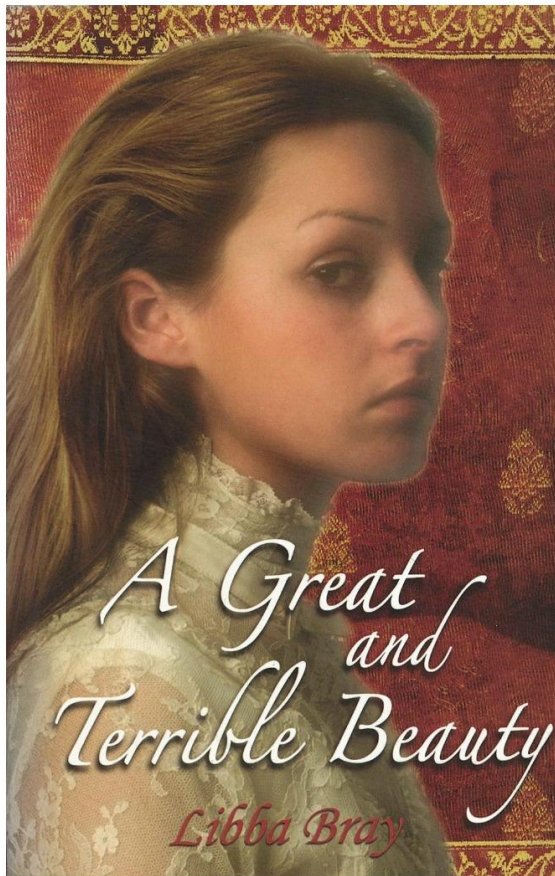
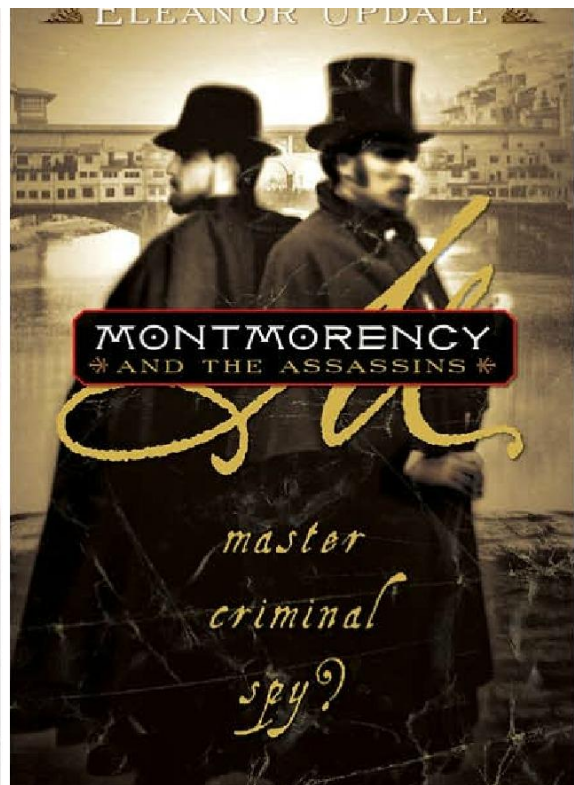
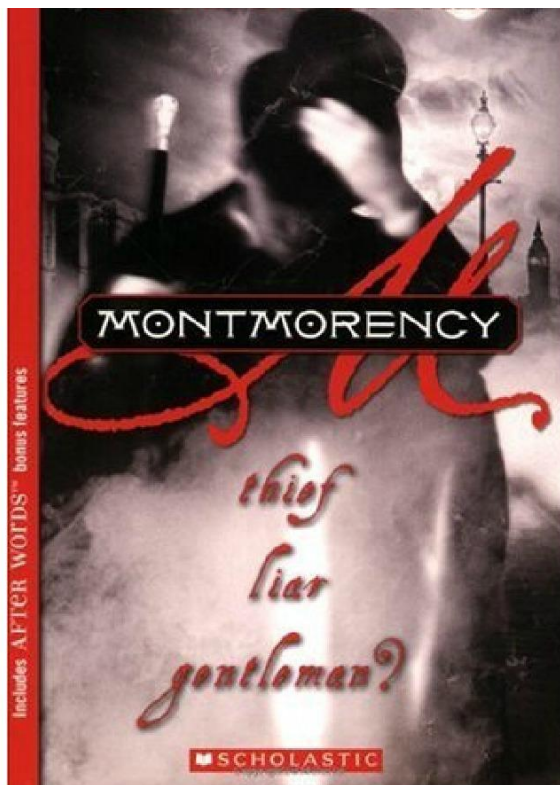


Fig. 10. Simon & Schuster, 2005.

Fig. 11. Scholastics, 2008.



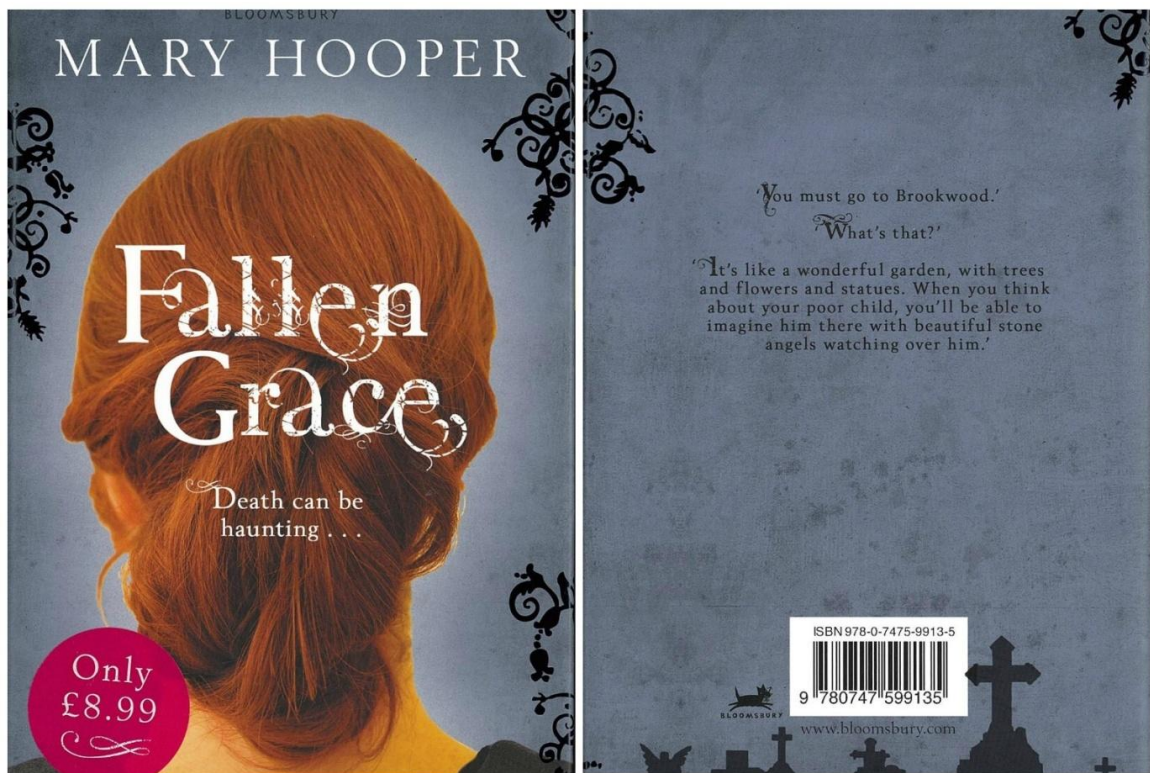


Fig. 12. Bloomsbury, 2010.

## CHAPTER ONE

### LONDON WITHIN LONDON: VICTORIAN SPACES WITHIN CONTEMPORARY TEXTS

London goes beyond any boundary or convention. It contains every wish or word ever spoken, every action or gesture ever made, every harsh or noble statement ever expressed. It is illimitable. It is Infinite London. (Ackroyd 778)

Victorian London is the background for all the modern texts under study here; indeed the metropolis is the main setting in almost every relevant text I have encountered to date. In order to reconstruct the city, these authors borrow the tropes of Victorian fiction and social investigation, both imbued with the ideologies of the era. The image that emerges is that of a city split into East and West. While the adventures take place in the gloomy, labyrinthine, and monstrous East End, the happy endings lead most characters away from it, towards the West. In this manner, the authors offer a simplified version of a Victorian perception. They polarize London, perpetuate stereotypes and (most interestingly) avoid challenging social divisions.

#### **London: The Victorian City**

London's history spans many millennia. It is therefore no surprise it has earned itself its own biographies. Peter Ackroyd's *London: the Biography* (2001) treats it as a living entity. Such legendary status is not new. As early as the fifth century, Dunbar wrote of the "towne of townes", London the "floure of Cities all" (178). Blake wrote "I behold Babylon in the opening streets of London" (*Blake: the Complete Poems* 795), and for Benjamin Disraeli, too, it was "a Modern Babylon", "a city where everything has been destroyed, and where nothing has decayed" (*Tancred* 378). It was similarly hell-like for W.B. Yeats, who described it as a place where "the souls of the lost are compelled to walk through its streets perpetually" (81–82). More than a mere collection of buildings and inhabitants, London is a timeless place in which past and present join into (as Ackroyd put it) "a hard and almost solid mass" (561). Part of that past is visible today in its buildings and streets, in its people and institutions, forged during Queen Victoria's rule. Under her reign, the city became a symbol of human power and achievement, as displayed in The Great Exhibition of 1851. This international display of industrial technologies and designs was held in an iron-and-glass structure — dubbed



the “Crystal Palace” — constructed for this sole purpose. Visited by almost six million visitors from around the world, it was a remarkable feat of architecture, its size and its grandiose shape illustrative of the status of Victorian London. In the nineteenth century, London came to be considered the greatest city on earth; the economic, political, and cultural centre of an empire commanding four hundred million people across the globe. It carried the promise of progress, its streets alive with the century’s latest technology. Railways, buses, subways, cars, sewers, telegrams, telephones, and gas and electric lights all crossed and re-crossed the city, ripping it apart only to rebuild it.

Although London represented Western civilization’s advancement and triumph, progress was not without a cost. Victorian “social explorers” such as Henry Mayhew, James Greenwood, and Blanchard Jerrold, among others, undertook studies of the city’s less glamorous sites — the places inhabited by the poor and destitute, whose labour was essential to London’s existence.<sup>13</sup> Such accounts complete the picture of a city that, by the end of the century, suffered a severe “split personality”. To the West were St Paul’s Cathedral, Westminster, Buckingham Palace, gardens, parks, and terraces — the territory where the noble and wealthy dwelled. To the East were boroughs and districts such as Spitalfields, Whitechapel, Lambeth, Wapping, and the Bluegate Fields slums with lodging houses such as Rat’s Castle<sup>14</sup> — “terra incognita”, the narrow streets and courts inhabited by criminals and the “unclassable poor” (Jerrold 181).

### **The Underworld: The Social Explorers of the East**

This is London, this, and the East End. (Jerrold 96)

During the Victorian era, London became the world’s political and financial capital (Ackroyd 573), as well as its largest city. Its population went from about one million at the beginning of the century to six and a half by the end (Codrington 576). Its infrastructure could barely cope with such exponential growth. As housing and health

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<sup>13</sup> Although this will be mentioned later, the literature of social exploration was, in its most basic form, the story of one person from a higher social circle — journalist, philanthropist, writer — who detailed their “journey into an alien culture” (Keating 13), constituted by a lower class.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Rat’s Castle’ was a lodging house in a slum, featured in George W.M. Reynolds’ *The Mysteries of London* (1844) as well as in Dickens’s “On duty with Inspector Field” (1850). It was north of New Oxford Street, near Bloomsbury Street. The collection of lodging houses “were known as the Rookery, and the general area was called the Holy Land” (Hepburn 33).



issues multiplied, slums continued to grow near the dock areas and in the East End, where the working classes and the poor faced overcrowding and highly unsanitary conditions. Its population was commonly perceived as divided. Future Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli expressed this in his political novels. In *Sybil* (1845) he characterized the rich and the poor as:

Two nations; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones ... who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws.  
(68–9)

The distinctions between bourgeoisie and proletariat in Karl Marx and Fredrick Engel's *Communist Manifesto* (1848) were to echo Disraeli.

Prompted by a mixture of humanitarianism and reactionary fear (of socialism and anarchism), the well-to-do became fascinated by the conditions of the working classes. Their concern produced the genre of “social exploration”. Writers equated the slums with remote colonies, fuelling the fad of “slumming” which reached its height in the 1880s (Koven 15). West Enders toured the East End to witness the lives of the poor.<sup>15</sup>

English social researcher Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851-61) is subtitled a “Cyclopaedia of the Condition and Earnings of Those that *Will* Work, Those that *Cannot* Work and Those That *Will Not* Work”. Mayhew's work is full of what might be described as “novelistic” or even folk-tale exaggeration. The flower girls of Drury Lane are “chiefly the offspring of Irish parents ... who are the noisiest, the most pugnacious, unprincipled and reckless part of the population of London” (4: 238). Around Lambeth, young thieves “steal forth from their haunts, with keen roguish eye” (4: 277). Child stripping (the theft of clothing from the back of well-dressed children) was done by “old debauched drunken hags” (4: 281).

The tastes and activities of the lower classes are also described subjectively. These are people who consider rat-killing a favourite sport (1: 6); people that cannot make sense of *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*; people who consider fighting a necessary part of

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<sup>15</sup> As Seth Koven explains, such labels as “poor” and “well-to-do” do not express the heterogeneity of both sides — politicians; clergymen's children; merchants on one side, with skilled artisans and unemployed labourers on the other. However, the terms are useful in so far as they “signal the social distance — and contemporaries' own perception of that distance” (11) that was key to slumming.

both boys' *and* girls' educations (1: 15). Moreover, Mayhew claims they were revolutionaries — “nearly all chartists”,<sup>16</sup> whose ignorance and impulsiveness makes them a “dangerous” class (1: 20).

As already noted, the East End was represented as a foreign territory. In 1866, the Pall Mall Gazette published James Greenwood's “A night in a workhouse” articles. Greenwood disguised himself as a “casual” in order to spend a night in a London workhouse, supposedly guaranteeing the authenticity of his perspective. This scheme quickly became a popular part of the genre: Blanchard Jerrold and Gustave Doré employed it for their travelogue, *London* (1872), significantly sub-titled *a Pilgrimage*. Jerrold's humanitarianism (and fear of revolution) is coloured by his notion of the East End as a foreign place, where, therefore, Westerners are foreign — “as strange and amusing as Chinamen”. “We were”, Jerrold wrote, “spies upon them; men of better luck whom they were bound to envy, and whose mere presence roused the rebel in them” (176). When they leave “familiar London” (166) to “plunge into a maze of courts and narrow streets” (171), they are like other “adventurous people [who] visit with as much ceremony and provision of protection as travellers across Finchley Common used, in the middle of last century” (166). Jerrold recalls the adventure stories of writers like R. M. Ballantyne. Rough clothes, two or three companions — able to stand the horrors ahead — and an “intelligent and fearless” guide are necessary for the enterprise (166).<sup>17</sup> Jerrold's poor are “tattered and tired out creatures” (167), “black objects against the deep gloom” (128), and when card-players “stare, leer, dig at each other in the ribs”, they “fold their *black* hands ... and *grunt* and *growl*” (171, italics mine). As Jerrold sees it, most will become criminals. Andrew Mearns's *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London: An Inquiry into the Condition of the Abject Poor* (1883), exemplifies the Victorian association of poverty with moral decay: “seething in the very centre of our great cities, concealed by the thinnest crust of civilization and decency, is a vast mass of moral corruption, of heart-breaking misery and absolute godlessness” (1).

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<sup>16</sup> Chartism was especially strong amongst working people between 1838 and 1858 (Brown 1). According to some historians, later on its name evoked “the wildest hopes and worst fears, like Bolshevism in a later age” (Harrison 261).

<sup>17</sup> In her study of Dickens and empire, Grace Moore discusses this account as absurd, “evocative of Edward Said's descriptions in *Orientalism* of T.E. Lawrence disguising himself as an Arab” and wonders to what extent Jerrold's disguise fooled the East End inhabitants: “For Jerrold, the journey into the nether world sheds the ‘pilgrimage’ characteristics boasted by the title of his work and instead seems to degenerate into a child's game of dressing-up” (39).

British journalist W. T. Stead published an explosive exposé of child prostitution in *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon* (1885) — positing the East End as its home.

The notion of London as divided on so many grounds is vividly embodied by Charles Booth's mammoth work *Life and Labour of the People in London* (1889). Booth mapped London's levels of poverty and wealth, colour coding from the upper middle classes to the semi-criminals.<sup>18</sup> Salvation Army founder William Booth famously alluded to Henry M. Stanley's travelogue in Africa, in his own title *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (1890).<sup>19</sup> Jack London's *The People of the Abyss* (1903) placed East Enders at a metaphorical depth — as illustrated by a chapter called "The Descent". Thomas Holmes in *London's Underworld* (1912) focuses on the caves and dens of "the mysterious world below the line" to which those who have "descended from the Upper World ... live out strange lives, or die early deaths" (2).<sup>20</sup>

If the inhabitants of the East End were represented as foreign, or even demonic, their habitation became emblematic of this supposed nature.<sup>21</sup> The stunted, twisted, and closely-knit alleyways reflected the degeneration and deformity of its inhabitants. Such portrayals were not only part of the ostensibly factual "social exploration" texts of the time, but also a sometimes major part of contemporary fiction.

### **"London, that great cesspool": The City in Victorian Literature**

The sociological studies discussed above had much in common with the works of fiction to which I now turn.

As a journalist, Charles Dickens treated the conditions of orphans and prostitutes, the New Poor Law (1834), the workhouses, and the unsanitary circumstances of the underprivileged — and his fiction explored the same issues. How much his writing influenced the social explorers may be judged from Jerrold and Doré's *A Pilgrimage*. Dickens's fictional characters frequently enter Jerrold and Doré's "real" London. In a chapter dedicated to the Derby, Jerrold remarks: "it is Dickens' children you meet ... All the company of Pickwick — Sam Weller and his father, a hundred

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<sup>18</sup> It started as one volume on the East End in 1889, then was extended to a second on poverty in London, and ended up as seventeen volumes published in 1902–1903.

<sup>19</sup> Subtitled *The Quest, Rescue, and Retreat of Emin, Governor of Equatoria* (1890).

<sup>20</sup> Ironically, Holmes only undertook this study of the slum life in the East End after a report he was to write on the conditions in South Africa was cancelled.

<sup>21</sup> Given the social consequences of modernisation, it is not surprising that affected areas came to seem like outposts of the empire (Koven 21).

times” (72), while “Pushing through the crowd, nimble, silent and unquiet-eyed, Mr. Fagin’s pupils are shadow moving in all directions” (73). When they visit Newgate prison, he observes that those locked up there are “humble imitators of Mr. Micawber, who thought that something must turn up in a cathedral city” (157).<sup>22</sup>

Dickens’s *Oliver Twist* was an ur-text in that its depiction of East London became a blueprint. When Oliver is guided by “the Artful Dodger” to Fagin’s dominion, “[a] dirtier or more wretched place he had never seen. The street was very narrow and muddy, and the air was impregnated with filthy odours” (103). Screaming children crawl in and out of doors, while in the surrounding abodes and public-houses, drunken men and women are “positively wallowing in filth” (103). The Jew’s dwelling is a “dismal and dreary” (178) collection of rooms, walls blackened by age and dirt (105), with mouldering shutters, barred windows, spiders, and mice; all submerged in darkness but for light coming through a few holes, making it gloomier and filling the place with “strange shadows” (178). These people are considered intrinsically decadent, as evidenced by Oliver’s conclusion that the house that Fagin occupies had once been “handsome” and “quite gay” when it belonged to “*better people*” (178, italics mine).

These descriptions slowly build up to the novel’s climax: Jacob’s Island. Near the Thames, where the dirtiest and blackest buildings and vessels lie, “there exists the filthiest, the strangest, the most extraordinary of the many localities that are hidden in London, wholly unknown, even by name, to the great mass of its inhabitants” (442). Such places are so wholly remote that, although they are part of the city, they remain unnamed. Visitors must “penetrate through a maze of close, narrow, and muddy streets, thronged by the roughest and poorest of waterside people” (442).

Dickens’s London remained unchanged thirty-three years later, in *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870). As Philip Collins explains, Dickens had acquired an image of London in childhood that did not truly evolve with the times (538); the Embankment, the underground railway, and the commuter’s train are mostly absent from his writing. “[T]he London of his novels”, then, “is smaller than the London he knew; his fictional London did not expand as the actuality did” (546). Dickens’s static image of London was still evoked by writers in the late nineteenth century. Oscar Wilde’s works, thus,

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<sup>22</sup> Equally, there are many examples of tourists who arrived in London and also looked at the city through Dickens’s eyes, finding “whole processions” of his characters (Collins 551).

contain similar, if less expansive, descriptions of the East End. In *Lord Arthur Savile's Crime* (1891), Lord Arthur walks into "narrow, shameful alleys ... From a dark courtyard came a sound of oaths and blows, followed by shrill screams, and, huddled upon a damp doorstep, he saw the crookbacked forms of poverty and old ... Were these children of sin and misery predestined to their end...?" (36). In *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891), the title character wanders the same streets once again.<sup>23</sup> As he leaves Sibyl Vane:

He remembered wandering through dimly-lit streets, past gaunt, black-shadowed archways and evil-looking houses. Women with hoarse voices and harsh laughter had called after him. Drunkards had reeled by cursing, and chattering to themselves like monstrous apes. He had seen grotesque children huddled upon door-steps, and heard shrieks and oaths from gloomy courts. (75)

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* stories (1887-1927) also describe the city in Dickensian terms. Watson talks of "that great cesspool into which all the loungers and idlers of the Empire are irresistibly drained" (15). More than that, the London of the detective's adventures is a gothicised space, a collection of foggy, dimly gas-lit streets. Down the Strand, where the lamps are but "misty splotches of diffused light" (98), the city's "dense ... swarm of humanity" (245) is transformed into "something eerie and ghostlike" (98). Watson observes how "A thick fog rolled down between the lines of dun-coloured houses, and the opposing windows loomed like dark, shapeless blurs through the heavy-yellow wreaths" (317). Doyle's short story *The Case of Lady Sannox* (1893) also describes the dwellings of the poor in stereotypical terms. His character visits a "mean-looking house in a narrow and sordid street ... The door ... was blotched and discoloured, and a faint light in the fan pane above it served to show the dust and the grime which covered it" (147).

Robert L. Stevenson picks up on this London aesthetic in *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886). Characters walk "through wider labyrinths of lamp-lighted city" (650), while much of the narrative takes place "at night under the face of the fogged city moon" (651). Indeed, the fog is a haunting element in the text: rolling, sleeping, and laying thickly over London, muffling its sounds. The East, under its dim light, is "a district of some city in a nightmare" (657).

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<sup>23</sup> Literality: as Roger Luckhurst points out, both works are referring to the same area (269).

George Gissing continues in the same tradition. In *The Netherworld* (1889), a train advances into “the pest-stricken regions of East London”, which is “a city of the damned” (164). In Arthur Machen’s *The Great God Pan* (1894), the narrator contemplates how London nights are “black with fog, and raw with frost” (191). Characters wander the dimly lit streets of Soho, the “obscure mazes and byways of London life” (197), where “the houses are old enough to be mean and dreary, but not old enough to be quaint” (204). Arthur Morrison’s *A Child of the Jago* (1896) is set in the Old Nichol Street Rookery that was gone by the time Morrison was writing. The place has its own smell — “a close, mingled stink” (45) — and is a labyrinthine collection of decrepit buildings and degenerate people, mostly referred to as rats (140, 171, 191). Real vermin are also plentiful in a slum that “for one hundred years the blackest pit in London, lay and festered” (45). When the titular character of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) moves to the “mighty” (27), “teeming” (188) London, his abode, Carfax — a gloomy estate with rust-eaten gates and a deep, dark pond (30) — is located in the East side (31).

These are some of the most popular renditions of London within Victorian literature. The model was imitated and disseminated through many other works, including the numerous penny dreadfuls printed during Queen Victoria’s reign. These helped cement in popular imagination what has now become “Victorian London” — a Dante-esque world of seemingly eternal night.<sup>24</sup> Even the “new realism” of the *fin de siècle* narratives of Gissing and Morrison continue (as Dryden notes) to associate metropolitan decay with moral and social decline (7), and to represent the East as a foreign territory as far as the heroes — Dorian Gray, Sherlock Holmes, Dr Jekyll — are concerned.

The East, particularly in its labyrinthine manifestations, was persistently associated with crime. As Franco Moretti explains, in “stories of crime, of criminals, like *Oliver Twist* ... the metaphor of the labyrinth ... returns time and again whenever the story approaches the dangerous classes of Fagin and company” (84). As evident from both non-fictional and fictional accounts, the labyrinth trope had indeed become increasingly prominent during the nineteenth century. It provided what Robert Mighall calls a “model for organizing a dichotomous city and for suggesting that secrets and

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<sup>24</sup> Gustave Doré had previously worked (1857) on illustrations for Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. According to Jules Zanger, Doré’s illustrations for *Pilgrimage* were “as horrifying as any he did for his edition of Dante’s *Inferno*” (Zanger 81).

mysteries may lurk in its darker recesses” (32). De Quincey illustrates the point, as he describes “such knotty problems of alleys ... such enigmatical entries, and such sphinx's riddles of streets without obvious outlets or thoroughfares” in the East (182). His narrator almost believes himself to be “the first discoverer of some of these *terrae incognitae*”, doubting whether they had yet been laid down in “the modern charts of London” (182). The fictional mazes and dark recesses of the East and the world below invite interpretation as projections of the repressed anxieties of the middle-class.

### **Narrow Courtyards and Dark Alleys: The Resurrection of Victorian London**

Franco Moretti argues in his *Atlas of the European Novel* (1998) that “[c]ities can be very random environments ... and novels protect their readers from randomness by reducing it” (105). Victorian “social exploration” texts and fictional works certainly did this, putting forward a very precise Victorian London aesthetic. Dickens, Wilde, Conan Doyle, and Stevenson — among so many others — deliver a metropolitan landscape that contains the open and clear spaces of the West shadowed by the gothicised regions of the East, unknown and unnameable.

It is this “reduced” Victorian London that is brought back to life in most contemporary young adult texts. The West, depicted mostly from indoors, barely features. What is taken to be most representative of the city during the nineteenth century is an East built, as it were, out of the torn pages of Victorian novels.

#### *Philip Pullman's Sally Lockhart: Gripping Mysteries from the Depths of Victorian London*

Most of the adventures in Phillip Pullman's *Sally Lockhart* quartet (1985-1994) take place in a Victorian London which focuses more frequently and intently upon the East, invoking the familiar names of Wapping, Limehouse, Whitechapel, and Spitalfields. Pullman's version of the area recalls its Victorian stereotypes — dirty narrow alleys filled by literal and figurative rats. Indeed, there is rubbish and stinking water on the cobbled streets of the East End (*The Ruby in the Smoke* 87). Croke's Court is “crowded and villainous”; while Seven Dials is “sordid and metropolitan” (105). In addition, Hangman's Wharf has an industrial aspect, its “projecting beams” (16) reminiscent of the “thrusting” chambers (443) of Dickens's Jacob's Island:

A district of docks and warehouses, of crumbling tenements and rat-haunted alleys, of narrow streets where the only doors are at first-floor level, surmounted by crude projecting beams and ropes and pulleys. The blind brick walls at pavement level and the brutal-looking apparatus above give the place the air of some hideous dungeon from a nightmare, while the light, filtered and dulled by the grime in the air, seems to come from a long way off — as if through a high window set with bars. (16)

Rats are a standard feature of London scenes in penny dreadfuls.<sup>25</sup> In *The Poor Boys of London; or, Driven to Crime* (1866), the detective Richard Grant, locked in a cellar adjoining the sewers, faces “huge”, “monstrous” water rats, “brutes” with “fearful eyes glaring ravenously upon him” (45). Dickens describes Fagin as having fangs “as should have been a ... rat’s” (417), while Arthur Morrison’s *A Child of the Jago* (1896) also uses the rat as a metaphor for the inhabitants of the slums:

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. (171)

Pullman calls Croke’s Court a “warren”, and, on his first appearance, Paddy, leader of the mudlarks, makes “a quick, scuttling sound like a rat” (*Ruby* 105). Jim visits a labyrinthine yard in Lambeth, out of which “[f]aces peered at him from the gloom — wizened ones like elderly rats” (*Shadow* 91).

However, there is more than just rats under the city. Discussing London’s sewers, the narrator explains how they work and talks about the underground rivers that feed into them. These “old rivers that laced subterraneously through London” are “known and mapped and accounted for” (*Tiger* 283–4), but:

... in the older parts of the city there were dozens of springs and streams that had been completely forgotten ... And along ... there were hundreds — maybe

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<sup>25</sup> How much rats have become associated with the period is evident from the inside front cover flap of Nancy Springer’s first *Enola Holmes* book, which mentions “Victorian London’s rat-infested streets”.



thousands — of ancient sewers, some blocked and crumbling, others still just flowing, but all of them crusted with filth and slime and alive with frogs and rats and eels. (284)

These forgotten waterways bring to mind De Quincey's uncharted territories, the "springs and streams" echoing the "alleys" and "passageways" Victorian writings situated in the East. Being "filthy" and "crumbling", they are like the tenements above. These waterways are located in the "older" parts of the city, coincidentally where most slums are, since — as previously mentioned — the architecture of the poorer neighbourhoods was left untouched by nineteenth-century progress.

This London is not limited to the grittier parts, as Pullman provides a broader map of the metropolis in an effort to "enlarge" Victorian London — and to accommodate his particular contemporary vision.

London's geography emerges gradually as Sally grows older. In *The Ruby in the Smoke* (1985) and *The Shadow in the North* (1988), Pullman depicts the East in conventional terms. In *The Tiger in the Well* (1991), however, we are offered a different perspective in which Charles Booth's colours are blended together. Beautiful buildings can be found among filthier tenements and, as Sally walks the streets of Lambeth (a typical East location), the scene expands:

Long terraces of mean little dwellings, railway bridges, a prison, a hospital, chapels, a grand square of elegant eighteenth-century houses, an engineering works, a market, a workhouse, a theatre, houses, houses, houses; a cricket ground, a gas works, a brewery, a stable, a builder's yard, a railways station, a school; grim blocks of artisans' dwellings, more houses, an asylum for the blind, a printing works ... (121)<sup>26</sup>

The infamous Soho is imbued with a similar positive energy. Though "dingy, noisy, smelly, and decidedly un-genteel", it is also "lively, cosmopolitan and fascinating" (54).

As for Pullman's West, it is not reserved for the upper class, although the rich do drive around Hyde Park to be noticed (*Shadow* 203), and members of the Parliament (like Lord Wytham) keep house in Mayfair. Sally's first house, the Garland's "shabby

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<sup>26</sup> Where most authors depicted only the metaphorical and literal night, Pullman attempts to show some activity under daylight.

little place” (*Ruby* 64), is also located in the West — on Burton Street, which is in a quiet row of “shops and houses not far from the British Museum” (*Shadow* 22). Unlike Dickens’s London, Pullman’s city observes change and expansion: Telegraph Road, in Clapham “[edges] the country aside as the city spread outwards” (*Tiger* 76). Clapham is a modest middle-class neighbourhood with rows of twin terraced houses “not far from the common”, where clerks, small businessmen, and shopkeepers live (76).

Even the East End, with its filth and rats, is more than just an atmospheric setting for the narrative. As Sally grows older, there is a shift from the typical squalor of the East to the industrial economy responsible for its origin — a situation that reaches a breaking point in *Tiger*, mirrored by the literal breaching of one of the city’s underground rivers. This subterranean area contains mapped and unmapped spaces, but it is the latter that Pullman concentrates on. Significantly — and unlike in Victorian literature — these spaces, these sewers and rivers, are never referred to as the “underworld”, which has negative connotations.

Pullman weaves one of these “lost rivers” into the fabric of his third novel, the Blackbourne which cuts through London, from North to South, to end in the Thames, marking the East/West divide. The narrator pauses to give “historical” details: the river originates in the North “where there had once been a monastery, but which by Sally’s time was occupied by a pickle factory” (*Tiger* 284). Pullman’s account of the city — like Ackroyd’s — presents a London made of layers of compressed history over which people walk every day. This is evident in the narrator’s discussion of Fournier Square, part of Spitalfields. If it were cleared up, “you could people it with perukes and swords and three-cornered hats and sedan chairs, and if the great Dr Johnson came back ... he’d never know the difference” (200). Following Ackroyd’s model, Pullman gives the reader the sense that London is populated not only by its contemporary architecture, but also by the ghost of a past present in its very bricks. Sally might already be in the past for the reader, but history goes further back than that. This is important because this historical perspective is built up and used to create a sense of how long certain parts of the city, together with its inhabitants, have been neglected. Thus blame is not exclusively put on the nineteenth century, and nor is it limited to the past. Accordingly, the river’s filthiness is not presented as exclusively the product of the Victorian era and its poor. It is with a certain amount of contemporary environmental concern — which makes the narrative’s *neo*-Victorian construction more evident — that the Blackbourne’s situation is discussed:

By the thirteenth century it was already an open sewer, flowing not only with household wastes, dead dogs, and so on, but also with the by-products of paper-mills, tanneries and soap-boilers along the banks, so that Blackbourne water became a synonym for unspeakable filthiness ... [a] putrid swamp. Soon after that it was built over again, and forgotten. But it still ran. The forgotten sewers still emptied their filth into it; and the various abominations that had trickled into it since then had made it no sweeter. (*Tiger* 284)

The “abominations” that continue to pollute the river are mainly industrial waste: blood from a slaughterhouse in Stepney and waste chemicals from dye-works in Shoreditch, as well as the remains of the plague victims of 1665. The resulting combination is a nauseating mixture that is working, slowly scouring “away ancient mortar and lime and cement” in crumbling cellars (285). This description is similar to Morrison’s *Jago*, which as mentioned, is also a force that is lying and festering. Pullman leaves this “powerful brew” (285) in the background while the plot advances, only to bring it out at a crucial point.

Meanwhile, this literally subversive underground activity is mirrored by the action above ground. Sally is a financial consultant, but the story’s villain — the Tzaddik — forces her to flee her comfortable home in Twickenham. She then decides the best place to hide is London. Her journey into “crowded anonymity” (152) takes her to Whitechapel Road in the East. Alone with her child, and with no maids to help her, Sally has to negotiate London on her own: walk its streets, take buses, find lodgings, wash her own clothes and care for her child. She is initially afraid, sitting still, holding her daughter close as they get to the East End (182), which seems to be the last frontier — the driver announces they “don’t go no further. This is the end of the line” (183). Out of necessity, Sally starts sharing the experiences of the East End inhabitants: hungry, homeless, and without money, she ends up at a pawnbroker’s, surrounded by “the smell of stale clothes and unwashed bodies” of those selling “pitiful things like saucepans and shoes” (184). At the beginning, the two wander “like tourists” (186) under the faint glow of the streetlamps among the typical East End imagery of Victorian literature: drunken men, gangs of children, shadowy benches and doorways. But soon Sally discovers that shabby houses can be clean and inhabited by hard-working people who are suffering: sick prostitutes, battered wives, abused

children, unemployed men.<sup>27</sup> When she sees a little girl, naked from the waist down, aged like an “elderly monkey” (208) and standing in a lake of filth, Sally is faced with what her daughter could be if circumstances were different.<sup>28</sup> She sees underpaid people working in cramped sweatshops making matches for a company she and her clients own shares of (234). This forces her to question her own actions, to realize that the squalid reality of the East End is produced by the luxuries she and others enjoy in other parts of the city. In this manner, Sally’s insight echoes Disraeli’s and Jerrold’s comments on the twisted symbiotic relationship between East and West.

The Tzaddik is placed in a similar position to Sally, although, since he is a villain, he is not only aware of the disparity, but contributes to deepen it. He lives in a beautiful brick house in a corner of Spitalfields and conducts several profitable businesses in the East, exploiting immigrants and running both gambling and prostitution operations. It is in his basement that the narrative discourse merges the East streets, the sewers, and London’s secret rivers for *Tiger’s* climax. When Sally faces the Tzaddik, she thanks him for teaching her “what evil looks like” (371). Evil, she says, is the vicious cycle that allows men to go unemployed, couples to die at workhouses, children to wade in filth, and families to go hungry (372). Sally admits to herself that this happens in “My city. The same city I live in. That’s evil” (372). Faced with the facts, she is forced to accept the responsibility of how people like her trade without looking, “buying and selling and buying again” without actually knowing what it means (372). Sally’s epiphany is the discovery that the style of life she shares with the Tzaddik is at the heart of the problem.

It is at this moment that the Blackbourne river — which represents the unknown and exploited side of London — breaks into the room. The torrent cracks, splinters, and ultimately swallows the house and the Tzaddik. The metaphorical significance of this event is obvious — “something deep had rotted, and the scouring of the Blackbourne had weakened the very roots of the foundations” (378). Given the highly volatile social tensions in the novel, a clear parallel exists between the waters and the people. Pullman implies that the exploited, under extreme pressure, can become a destructive force. He shows a group of unemployed men, pushed around by poverty and frustration, about to attack Jewish homes, encouraged to blame them for their troubles. Just like the

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<sup>27</sup> These, the suffering poor, are rather stereotypical; their misfortunes are not only linked to financial hardship but to alcohol and violence.

<sup>28</sup> Once again the poor are compared to animals.

Blackbourne, these men have reached a breaking point. The warning is clear: once they stop being individuals and become a crowd, they can be “a hundred-handed howling monster without a soul” (382).

Regarding the geographical location, the city that Pullman offers seems, deceptively, to correspond to the “real” London. The Tower of London, St Katherine’s Docks, Shadwell Basin, and Wapping are all Victorian locations that still exist and whose names refer to the same spaces in the reader’s contemporary London. Among these real names, Pullman introduces fictional spaces, such as “Hangman’s Wharf”. Although it could be alluding to the execution dock in Wapping, it was rarely used by the time Queen Victoria came to power. By modifying its geography, the narrative changes the reader’s perception of the city.

Pullman’s London is thus depicted as made up of East *and* West. Beauty and horror exist side by side; danger is entwined with energy. The city even includes areas such as Soho, which have become “trendy” in modern London. This is part of the neo-Victorian construction of the story, as Pullman attempts to establish that the East/West partition is about more than pure geographical location, and it goes beyond the Victorian era too. The division has to do with London’s society, which will plunge into chaos if it does not manage to integrate those below (workers and the poor) with those above (the middle class and the privileged). While Pullman cannot escape painting the area with Victorian stereotypes, it is this underlying tension that drives the narrative. It culminates in his contextualizing of the city’s poverty, explaining its origins and discussing those responsible — even though the inhabitants of the East are mainly seen as passive agents. The message of Sally’s powerful speech — regarding the misery speculation causes — points to both Victorian and contemporary worlds. It is a comment on Victorians and their problems, but it is easy to see how her words relate to the economic recession and tense atmosphere London was suffering during the 1980s, when Pullman was writing.

There is a degree of nostalgia in Pullman’s pseudo “Victorian” pages. The Tzaddik’s Spitalfields dwelling is set among tall brick buildings built for the Huguenots “at a time when builders couldn’t put up an ugly house if they tried” (200). At the same time, Pullman’s London is in line with Ackroyd’s mythical reading of the city. London is a living and breathing entity that can make people vanish, simply swallowing them up whole (67).

When Sally gets to know the city, she says that before, “She’d had no idea of the vastness of London despite having lived in the city for so long ... she knew London as an idea, not as a reality” (122). Pullman’s “Victorian” London is not, however, “real”. Pullman strives, without total success, to break free from Victorian stereotypes and offer a city that is “more real”. In doing so, Pullman also reflects values and preoccupations that belong distinctly to the twentieth century.

*Eleanor Updale’s Montmorency: Scarper’s Netherworld*

Eleanor Updale’s *Montmorency* series (2003-2006) uses a precise historical event as its starting point. During the nineteenth century, London experienced several health crises due to its growing population and the untreated waste they produced.<sup>29</sup> After the “Big Stink” of 1858, when a heat wave transformed the capital into a smelly cesspit, the English Parliament commissioned a new sewerage system. Joseph Bazalgette, the head of the London Metropolitan Board of Works, was put in charge of the construction. The successful transformation of Updale’s eponymous character from thief into gentleman hinges on this system, as he uses the sewers to carry out burglaries in wealthy houses and escape unseen, an activity that helps sustain his new persona as a respectable West Londoner. His duality is evocative of the city’s social divisions. Thus East and West, below and above, stand for clearly different spheres, co-dependent worlds that are not encouraged to mix. Unlike Pullman, Updale reproduces this Victorian model without challenging it.

The story opens with the protagonist in prison, serving a three-year term for robbery. Recovering from a serious fall, which he survived thanks to the talented Doctor Farcett, he is exhibited regularly at the Scientific Society. While he waits for his “turn”, he listens to scientists, doctors and others discussing discoveries and ideas. The sewage system is first introduced by a fictionalized version of Joseph Bazalgette — here a dynamic, neat, short man passionate about his work. The narrator’s description incorporates facts; its didactic tone, and attention to detail, prompt the reader to accept its “historical” credibility<sup>30</sup>:

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<sup>29</sup> Cholera became an epidemic, although at the time it was attributed to “miasma”, which was supposed to be air that had been contaminated by coming into contact with corrupted matter. Even though the real cause was misunderstood, Joseph Bazalgette’s sewers helped combat the disease, caused by contaminated water.

<sup>30</sup> The narrator is not the protagonist.

For almost twenty years the capital had been scarred by the filth and inconvenience of road works and construction sites. Gangs of labourers had shovelled tonnes of earth, and made and laid millions of bricks to produce eighty-three miles of underground tunnels through which the smelly and dangerous waste of the city could be taken away to be dumped nearer to the mouth of the Thames. (*Montmorency* 6)

When Bazalgette discusses the Victorian Embankment, he initially speaks of children and people walking and enjoying the air, and of the grand boulevards along the river. He then urges his audience to cast their minds to what is underneath, to the “manholes that are the gateway to our new subterranean world” (10). This observation links these two spheres: the tunnels below take all that is foul and dangerous away from the streets above, allowing for the boulevards and the fresh air. The connection serves to illustrate the city’s social dynamics, foreshadowing the story’s plot. The poor and the “gangs of labourers”, who Victorian writers placed in the “underworld” of the East, are necessary to sustain London. However, they are “hidden”; the beauty and luxury their work affords the West is not for them. This dichotomy is epitomised by the protagonist’s double identity.

Historically, Bazalgette’s oval tunnels amount to a giant masonry underworld of nearly one-hundred-and-thirty kilometres, requiring three-hundred-and-eighteen-million bricks (Goodman 103), and making it one of the greatest engineering feats of the Victorian era. In *Montmorency*, too, the structure is linked to Bazalgette’s genius. Scarper compares the sewers to the arteries and veins of a living organism: “when they came together into the biggest of all [the tunnels] they had an awesome grandeur, yet each tiny brick in the wall was just as important as the whole: like a cell in a living thing” (59). London is thus an organic entity — Ackroyd treats it comparably — made of “living stones”: people whose work and presence allows for the city’s grandeur.

Significantly, this positive and sanitized vision of the sewers is short-lived. For the most part, Updale’s sewers pick up on the Victorian equation of poverty and crime with the subterranean. In the penny dreadful *The Wild Boys of London; or, the Children of the Night* (1866), much of the action takes place under the city. Tunnels are initially described in similar terms to Updale’s — they have stone walls and vaulted roofs (8). The band of orphans search the sewers “to find such trifles as fall into it or

are emptied from other sources” (180). This realm is dark and filthy (244), full of “black slime” and “mal-odorous fluids”, a place whose “poisonous air” means “certain death” (51). Thomas Holmes also writes of the city’s “underworld” — that is, the East — as a realm of greasy narrow passages in semi-darkness where the walls ooze slimy moisture (20).

The more Scarper uses the tunnels, the more the description echoes the Victorian-era narratives. The sewers are indeed an equally dark and smelly world, full of danger, filth, and diseases (*Montmorency* 130), although the idea of narrowness is reserved here for old drains that do not have “Bazalgette’s sturdy bricks” (197).<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, the tunnels are “stinking caverns” (63) and as such, primitive and bestial habitations. Despite the mention of the wide arches (*Montmorency on the Rocks* 234), it is the bricks glistening with sewage (234), the “billowing stench” (233), the darkness, and the rats that are the most memorable features of this “nightmare” which gathers all the by-products of the city “moving on its way *east*” (235, italics mine).

That the sewers stand for and mirror the East is further emphasised by the baggage of its underground rivers. These carry, along with tons of waste, a myriad of discarded objects: women’s corsets, keys, coins, chairs, cricket bats, boots, shoes, bottles, jars, assorted rags, and even false teeth (*Montmorency* 64). Such a jumbled assortment conjures up the image of a maze-like underground city whose streets are full of broken objects, a reflection of the East above. Indeed, the city’s slums are also commonly described as a repository of the wrecked and useless. Dickens’s Jacob’s Island is the epitome of the East as an abandoned, broken land, and it is imitated here in the shattered windows, the crumbling tenements (*Rocks* 250), and the tattered clothes (*Montmorency* 49).

London’s sewers combine two “Eastern” Victorian tropes: the labyrinth and the underworld. Another Victorian dimension is also modelled here. In *The Wild Boys of London*, the sewer’s miasma is potentially fatal only to the gentleman who finds himself stranded beneath London — he believes it means “certain death” (51). And yet the titular band of ragged orphans live there, fearing only the vicious rats. While a gentleman belongs to the West and thus could not survive in the underworld’s atmosphere, these poor children are safe because it is their natural environment.

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<sup>31</sup>These primitive “crumbling” (*Montmorency* 197) structures are situated underneath the Mauramanian Embassy, which represents corrupt European powers willing to endanger England.



This space is similarly ambiguous in *Montmorency*. The criminals are represented by Scarper, who “belongs”, in spite “of the smell, the dark and the possible danger ... being here, underground ... [is] a special thrill for him” (*Montmorency* 59). Later on, he declares that “Not being preoccupied with planning a theft, he was off-guard, and *quite enjoying* the trip” (62, italics mine). While in the West, Scarper is a servant to Montmorency; here he is in charge (196). How much he is part of the sewers is obvious in his familiarity with them: “Even after years of absence, the layout of the sewers was clear in Scarper’s mind” (*Rocks* 234).

Other denizens of this realm include the “flushers”, who work to unblock silted sewers. The one woman who gains access to the sewers is a prostitute. This placement reflects a Victorian view of prostitutes as physical and moral polluters of the city (just as the sewer system is also a city under the city, a distorted mirror of the clean, magnificent, and busy metropolis above).

Montmorency is, obviously, a descendant of R.L. Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1885). Dr Jekyll’s double personality also reflects the East itself which is presented as a source of nefarious gratification for the wealthy. Mr Hyde’s “black secrets” (653) are nothing but Dr Jekyll’s “pleasures” (677). In the same way, the sewers become the dwelling place of the illicit impulses that Montmorency represses but Scarper acts on, as well as his drug addiction and criminal behaviour, and the dark secret of his past: letting another man hang for his own crimes. Paralleling how Dr Jekyll is perceived by his friends to be a good man while Mr Hyde is a monster, the narrator explains “Montmorency might have hopes of becoming a gentleman, but Scarper really wasn’t a very nice man” (*Montmorency* 60). Updale here equates gentlemanliness with goodness, conversely implying a natural association between poverty and moral degeneracy and ugliness, bringing to mind Gissing’s “semi-humans” (111) and the Victorians’ fears of disease, decay, and degeneration. Indeed, Scarper’s introduction into the narrative shows him running from the police “like an animal” (*Montmorency* 2). As previously mentioned, he suffers a horrible fall and is left “a mangled form”, “a creature” (3) who survives to be exhibited to the Scientific Society — a sort of freak exhibit reminiscent of Joseph Merrick, the Victorian “Elephant Man”.<sup>32</sup> Scarper recovers, and his physical appearance is mainly left blank: he is but a

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<sup>32</sup> Merrick was for a while part of a “freak show” until he was moved into the London Hospital to, among other reasons, “prevent his deformity being made anything of a show, *except for purely scientific purposes*” (“The ‘Elephant-Man’” 74, italics mine).

dirty body covered in grotesque scars who wears tattered clothes and has greasy hair (81). Although he occasionally circulates above ground, nobody ever seems to notice or remember him. He thus recalls Stevenson's Mr Hyde, who was also nearly indescribable. As Mr Enfield explains, "[h]e must be deformed somewhere ... and yet I really can name nothing out of the way. No, sir ... I can't describe him" (648), and he has a "haunting sense of unexpressed deformity" (658).

A second source of Updale's duality may be H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), where the Eloi/Morlock division reflects a quasi-Marxist class divide. Wells's workers (the Morlocks) end up literally feeding on the wealthy — embodying the possibilities inherent in the class system. According to Updale, however, it is not the Morlocks, Hydes, or Scarpers who are stronger. Scarper functions as a means to attain (as Montmorency) a position in the West. Indeed, in the subsequent books, Montmorency's character becomes more prominent as Scarper and his underworld become less important.

The few scenes that take place in aboveground East London identify it with the sewers below. As well as the usual squalor and how the streets grow "narrower and dirtier" (*Rocks* 250), the houses slouch so much in their crooked architecture that they touch, and the alleys below become "like a dark tunnel" (251). We recall the twisted architecture of Dorian Gray's East and the "dreadful ... court, flanked with tumble-down one storied houses" (172) of Jerrold's *Pilgrimage*, and the Dantesque atmosphere of general Victorian representations. Updale's portrayal marks the East as a Gothic space. Nothing can thrive in this "wasteland", and once it has been escaped, its memory should be suppressed, just as Montmorency hides Scarper.

The nineteenth-century London represented here tends to omit the West since it is defined primarily in opposition to the East. Updale engages in a shallow reproduction of the popular Victorian-era view of the city, one that concerns itself mostly with the graphic depiction. The protagonist's change of social milieu — and his corresponding change into a man of morals and principles — is illustrated by a change of *location*, and his story encourages us not to improve upon the sewers and the East but to leave them behind in order to ascend to better things, only casting a thought in that direction while, as Bazalgette says, we walk the boulevards above.

As already noted, Victorian sociologist Charles Booth's famous *Life and Labour of the People of London* (1889) included a map of the city (see fig. 13). Still considered a valuable source of information today, the map colour-coded London according to the economic level of its inhabitants. Significantly, the lowest classes were represented by black in a colour scale that got lighter till it reached the wealthy upper-middle class, in yellowish gold. As Franco Moretti points out, such a choice was "either quite naive or very very ironic" (77). Moretti observes that the map can be read on two levels. At a macroscopic level, it offers an ordered whole with clear patterns where richness and poverty increase and decrease steadily. But on a microscopic level, these neat lines are muddled, with the very poor sometimes only metres away from the gold sections. The question Moretti addresses is how Victorian novels chose to reflect and "read" the city, confronted as they were with these complex patterns (79). Typically, they simplify the layout. While Pullman's map attempts to encompass different shades, Updale's London provides a blueprint of simplified geography, denying the existence of a middle ground between the "blacks" and the "golds" — a dichotomy embodied by Scarper and Montmorency. Brian Keaney offers a London which, at first glance, integrates these polarities, but ultimately his *Nathaniel Wolfe* series (2008-2009) displaces the West outside the scope of the city.

Keaney's series, like Pullman's, ostensibly defies the Victorian convention of simply dividing the city into two very distinct and separate spheres. His books follow the adventures of the eponymous character, a teenage ghost whisperer raised in East London by his father, an abusive drunkard. Nathaniel is also accompanied in his adventures by a parlour maid, and by the end of the first adventure he discovers, much like *Oliver Twist*, his lost and wealthy grandfather. The narrative opens by directly plunging the reader into the city on a grim day, when the "sooty breath" of "hundreds of chimneys mingled ... with the mist that came drifting from the river. The fog transformed London. Instead of a lively, bustling city, it became a sinister and treacherous netherworld" (*Haunting* 7). The description goes on but the details — the grime, the fog, the gloom — are familiar and easy identifiable in the Victorian tradition. However, this first vision of the city is given from a wider-than-normal angle. The fog transforms the *whole* of London, not just parts of it, and most importantly, the link with the whole city as a netherworld is established from the very beginning.

Keaney attempts to avoid the stereotypical Victorian division of the city into two areas. He places characters from different, if very simplified, social strata in geographical proximity. The two main characters, for example, both live in Stepney (a “real” location), despite belonging to different classes. Lily Campion is a young parlour maid who works at a respectable house (22) which keeps three servants. Nevertheless, turning a corner in the same neighbourhood results in the buildings immediately becoming “shabbier and more neglected” (23). Lily notices the scenery change and resents being there because “A respectable family ought to keep respectable company” (24). Lily’s mentality is more typical of the upper class she works for even if she herself is not wealthy. That she is above the poor and working classes is one of the reasons she becomes the victim of a mugging.

This mugging constitutes Nathaniel’s first encounter with Lily. He is wise in the ways of the city and familiar with the mugger, in possession of knowledge that clearly establishes him as belonging to the neglected streets Lily disdains. The class difference between Nathaniel and Lily is voiced by a sergeant, who warns her that “a decent enough girl ... didn’t ought to go mixing with the likes of him” (160). Lily’s experience of the change from wealthy houses to poorer ones is inversely perceived by Nathaniel: trying to escape the criminal Maggot Harris, Nathaniel feels lost until he identifies the Whitechapel Hospital in the distance. As he explains, “His flight ... had taken him away from his usual haunts and this was a much more mixed area. There were slums, to be sure, but also some smarter areas with big houses whose inhabitants employed four or five servants” (71). Here, Keaney’s “mixed” area is in accord with Booth’s historical data. Despite Stepney’s location in London’s East side, if we examine Booth’s map at Moretti’s microscopic level, we find the area coloured with rich reds, pinks, and purples — representing the middle class down to a mixed population — as well as dark blues and blacks as it nears the Thames to the south and Whitechapel to the northeast.<sup>33</sup> Such a representation fills in the blank spaces between the East and West, creating a geographic setup that actually exhibits grey areas between the slums and rich houses.

However, despite a geography that places poverty and richness literally side by side, Keaney ends up displacing the West into an idyllic countryside. Indeed, his attempt at a more balanced vision of the city is undermined by the choice of location

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<sup>33</sup> The gray represented a mixed population, where some inhabitants had a comfortable position while others were poor (Moretti 76).

when it comes to the wealthy upper class. The house where Lily works is one of the grander houses, but the “old days” are gone. Lily effectively works for a gentleman who looks after his pennies (24) and turns out to be a criminal. While the East End is an established part of the city’s geography, the West never figures explicitly. The map of London is thus dominated by a tiered East that engulfs almost the entire city. The Queen’s palace is part of the “West”, but it features only minimally in the adventures. The “real” upper-class circles are represented by the magistrate William Monkton, Nathaniel’s grandfather, who lives in a village in Kent. Thus the whole of Keaney’s London becomes a mixed East, with the metaphorical “West” located outside the city. All of London is represented as overcrowded and frantic, filled with organ-grinders, yelling paper-boys, carriages, costermongers, dogs, and ragged street children (*Nathaniel Wolfe and the Bodysnatchers* 48), as well as warehouses, breweries, tanneries, and factories, all “filling the air with foul smelling fumes” (*Haunting* 93). Setting out for Kent, Nathaniel encounters a swarming mass of people (bumping into each other, rushing). From the train, however, “London flashed by, soon giving way to green fields dotted with cows and sheep”:

They passed country lanes and winding streams, thatched cottages and bustling inns, bare fields where wheat had yet to raise its head above the black earth, orchards waiting for the warmth of the spring to wake them from their winter sleep. Old men stood by the roadside puffing on clay pipes, small children waved, and dogs ran alongside ... (172)<sup>34</sup>

The further away from London, the more pastoral the scene. Time seems to slow down to become seasonal, while the language of the narrative becomes more poetic. As W. J. Keith explains, localities such as these were used in Victorian novels “less ... for their own sakes than for their functions as opposite poles to an urban threat” (138).<sup>35</sup> Keaney portrays a similar anxiety here, as Monkton, a man shown as a pillar of rectitude, regards London with a measure of disgust, declaring he “cannot wait to return

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<sup>34</sup> Notice the difference between the “gangs of ragged street children [that] chased each other back and forth between the alleyways” (*Bodysnatchers* 48) and these rural children that are simply waving, surrounded by dogs and paternal figures.

<sup>35</sup> He contrasts places such as Nell and her grandfather’s cottage in *The Old Curiosity Shop* and Peggotty’s boat in *David Copperfield* to William Cobbett’s “great Wen” (Keith 138).

to the clean air of the countryside” (*Haunting* 225).<sup>36</sup> Moreover, Monkton looks down on those he considers “morally degenerate” (177): criminals, who are exclusively part of the city. The countryside is a realm of decency and purity, not merely physically but also morally. Since the countryside is reserved for the upper class, such qualities seem to naturally belong to that circle. It is not surprising that it is in Kent where Nathaniel talks of acquiring a “new identity” (208): that of a gentleman.

However, most of the adventures take place in London, which is re-created using Victorian tropes, resulting in a gloomy and treacherous metropolis. The dangers of the city are underlined often: Nathaniel tells the reader that “London was a dangerous place and you either kept your wits about you at all times or you suffered the consequences” (25). What such consequences might be is also directly exposed. On foggy nights “an unseen army of pickpockets, street-robbers, mug-hunters, cut-throats and common vagabonds waited in the shadows, ready to pounce on their unsuspecting victims” (*Bodysnatchers* 39). Thus “[p]eople were found murdered every week of the year, their throats slit, their bodies tossed into the Thames. And the perpetrators were seldom caught. They slipped away into the underworld” (*Haunting* 68).

There is an insistence on the relationship between violence and criminality that is not, arguably, asserted by Victorian literature. It does, however, reflect the anxieties provoked by the “Jack the Ripper” murders in Whitechapel (1888). Keaney vilifies the underclass, placing danger at each corner. Here he seems to reflect contemporary unease. Significantly, in this context, the current Metropolitan Police online crime-map colour codes as Booth did, and notes that crimes are “particularly concentrated in deprived areas both absolutely and to a lesser extent proportionately” (Gordon, Travers, and Whitehead 37).<sup>37</sup> A majority of Londoners apparently feel that “fear of crime is adversely affecting their quality of life” (37). Keaney’s representation of the whole of London as “other” may also reflect the cosmopolitan nature of contemporary London.

In addition, Keaney leans on Dante’s *Inferno*. There might not be nine circles of London as Hell, but there are certainly four different levels to be encountered, with the working classes closest to the surface. This is the level at which Nathaniel moves and it

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<sup>36</sup> This stands in clear opposition to London’s air, which can never be truly called fresh (*Haunting* 22). Indeed, when Nathaniel tries to see the East End through his grandfather’s eyes, it is but “the most appalling collection of slums” (184).

<sup>37</sup> In the Metropolitan Police crime map, red indicates above-average crime and is reserved for Westminster. Islington, Hackney, and the Tower Hamlets (which encompasses Eastern locations such as Whitechapel and Spitalfields) are in yellow, meaning average, but their crimes rates are on the rise compared to 2011 (“Metropolitan Police Crime Mapping”).

includes the people at Billingsgate Market, such as fishmongers, street musicians, beggars, tinkers, scavengers, old-clothes men, umbrella girls, barrow boys, fruit-sellers, and pickpockets (*Haunting* 63). This is a level that evokes the tireless commercial and industrial activities the working poor are tied to. Nathaniel lists the little shops, big warehouses, breweries, tanneries, and factories that fill the air with smoke and foul fumes, while middle-aged women sew for the rich and little girls dip matches in sulphur (93). Keaney exposes, by implication, how the work of the poor fuels London as a financial and industrial power.

A level down is represented by Jarvey's Island — which, as its name suggests, is in the tradition of Dickens's Jacob's Island. Just as Dickens's "visitor" is assailed by offensive smells before arriving (442), Nathaniel must cover his mouth and nose to withstand the stench (*Bodysnatchers* 137). That this hellish ring is a step closer to death is reinforced and sustained through the imagery: there are animal carcasses and "rotting timbers", while the water is "red as blood", the whole enveloped in noxious fumes of damp and decay (138). The "crazy wooden galleries" at the back of the houses that ooze slime in *Oliver Twist* (443) are present here in the "wooden galleries [that] had been constructed so that they overhung the foul water" (*Bodysnatchers* 138). But this is not, as it is in Dickens's, the refuge of Sikes-like criminals. It is, rather, the habitat of the hopeless. Nathaniel's guide talks of the endless human misery and voices a hope that "One day, perhaps ... disease and poverty will be swept away from London" (140). This obviously points to our present, prompting the reader to compare these "past" miseries with those of today. The island's proximity to the "underworld" is signalled by its location next to a river that "is not more than an open sewer" (134), which seems to be a kind of Acheron.<sup>38</sup>

There are indeed lower levels to descend to, and the real depths underneath are reserved for more sinister characters like Maggot Harris, whose name is indicative of his nature. A well-known street robber, Harris mugs Lily and wants to beat up Nathaniel. He is a sadist (*Haunting* 27). The villainous Mr Chesterfield also dwells here. Keaney has dropped the rookery of Dickens and Morrison unchanged into his landscape. It is "a warren of tiny alleyways" (196), a "narrow, twisting, filthy maze", in

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<sup>38</sup> Miss Pemberton, the guardian of the girl Lily is now a companion for, believes that the island is infected with cholera. She warns Nathaniel against going, explaining that it is in the air. The person that corrects her is a Jewish man well below her in the social scale, Milky Melchy, who — citing Dr Henry Snow — informs them that cholera is a water-borne disease. Despite the supposed historical character of the information, the name is wrong, as it was anaesthetist John Snow who published the paper on cholera in 1857 (Halliday 1470).

comparison to which the streets Nathaniel lives in are “bright and airy boulevards” (197).<sup>39</sup> The roads are “broken cobbles ... strewn with rotting vegetables, old straw and dung”, while the houses themselves are no better: “Rotten timber propped up crumbling masonry, windows were patched with newspaper or rags” (197).<sup>40</sup> These windows are exact copies of the ones in Dickens’s Rookery in “Gin-Shops” (1836): “Wretched houses with *broken windows patched with rags and paper*” (*Scenes of London Life* 100, italics mine). The gothicised urban spaces of Victorian writings — which Updale also uses — are present, with the twisted architecture echoing the moral corruption of inhabitants such as Maggot. This level also provides access to the underworld, as the streets of the East transform into dark tunnels, the buildings leaning close “together, as if to whisper to one another” (*Bodysnatchers* 40). These entrances to the underworld are explicitly articulated through Nathaniel’s reflections on the city. To negotiate this space, he twists, turns, and dodges archways and buildings (66). Although he is at “the bottom of the heap” he talks of a “layer ... darker and more desperate than anything” (79). The entrance to this “terrifying *underworld*” is “in the opium dens that festered down by the docks, like sores upon the body of the city” (79–80, italics mine).

Another entrance is provided by the rookeries, which are again geographically marked as “the very lowest rung of the great ladder of London society”, followed by death, although the latter is considered by many a “more desirable destination” (*Haunting* 197). In order to navigate this maze, it is necessary to turn, duck, dodge, and scramble (197) in a downwards spiral that invariably leads to the underground world.<sup>41</sup> Nathaniel and his friend have to literally bend in half while pursuing a criminal, which takes them into the deepest Dantesque level: the underworld represented by the sewers, reminiscent as they are of Updale’s. Particular attention is paid to the stench, described by Nathaniel as a mixture of “unwashed bodies, rotten meat, fish guts and cabbage, the sulphurous reek of match factories and the thick, cloying stench of breweries, the acrid fumes from the lime pits, and the dizzying vapours of glue-markers” (200).<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Notice “warren” is used here too.

<sup>40</sup> The rookeries are not the only place in the East that enclose such collection: the storeroom in the hall where Cicero works reveals “abandoned or neglected...broken chairs, piles of dusty old books, a crate of cups and saucers that do not match, several sacks of old clothes, and a roll of ancient carpet ... a cracked mirror” (*Haunting* 35). Everything in this realm is used, broken or too old.

<sup>41</sup> The idea of a spiral of decay that ends in certain death is also part of the tropes used when discussing the figure of the prostitute (see Chapter Two).

<sup>42</sup> Notice here that what Nathaniel smells are the “unwashed bodies”, not the dirty water used to clean them. This fits with both Updale and Keaney emphasis on the sewers as a symbol of the corrupt city and



The used, broken, and discarded objects link the sewers with all levels of the East: working class, the abject poor, and the criminals. Such images could serve to illustrate the cycle of production and consumerism they are part of, but the narrative here excludes the West: a closer look at these underground elements reveals they belong *only* to the East, and thus, to the urban, industrial city. These images return to the relentless characterisation of the East End/London as the realm of all that is dark and filthy — as opposed to the West/countryside.

The sewers are more of a spiritual realm than a geographical location. Smelling the stink of raw sewage, Nathaniel thinks of the Bible: “*Go not in the way of evil men for they eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence*” (*Bodysnatchers* 83, italics original). This fits the sewers’ depiction as the last stop, the repository of all that is evil and corrupt. The further one ventures in, the more it becomes a living organism, with the tunnels’ walls covered in fungus-like spongy material “uncomfortably reminiscent of human flesh” (*Haunting* 202). It is a world evocative of Greek myths, as the subterranean river current grows loud to echo “like the souls of the lost spirits crying out for comfort” (202). Eternal damnation is not far away. For Nathaniel this is “the closest thing he could imagine to Hell. There was nothing wholesome down here — no sunlight, no fresh air, and no plants or flowers” (202). Keaney models the world of the dead onto the sewers. Indeed, Nathaniel’s supernatural encounter with a penitent ghost means he enters a similarly dark, endless, and nightmarish passage of slimy walls and scurrying rats where souls moan, and which stinks like the sewers (*Bodysnatchers* 43–44). It is a “place where everything bad had its origin, where the mistakes and wrong turnings ... reached their ultimate conclusion” (44). Fittingly, the two villains of the first adventure find gruesome ends down there.

The sewers also serve to express, as in Victorian prototypes, the conception of the East as contaminating. By the time Nathaniel has to enter the sewers, he has become part of a different social sphere; he will be a gentleman. Correspondingly, Nathaniel starts exhibiting the phobias of his new identity. His descriptions of a decadent London are in part fulfilling a literary function, giving the reader a picture of the city through the main character’s eyes. But, by the same token, this indicates that he does not belong in the East.

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its inhabitants rather than on its positive functions: the promotion of sanitation and cleanliness as well as a weapon against cholera.

Keaney, like Pullman, establishes a clear link between the city's industrial activities and its state of decay. He differs from Pullman by having a stronger, less critical, allegiance to the Victorian model. Nathaniel is different to Pullman's Sally in that he is not enlightened by his experiences. Furthermore, although Keaney's social structure is graduated, it forbids social mobility. Like *Oliver Twist*, Nathaniel is revealed to be a member of a wealthy and respectable family. His ability to write and read are signs of his rightful belonging (*Haunting* 86). Once he has abandoned his life in the East, his passage into his new station as a gentleman is sealed by an interview with Queen Victoria. The rest of the characters, lacking this upper-class birthright, cannot change their lot. The instance when Jeremiah refuses Mr Monkton's offer of a gardening position illustrates this rigidity. Jeremiah explains he is a tosher "[b]orn and bred", whose world is the sewers (225). This is in keeping with the logic of the novel, as Jeremiah is part of the contaminated city and so cannot access the West. The inverse also applies, as Monkton could never be a "Londoner" — he puts a scarf to his face to avoid breathing in the stench and declares he cannot wait to return to the countryside (225).

Leaving "the bustling streets of London with all their promise, all their menace and all their shadowy secrets" (*Bodysnatchers* 197), Nathaniel seems to view the city as a mere source of excitement.<sup>43</sup> Keaney, too, seems to depict the grimmest aspects of London for no other reason than to make his work a "Victorian" adventure.

## Conclusion

The contemporary texts under study here often resort to a literary, archetypal, and simplified image of Victorian London. However, in spite of similar source material, each author uses the city to serve different purposes. Denying a middle ground between East and West, Updale reiterates the anxieties that underpinned Victorian texts, without re-contextualising for the modern reader. Keaney, on one level, avoids her simplistic dualism, showing an industrial and growing city where slums and fancier houses can be a stone's throw away from each other. But his East remains wicked and is the entrance to a hellish underworld. Pullman's vision arguably has more substance. His narrative is explicitly engaged in reflecting the literal materiality of London. As Sally walks its

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<sup>43</sup> When in Jarvey Island, Nathaniel wants to do something to help the poor there (*Bodysnatchers* 140), but this is never raised again.

streets, the reader discovers them. Pullman's London is a vast city that cannot be known without active engagement. There is a relationship between Pullman's imaginary London and its present form. Pullman's image is in fact also underpinned by a social agenda, to be explored in Chapter Six.

All three narratives offer an image of the East End that survives mainly unchanged from Victorian fiction. This simplified perception exists as a way to establish the "Victorian" in these texts. It depends on the ways in which popular culture sees (and saw) Victorian London, and the East in particular. To different degrees, each of these texts show the struggles of the poor and working classes, but the emphasis is on the violence and decay, and the characters are stereotypical. The East End is thus a space in which individuals from the West (Sally, Nathaniel, and Montmorency) can be heroes. The stories reflect the same exploitative dynamic that was, historically speaking, at work between higher and lower classes. Such ideas encourage an upper and middle-class world view that fears those who do not fit within their values.

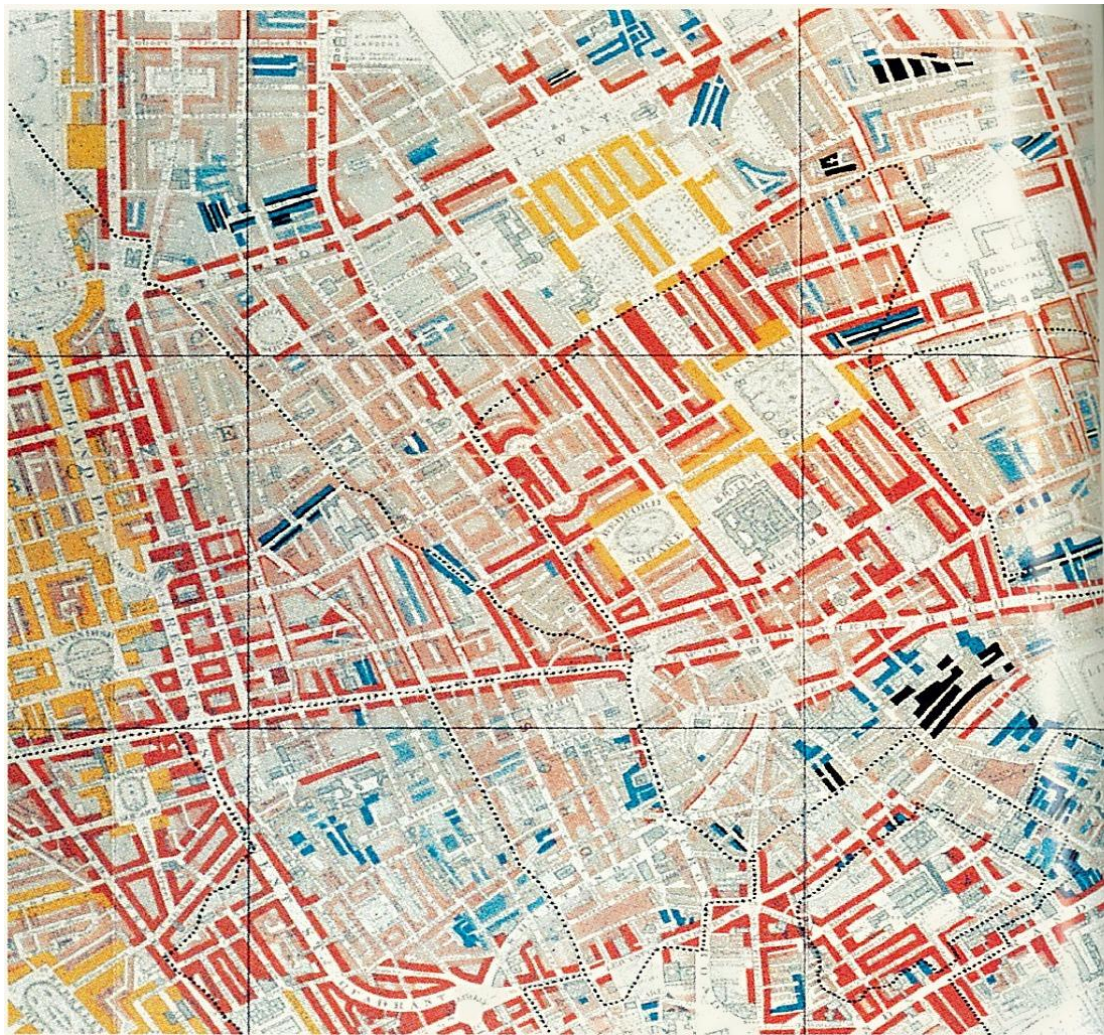


Fig. 13. Charles Booth's map of London according to its social classes (Moretti 76).

## CHAPTER TWO

### VICTORIAN PROSTITUTES AND FALLEN WOMEN: REVISING THE GREAT SOCIAL EVIL

Who are those painted, dressy women, flaunting along the streets and boldly accosting the passers-by? Who are those miserable creatures, ill-fed, ill-clothed, uncared for, from whose misery the eye recoils, cowering under dark arches and among bye-lanes? (Acton viii)

Victorians perceived prostitution to be the great social evil of the nineteenth century. In spite of this, there are few prostitutes in Victorian literature, as the fiction of the era focuses mostly on the fallen women. However, both types are often doomed to tragic ends. Symbolic of Victorian London streets, it is the prostitute that is featured in our young adult fictions. While the sexual content becomes much more explicit, we may observe a marked tension arising, apparently, from the authors' desire to detach themselves from the very concept of the fallen woman on the one hand, and (on the other) a resistance (not unlike that of the Victorians) to the acceptance of sex as a profession.

#### **“Soiled doves”: A Historical Account of Victorian Prostitution**

The Victorian prostitute of these young adult narratives is the direct descendant of those in nineteenth-century literature. In turn, these characters reflect the morality and the anxieties prevalent in Victorian society — corresponding predominantly to middle and upper-class values — and thus offer an already distorted representation of the era's reality.

The extent of prostitution in Britain was a cause of concern in the nineteenth century. Despite dubious sources, it was believed there were about 80,000 prostitutes in London, a number that was quoted from 1830 through to the end of the century (Trudgill 693). The topic is discussed in the social exploration works discussed in Chapter One. These writings, together with a number of manifestos, tracts, and police reports, give a clear picture of activities that, although part of social life, remained in the shadows, unspoken<sup>44</sup>.

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<sup>44</sup> In a letter to *The Times* in May 1857, a mother blames prostitutes for the fact that men are not marrying anymore. The complaint exposes the hypocrisy that was expected from “respectable” women:

A well-known English doctor, William Acton's writings on prostitution give an insight into the myths and facts surrounding these women during the Victorian era. Acton calls the idea that, once a prostitute, a woman was on a downwards path towards premature death a vulgar error. Instead, Acton explains prostitution as a transitory stage, with prostitutes often reintegrating into "polite" society (49). Acton was also progressive in including "cruel biting poverty" as a cause for prostitution (180).<sup>45</sup> Despite such a relatively forward-thinking view of prostitution, Acton's work also reflects prejudices typical of the day. While he declares the stereotype of a prostitute with "the dirty, intoxicated slattern, in tawdry finery and an inch thick in paint" (27) to be apocryphal, at other times, he still invokes this image.

Later on, towards the 1880s, it was child prostitution, rather than the causes of prostitution that became a concern, as reflected by social writings and newspapers. Among other social investigators, Andrew Mearns emphasised the age of the East End "working" girls, who were no older than twelve (61). However, it was W.T. Stead, the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, who attracted the most attention with "The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" (1885) — an exposé on child prostitution. Stead's sensational tabloid-like report transforms London into a Babylon, its streets the Cretan labyrinth where the bestial Minotaur, turned aristocrat, preys on very young innocent virgins, sold to brothels, often by their own relatives. London's underworld is made up, according to Stead, of a ghastly multitude of ruined women who seek solace in drink and then die in "horrible torture" (58).

Such writings mirror the city's division into a working East and a consuming West, but they equally reflect a vilification of the East End, presented here as a "great market for the children who are imported into West-end houses" (Stead 69). In fact, even when authors' works surveyed other areas of London (such as Mearns, who focused on South London), their findings were, as British historian Judith Walkowitz has explained, rapidly superimposed on the East End (30). Walkowitz also explains that, from a Victorian middle-class point of view, "only a degenerate social milieu [the working class] ... provided the setting for women's move into prostitution"

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"Go where we will, the mother's eye has this social cruel pest intruded upon it; these bad rivals of our children are no longer kept in the background, *as things we know, but knowing, are to seem not to know*" (qtd. in Acton 173, italics mine).

<sup>45</sup> Henry Mayhew followed Acton's example, discussing low wages among the "female industrial class" as a cause for prostitution (4: 213).

(*Prostitution and Victorian Society* 38). Thus the East, the working class, prostitution and child sex were all wrapped into a single story.

There was no clear definition for the term “prostitution” during Victorian times. It was a synonym for “fornication” and was applied to any woman who voluntarily gave away her virtue, paid or not (Acton 1), making it at times interchangeable with “fallen woman”. Amanda Anderson notes the “fallen woman” label as an umbrella term used to cover a series of taboo behaviours and “a range of feminine identities”: prostitutes, unmarried women that engaged in sexual relations, seduced girls, adulteresses, and “delinquent lower-class women” (2).

However defined, prostitutes were seen within Victorian society as both physical threats and moral polluters. They had, it was thought, the potential to destroy the nation, an idea that owed a lot to eugenics. As Bartley explains, these ideas were circulated by philanthropists who sought explanations to prostitution within a “more ‘scientific’ and ‘rational’ discourse” (132). Portraying prostitutes as “feeble-minded” (together with the working classes they came from) propagated fears that this inferior, “half-witted” population would continue to spawn more criminality, poverty, and immorality through their children — who, in turn, “threaten the stability of the British nation” (132). This is in line with the threat of prostitutes as a “social pest” (Acton 166), via venereal diseases. The “harlot” was believed to provide an outlet for masculine passions that could not be accommodated by “acceptable” moral behaviour; by betraying an unnatural sexual appetite, the prostitutes were deviant from “normal” femininity and morals.

It was in the hysterical atmosphere fostered by Stead’s articles that five prostitutes were killed between August 31<sup>st</sup> and November 9<sup>th</sup> 1888. Their mutilated bodies were found in the infamous location of Whitechapel, in East London. Different anxieties were superimposed on the figure of the murderer, coming from the articles published at the time. The murders fed superstition and facilitated fantasy. The elusive real murderer was replaced by the mythological “Jack the Ripper”, a figure that reflected the trope of the aristocrat driven by blood-lust as well as Stevenson’s Mr Hyde, a character in a story of class divisions and sexual antagonism. The unsolved murders helped associate the figure of the prostitute with the East End and violence.

The writings of Acton, Mearns, and Stead, among others, offer a historical survey of the prostitute, but it is important to understand how biased these “factual” depictions were. The lack of methodology, data, and objective language marks their



unreliability. Judith Walkowitz paints Victorian prostitution in very different terms and casts doubt on a whole range of mainstream Victorian notions. According to her research,<sup>46</sup> women were hardly ever pushed into prostitution as an alternative to actual starvation (*Prostitution and Victorian Society* 19). Pre-marital sex was accepted as something natural by the working classes, and did not automatically lead women onto the streets.

In light of this evidence, Walkowitz explains Acton's writings as an attempt to regulate a social reality that "did not carry any threat of political insurrection" (44). Walkowitz views Stead's articles and the campaign against white slavery differently, as the 1880s call for reforms came amidst a different atmosphere, with unskilled workers such as dockers and match girls protesting and striking. The spectacle of the East End marching masses brought out the worst fears of middle- and upper-class Victorians regarding the poor and their political mobilization.<sup>47</sup> The attempts to control the sexual behaviour of the poor were symptoms, reflecting the anxiety underlining such political movements and the cultural paranoia fuelled by the Ripper murders.

### **"O didn't you know I'd been ruined?": Prostitutes and Fallen Women in Victorian Literature**

The Victorian prostitutes did not only walk Regent Park and Fleet Street; they also wandered the paper roads of nineteenth-century fiction. A closer look at both the prostitute and the fallen woman yields the key elements of these Victorian depictions — elements that our modern fictions choose at times to imitate or contest.

In 1794, William Blake's poem "London", in *Songs of Experience*, included the prostitute as an intrinsic part of the urban landscape, while also identifying her as a source of disease and death:

But most thro' midnight streets I hear  
How the youthful Harlot's curse  
Blasts the new born Infant's tear,  
And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse. (46)

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<sup>46</sup> Based on Victorian police records, interviews, and information held by organizations such as the Rescue Society of London.

<sup>47</sup> Events such as the "Bloody Sunday" of 1887 fuelled such fears, as the police had to repress a demonstration trying to get to Trafalgar Square.

Decades later, Victorian writing continued to view the prostitute both as a part of metropolitan geography and as a disease. Fictional works referred to prostitutes only by euphemisms, their occupations rarely discussed openly. Indeed, very few English Victorian novels *explicitly* articulated their existence.<sup>48</sup>

English works featured both fallen women and prostitutes in opposition to the virtuous woman, “the angel in the house”. This term — taken out of two of Coventry Patmore’s poems — became symbolic of the Victorian model of womanhood and embodied the ideal of women as chaste, dignified, selfless, and maternal. Following the mores of their age, Victorian writers depicted the failure of women to follow such a model as a grave fault. The surrender of virginity outside marriage caused the loss of both moral and social status. Losing their virginity in these shameful circumstance debased women, leaving them physically contaminated and morally corrupted. Men in these narratives are not entirely blameless, but their actions do not imply an equal loss of place or status in society. Victorian fiction offered women, however, very restricted choices. Against historical evidence to the contrary (considering Acton), once a woman had sexually “sinned”, fiction left them with two options, as discussed by Eric Trudgill. They could become “Magdalen”-like figures, atoning for their depravity through extraordinary acts of devotion and penitence. More often, however, a process of degradation takes them from “angels” to creature of the gutter, with death awaiting at the bottom of this tragic downward spiral — precisely what Acton refuted. Towards the end of the century, a new liberalism was much more willing to allow for the fallen woman to “redeem herself in marriage” (Trudgill 305). However, it is the earlier depictions that have become most iconic.

Among these depictions, and due to their influence, it is appropriate to briefly discuss Dickens’s writings on prostitutes, although there are only a few. As a chronicler of London, and a man interested in the social questions of his time, this topic was naturally one of his concerns. In “The Pawnbroker’s Shop”, he depicts four women in a dirty Drury Lane shop and illustrates the different stages of the downward spiral: a mother and daughter in dire need, and two other women. The first duo is still “respectable”, but the mother urges the daughter to use her “utmost powers of persuasion” (*Scenes of London Life* 128) to get money from the pawnbroker,

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<sup>48</sup> Contemporary European literature (especially French) by contrast provided several examples. Among these, we can include Honoré de Balzac’s *The Splendors and Miseries of Courtesans* (1847), Victor Hugo’s *Les Misérables* (1862), Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* (1866), and Guy de Maupassant’s *Boule-de-Suif* (1880).



foreshadowing her future as their misery deepens. In the next box, the attire of the third woman, being “miserably poor” but “extremely gaudy” and “extravagantly fine”, “too plainly bespeaks her station” (129). Her fate is almost literally written on her features, with her “sunken face, where a daub of rouge only serves as an index to the ravages of squandered health never to be regained, and lost happiness never to be restored” (129). The fourth woman embodies a further stage in the prostitute cycle, one closer to sickness and death. Intoxicated, she is “the lowest of the low; dirty, unbonneted, flaunting, and slovenly” (130). These women are joined in their journey towards misery:

Who shall say how soon these women may change places? The last has but two more stages — the hospital and the grave. How many females situated as her two companions are, and as she may have been once, have terminated the same wretched course, in the same wretched manner! One is already tracing her footsteps with frightful rapidity. How soon may the other follow her example! How many have done the same! (130)

But Dickens’s best example comes from his fiction. Although *Oliver Twist* (1837) was a success, Nancy caused much controversy. Dickens insisted that his portrayal was faithful to reality, neither embellished nor exaggerated. He went so far as to categorically state it in the novel’s preface:

It is useless to discuss whether the conduct and character of the girl seems natural or unnatural, probable or improbable, right or wrong. IT IS TRUE ... From the first introduction of that poor wretch, to her laying her blood-stained head upon the robber’s breast, there is not a word exaggerated or over-wrought. It is emphatically God’s truth, for it is the truth. (36–7)

In this 1841 preface, he writes baldly that “the girl is a prostitute” (33). But Nancy’s occupation is never actually mentioned in the novel itself. We first see her through Oliver’s eyes. His innocent depiction of Nancy’s clothes and manners (111) allows Dickens to imply her profession to the adult reader, who is more knowing than the boy. The closest the narrative comes to being specific is when Nancy goes into the West End to visit Rose Maylie, who embodies her opposite, the virtuous girl. A servant does not

think that “the young lady will see *such as she*” (359, italics mine), while the “chaste housemaids” mutter “audible expressions of scorn” (360). In the 1841 preface, Dickens justifies avoiding this precise denomination *within* the novel:

No less consulting my own taste, than the manners of the age, I endeavoured, while I painted it in all its fallen and degraded aspect, to banish from the lips of the lowest character I introduced, any expression that could by possibility offend; and rather to lead to the unavoidable inference that its existence was of the most debased and vicious kind, than to prove it elaborately by words and deeds. In the case of the girl, in particular, I kept this intention constantly in view. Whether it is apparent in the narrative, and how it is executed, I leave my readers to determine.  
(36)

Dickens is true to his word, as Nancy is named as a prostitute only *outside* the text — but this does not protect Nancy from her destiny as such a woman *within* the novel. She gets drunk, lives with the criminal Bill Sikes, and is part of Fagin’s clan. Still, this “miserable companion of thieves and ruffians, the fallen outcast of low haunts” (361) is allowed to have “something of the woman’s original nature left in her still” (360). Nancy’s redeeming gesture is to contact Rose about Oliver. Offered the means to escape her existence, she declines, almost aware that her only possible exit is death.

Agnes Fleming, Oliver’s mother, is different from Nancy in that hers is the “old story” (47) of the seduced, and thus, fallen woman. Her destiny seems fitting since she is not an East Ender, but comes from a higher social class. In love with a married man, she trusts him “until she trusted too far, and lost what none could ever give her back” (458). The loss is quickly followed by pregnancy, destitution, and death, as she gives birth to Oliver, kisses him, and dies in a few breaths. However, all is resolved in the end, and Oliver, though technically an illegitimate child, comes into fortune and happiness as a rightful heir.

Nancy and Agnes are not the only “fallen women” we find in Dickens. *David Copperfield* (1850) contains two further examples. Martha and “Little Em’ly” are also representations of the prostitute and the fallen woman, although they are part of Trudgill’s redeemed Magdalene convention. What Martha has done is never revealed, but her appearance and the attitude of others around her point towards her dubious morality. Once she leaves town for London, there is no doubt about her activities in the

city. Although this is never voiced, that she has been seen in the city's streets — a confession accompanied by a shiver (568) — is enough. Emily, on the other hand, is an orphan seduced by a man of higher social rank who eventually grows tired of her and leaves her. David Copperfield and Emily's uncle enlist Martha's help to find her in London. The scene is iconic; the imagery and setting have since become stereotypical in relation to prostitutes. It is set during night time, near the Thames, in a dreary nightmarish neighbourhood full of broken and discarded objects rotting away. The prostitute as the polluter is clear in the identification of Martha with this cast-out "refuse" (571).

Although the two women leave for Australia, their fates are quite different, corresponding to their positions as prostitute and fallen woman. Martha's insistence on helping Emily constitutes her redemption. Once a prostitute, she is nevertheless given the chance of a new life. It may take place in the isolation of the Australian countryside, but she reforms and marries. Emily faces a different future. She says of herself, "I *am* fallen" (604, italics mine) — her phrasing reveals this as a state of being, not a bad step that can be redressed. Martha's outcome is denied to Emily as Dickens allows Emily a redemption that elevates her because she is *only* a fallen woman. Emily never marries, but goes from sinning harlot to sanctified Madonna figure, providing care and attention to the sick and needy (730). For both women, life can only be possible away from home, and from England, almost as if the redemption cannot be sustained within their own world.

Dickens's work gives a clear idea of the Victorian rhetoric of fallenness. Frances Trollope's *Jessie Phillips* (1842-43), Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848), George Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1856), Mary Bennett's *The Cottage girl* (1865), and Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), among others, are similar. Throughout all these works, the trajectory of the fallen women in Victorian fiction follows a well-established arc. They are young, exceptionally beautiful creatures, usually working-class: sweatshops' needle-workers, seamstresses, or factory girls. In part due to their yearning for status, these girls fall prey to the attention of young "rakes" — squires' sons, army officers, or the youngest sons of lords and aristocrats. These fictional men are — contrary to Walkowitz' historical evidence — their social superiors, which

means their liaisons must be passing affairs.<sup>49</sup> The women are abandoned immediately, or after a short time as mistresses, to face a variety of futures. Many are pregnant at this stage, but, regardless of whether or not this is the case, both paths usually lead to the grave. A number of women disappear in the city's streets, implying they have become prostitutes. Those with children see them die and are left sad, prematurely-aged women. In these fictions, death seems to be the best exit a "soiled dove" has access to. Often, burdened by shame, they become alcoholics and are quickly consumed by disease or are close to ending their misery by their own hand. Others fall ill from hunger, misery, and (as we are encouraged to imagine) guilt.<sup>50</sup> The few women that do not die can only pursue their existence in exile — moving to Australia or other colonies.

These women are never portrayed as vicious. Virtually all of the fictional portrayals are sympathetic. Although they have lost their "womanly" nature, some goodness still remains in them, usually evident in a last act of kindness before death. This last gesture is crucial; although the woman is a sinner, as a victim, she may invite pity. This implies that, were they not about to die, salvation and reformation might be possible. The possibility of reformation has to do with the "real" world, pointing outside the text to the actual streets of London where these women did not die so conveniently. Many believed that readers' compassion for fictional fallen women could translate into donations or help towards the multitude of organizations working to redeem prostitutes in London. This makes sense if one considers that many writers supported specific political agendas regarding social work among prostitutes. The plot, that sees both Martha and Emily leave Britain, of *David Copperfield* reflects the real efforts Dickens was involved in at Urania Cottage and presents immigration as a solution. This institution helped prostitutes, or young girls in danger of becoming street walkers, to acquire skills so they could become respectable domestic servants. There was, however, no wish to reintegrate them into English society; their training was to be used far away, in Australia or South Africa.

Based on these fictional works, several distinctions can be made. There is the prostitute: the street walker who exchanges sexual favours for money. But there is also

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<sup>49</sup> Usually pre-marital affairs involve this sort of women. When it comes to adultery, examples are sparser and they usually involve women of higher social class.

<sup>50</sup> Gaskell's Ruth, who also dies at the end, is perhaps one of the most frustrating examples. The novel does suggest men might bear a responsibility too (a scandalous notion for the time), and reflects a forgiving attitude towards Ruth, allowing her to transform into a "penitent Madonna" by helping those in pain. Nevertheless, it seems this cannot be sustained, as Gaskell's narrative forces Ruth to die while nursing her seducer.

the mistress: the kept woman who does not always come from the working classes. And, finally, there is the fallen woman: the virtuous creature who is seduced and thus ruined.

### **Adapting and Re-imagining: Victorian Prostitutes for the Contemporary Reader**

More than a century later, it seems that London's streets are only "properly" Victorian in the popular imagination if the cobbled streets, the rolling fog, and the dark, turbulent river are accompanied by a prostitute waiting in the shadows of a doorstep, near a dim gaslight. In these modern young adult texts, prostitution and sexuality are dealt with much more directly and openly than in Victorian fiction. It is not depicted as a moral flaw but, according to different authors, it can be seen as part of a system of exploitation or even a valid work option. The portrayal of the prostitutes is complicated, as the authors do not always disagree with Victorian values when it comes to these women. The absence of fallen women is significant, as it overtly challenges Victorian morality.

#### *Phillip Pullman's Sally Lockhart: Girls "on the game" or the Mechanics of Prostitution*

Fallen women and prostitutes appear in all the Sally Lockhart stories, although the instances are not numerous. Pullman adopts many features that belong to Victorian fiction. At times, there is a sensationalist tone that echoes W. T. Stead's articles, while Pullman also uses stereotypical Victorian characters as well as the downward spiral trope. As with nineteenth-century fiction, the writing is never explicit; however, the depictions are grittier and more realistic. Pullman deviates from the Victorian model by exploring the socio-economic dimensions of prostitution rather than discussing it in terms of sexual morality. The possibility of re-integration (which follows historical, rather than fictional material) shows how Pullman intertwines Victorian and contemporary concerns into these characters.

References to prostitutes are brief in the text, but, to a certain extent, they still carry some elements from their Victorian origins. Melodrama is present in *The Tiger in the Well*, where we are told of Mary, a drunkard prostitute in Whitechapel who will (stereotypically) die soon, either from syphilis or alcoholic poisoning (198). Innocent maids are pursued by lascivious valets and working girls are enticed by madams to

become prostitutes. There are touches of Stead's sensationalism, as in the wealthy Tzaddik's habit of getting prostitutes — "*those sort of girls*" — brought to him in his cellar (303).

The figure of the madam is also taken from Victorian fiction. In *David Copperfield*, Emily sets out to London where, penniless and alone, she finds "(as she believes) a friend" (621). The woman is a predatory creature who promises work and takes Emily to a lodging house. It is Martha, the repentant prostitute, who releases Emily, asking her to "Rise up from worse than death", taking her away from "that black pit of ruin!" (612). In Pullman, Mr Goldberg, a Jewish political activist and journalist, describes a similar operation, with women trying to entice young girls away as they arrive to London. Goldberg's predictions for the girls echo Martha's words, as disease or further misery awaits them (*Tiger* 226). In *David Copperfield* the scene is narrated after the facts; here, it is dramatised as Sally herself witnesses the system in action. The brothel-keeper, Mrs Paton, is Acton's apocryphal creature. She is also reminiscent of the girls Dorian Gray sees in the opium den in Oscar Wilde's novel (1890).<sup>51</sup> Dressed in expensive furs, and heavily covered in make-up, she recruits girls by talking gently to them as they step off the boats, almost seducing them. The madam mimics W.T. Stead's depiction of a brothel-keeper who would, indeed, "entice fresh girls and persuade them", with those who are poor and away from home being the easiest to pick up (71). Pullman never discusses the clients creating the demand, just as they did not feature in Victorian laws or novels.

The Victorian downward spiral, of both Victorian fiction and most reports of the time, is part of the stories too. Echoing the "old story" in *Oliver*, the "usual thing" (*Tiger* 292) happens to Lucy, a maid working at the Tzaddik's house. Seduced and pregnant with the valet's child, Lucy is dismissed. Likely to leave the baby at an institution, her prospects are bleak, as "what happened to servants without a character" (321) is common knowledge.

Mrs Holland's little maid, Adelaide, is also the sum of many stereotypes, although she does not complete the downward spiral as she is a *reformed* prostitute. However, she is an illiterate twenty-year-old East End orphan of rough manners.<sup>52</sup> Like

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<sup>51</sup> These are "two haggard women" (Wilde 155–156) who chatter and sneer, and whose profession, even though not stated, is obvious. One of them has a "crooked smile, like a Malay crease", a "hideous laugh", painted lips, and hiccoughs while she talks (157).

<sup>52</sup> Once she has learned to read and write, her evolution into a charming and politically savvy young woman is faster.

Dickens's Nancy, she is "gaudily overdressed", has a sharp cockney tongue and a harsh voice (*The Tin Princess* 5). At the beginning of *Princess*, she is living in a luxurious house in St John's Wood, a place notoriously used by "rich gentlemen ... to set up their mistresses" in houses of their own (6). In addition to these usual Victorian traits, Adelaide also reflects the Victorian notion of prostitution as shameful. Talking to her friend Jim, she confesses to doing "terrible things", while avoiding the word "prostitute". She tries to voice it, but cannot do it: "I used — I was — I'm ashamed, I can't tell you" (36). In the end, she merely nods when asked if she has been "on the game" (36). The shame, together with "her little face ... flushed with sorrow" (36) mimics Victorian reaction to such an avowal and Victorian literature's reticence about explicit references to prostitution. Adelaide's regret is underlined when she summarises her past existence in a series of Victorian vignettes:

I begged, I stole, I near starved ... Finally I ended up in a house in Shepherd Market. You know the sort I mean. This old woman ... she had half a dozen girls. She weren't bad, she had a doctor what called every month to keep us healthy. (36)

The Victorian mechanics that divide London into a working East and a consuming West are also present. It is made clear that girls from the working class (like Lucy) do not have "the option of being ruffled and indignant" (*Tiger* 320) or to reject the advances of their superiors. Class is the key. Sally observes that men look at her differently when they do not know about her class (320). When she is herself, a "lady", men would not dare to make an advance. This underlines the novel's depiction of the same system at work in prostitution, where the social position of those less fortunate is exploited by those wealthier or superior.

Prostitution is also represented as "white slavery", in a similar manner to Stead's writings. One of the subtitles of his exposé is "The London slave market" (69). In Pullman's *Tiger*, the Tzaddik runs a series of businesses, among which are "white goods" (226). Mr Goldberg explains to Sally, and to the reader, that the term means: "Girls sold into prostitution" (226). Men are seen as responsible for *organising* such trade; a view that agrees with Victorian writings, but goes against historic evidence. Indeed, Walkowitz notes that "[o]n the whole, prostitution in Victorian Britain was a

trade largely organized by women rather than men” (*Prostitution and Victorian Society* 25).

Pullman, to some extent, also blames economic hardship for prostitution, a Victorian belief that Walkowitz has also discredited. In a cramped East End sweatshop a family works to keep starvation at bay. Miss Robbins, a social activist, literally points to the “bright, rebellious-looking” (*Tiger* 233) daughter as a future street-walker. Enticed by a brothel-keeper, the girl will earn money quickly and die of disease (234). When Sally questions such fixed destiny, she is told “[n]othing is more certain” (234). With a dose of sarcasm, the social activist explains how romantic notions of reformation are fantasies:

Perhaps a kind-hearted gentleman with five hundred pounds a year will fall in love with her and marry her<sup>53</sup>. Perhaps an angel will come down and take her straight to Heaven. Perhaps she’ll be run over by an omnibus. I can’t predict the fate of an individual. But what’s undeniable is that in a thousand other sweatshops there are girls as pretty as that, as lively and quick and frustrated as that, and of those a large number will end as I described. (234)

In the scene, Victorian beliefs — Acton’s “cruel biting poverty” and the downwards trajectory “plot” — are combined with modern undertones. Indeed, its dismissal of melodramatic solutions underlines the bare horror of prostitution, not in terms of sexual morality, but in terms of exploitation.

This is one of the ways in which Pullman differs from his Victorians precedents. The word “prostitution” is used explicitly only to discuss the mechanics of the trade. Unlike in nineteenth-century fiction, Pullman emphasis is on the economics of exploitation. *Tiger* depicts prostitution as a trade organized and controlled by men, such as the Tzaddik:

They employ a number of women – Yiddish-speakers, often – to go to the docks and look out for single girls travelling alone. They offer them somewhere to stay, and when the girl is safely out of the way of help, with no one who speaks her language within a mile, they make it clear what the price of shelter is. The girls

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<sup>53</sup> Ironically, this is *exactly* what Pullman deems possible when it comes to Adelaide in *Princess* (1994). However, this book opens with a list of characters, like in a play, thus underlining its fictionality.



who work in these filthy houses ... half of those will be refugees, poor Jewish girls who arrived alone. When they become diseased or worn out, they're taken abroad and sold to brothels in seaports ... That's the sort of people we're dealing with, Miss Lockhart: men who do that. (226)<sup>54</sup>

That the recruiting madam has “eyes as cold as coins” (257), underlines the greed that fuels prostitution rather than the moral corruption that worried Victorians. In this manner, Pullman stresses prostitution's socio-economic dimension, showing those who prey on new immigrants like vultures, part of a system that consumes these young women. That these girls are entered in the books as “white goods” and are “sold” clearly labels the operation as slave trade. This is what is actually being discussed, a practice that is estimated to be bigger today than ever.<sup>55</sup> Pullman's position here was anticipated during the late 1800s, even though the widespread concern regarding “white slavery” then was mostly created by sensational journalism. Since the 1990s, debates about prostitution have oscillated between the concept of prostitutes as victims, exploited and abused by men, and the concept of prostitutes as women in control of their own bodies who view sex as work. Pullman eliminates women's agency. Even Mrs Paton does not work for herself, but for the Tzaddik. Pullman's perspective is modern in how the explicitness with which he treats the topic indicates it to be part of the reader's world, that is, the modern world. It is “Victorian” in how it depicts the driving forces behind it as exclusively male.

Prostitution as economic exploitation rather than as moral corruption is not the only new element introduced here. Discussions of rape and depictions of sexual violence are included in a way that would have never been possible in Victorian (adult) fiction. Such topics can be dealt with in modern young adult fiction, but only to a certain extent, due to the age of the implied audience. Even though rape is not directly articulated, it is implied more prominently than nineteenth-century fiction would allow, giving this Victorian world a sense of sexual danger for girls that is mostly absent in the original inspiration.<sup>56</sup> The real villain of *Ruby* is not Mrs Holland, but the Tzaddik.

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<sup>54</sup> Pullman introduces another new concept, that the disoriented Jewish immigrants are depicted as the victims, which ties in with the book's theme of xenophobia.

<sup>55</sup> Indeed, trafficking people has become “the third-largest moneymaking venture in the world”, with the UN estimating the trade generates more than \$12 billion a year (Malarek 4).

<sup>56</sup> In most Victorian fictions, girls are “seduced”. Even in Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), it is not exactly clear whether Tess is actually raped by Alec, and has not just been “weak”. She says she was dazed by him and didn't understand Alec's meaning until it was too late (91).

About to sail for the East, he confronts Sally with two choices: to come on board alive or to die. When Sally asks what he wants her for, Ah Ling replies “Oh, surely ... I don’t have to explain that? You are not a child” (197), then leans forward and caresses her hand (198). Pullman’s writing assumes a degree of sexual awareness from both Sally and the reader that requires no further explanation. Sexual violence is even more explicit in an episode where Rebecca, a Jewish immigrant, tells of her ordeal while spying on the Tzaddik. Discovered, the men that find her take her to the basement. She stops talking and Sally takes her hand. She then adds that “[a]fter a while they’d had enough” (*Tiger* 266). By association, and in light of his proposal to Sally, the Tzaddik emerges as a particularly greedy and sadistic man, unlike any Victorian villain. In addition, Mr Michelet, the Tzaddik’s valet, is a sexual predator who not only goes after housemaids, but also has a dark past involving jail time for his involvement with children. Such characters are not in Victorian fiction — demonstrating that the modern context allows more freedom in dealing with such topics — but at the same time the implications of rape and child abuse seem to reflect contemporary anxieties. It is also relevant that, like prostitution in Victorian fiction, rape is not made explicit in these modern texts. It is simply talked around and implicitly understood.

Although the downward spiral is mentioned, Pullman allows for exceptions. Indeed, death can be avoided if one “leaves the game”, as illustrated by Adelaide who changes her life by marrying a future king. Although the plot device strains credibility and is arguably sexist, it is important that Adelaide *is* able to have a life. Neither consumed nor corrupted, this “illiterate cockney mistress” (*Princess* 9) is redeemed, becoming someone whose “experience of the world has given her a wisdom beyond her years, and a strength and perception of character” (43) that her husband relies upon. This challenges Victorian fiction but echoes Acton’s contention that prostitutes who re-integrated into society had acquired, through their profession, a knowledge of the world above their original station (40).

From the outset, Pullman, unlike the Victorians, distinguishes between prostitutes — doomed, as in Victorian fiction, to death, with the exception of Adelaide — and fallen women. Even though Mrs Holland, the villain in *Ruby*, falls into the latter category this is not what dooms her. It is her ruthlessness, dishonesty, murderous determination, and abuse of those weaker than her that condemn her. She chases Sally to get the titular ruby — a jewel Sally’s father left her — because she was once bought

with the jewel, promised to her by a Maharajah.<sup>57</sup> When the two women meet at the end of the story, the atmosphere echoes both David Copperfield and Mr Peggotty's encounter with Martha, as well as Nancy's meeting with Rose Maylie on London Bridge. In *Ruby*, the women meet at night, in the middle of a city bridge, under the cover of gas lamps and the chiming of the city clocks. Both Pullman and Dickens depict a meeting between women from different classes. However, Mrs Holland is no Nancy, and she is also far from the terrifying figure she was. Now she is just a "squat, dumpy figure in black" (*Ruby* 187–8), a shadow advancing slowly, limping, wheezing, and holding her side. When Sally throws the ruby into the Thames, Mrs Holland jumps after it and dies. Her muttering of what the Maharajah told her when he promised her the ruby indicates that Mrs Holland's obsession with the jewel is about the loss of her youth and beauty.<sup>58</sup> However, Mrs Holland has not suffered the life of a fallen woman in Victorian fiction. Far from being shunned by society or becoming a Magdalene, she has been married and has led a "normal" life. Thus Mrs Holland is not simply a one-dimensional character used to illustrate moral failure, nor does she function merely as a foil to exult the better women around her (the way Rose exists to contrast with Nancy).

Pullman differs from the Victorians in other ways too. Contradicting apparent Victorian beliefs (but not necessarily Victorian realities) both men and women have sexual impulses and a right to act on them. When it comes to Fred Garland, it is Sally who takes the initiative to transform their friendship into something more. She pulls his hand, "commanding ... [and] urgent" (*Shadow* 224) and leads him to her bedroom. The atmosphere — with the glowing embers in the fire, the warm room, and the nervousness reflected by both characters "trembling" (224) as they kiss — makes clear that, far from condemning the characters' actions, the narrative approves.

Since Pullman imposes a contemporary view of sexual relations on the Victorian setting, the idea of "fallen women" is treated as being reactionary.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, Sally and Fred's pre-marital sex is depicted as part of the natural evolution of their relationship. Nevertheless, Sally is made a victim of Victorian circumstances because she is unmarried, pregnant, and alone after her lover dies. Being a single mother is not an absolute taboo: the people who Sally lives with accept her and her child as

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<sup>57</sup> "You know what he wanted" (*Ruby* 191) is all Mrs Holland says but it is enough to understand what the bargain entailed.

<sup>58</sup> Indeed, Sally first laughs at the idea that she was once beautiful.

<sup>59</sup> Sally never judges Mrs Holland on the basis of her story with the Maharajah, but rather on her criminal activities.

something completely natural. Outside of this modern environment, however, Sally faces negative attitudes as Pullman presents most Victorians as particularly narrow-minded individuals. Indeed, Sally loses all her business files when her landlord decides she is “a common prostitute” based on the fact that she receives men in her office (*Shadow* 194), and a lawyer, who is supposed to be defending her, belittles her as “only a woman”, adding that she is “a woman who by her own admission has given away her virtue, who has behaved in a manner no better than a common prostitute ... lascivious, greedy, weak-minded and mean-spirited” (*Tiger* 125).

Independent women like Sally are in danger of being labelled prostitutes by their contemporaries not only for pre-marital sex and adultery, but also if they breach the tight rules controlling their gender’s social behaviour. These attitudes are presented retrogradingly, and typically Victorian, as Pullman has people who represent authority — policemen, lawyers and judges — voicing these ideas. There is an implicit critique in the contrast between Sally’s “modern” world and the exterior Victorian one, which advances modern attitudes as far superior. Sally can only associate herself with those on her level — enlightened characters such as Mr Goldberg, whom she recognises as her equal (228) and whom she ends up marrying. Pullman’s “modernised bubble” functions as a device to set up modern viewpoints within a Victorian world in order to criticise its values.

It is important to understand that Sally, who fits the Victorian mould in many ways, is never depicted as a “fallen” woman. Unlike Mrs Holland, Sally has sex with Fred out of love. Pullman attaches a degree of morality to sex, but this still differs from Victorian attitudes. Considering Mrs Holland, Sally, and the reformed Adelaide, the idea suggested is that sex for love is never a sin; using sex as a trading tool is. Nevertheless, Pullman’s mixture of Victorian sensationalism and modern concerns leave books within the same series in slight opposition: while the matchmaker girl and the immigrant are destined to die, Adelaide rises from harlot to Queen.

### *Eleanor Updale’s Montmorency: Reversing the Victorian Prostitute’s Downwards Spiral*

Eleanor Updale’s *Montmorency* series (2003–2006) features one prostitute, Vi. Her origins, physical appearance, and actions reflect nineteenth-century prejudices surrounding the figure of the prostitute. Her portrayal over the course of the adventures

is complicated by her transformation from young streetwalker to respectable mother, an evolution that challenges the Victorian model.

Vi's occupation is not discussed in her first appearance. However, Updale borrows markers from nineteenth-century fiction to signal her status. Like Dickens's Nancy, she lives in the East End. Her lack of education is denoted by the "Vakensees" (*Montmorency* 49) sign displayed outside the boarding house Vi attends to with her mother. Her appearance also bespeaks her station in life. The fifteen-year-old Vi alternates between two states. By day, she is a ragged child, as she sits barefoot on the doorstep in "tattered petticoat", looking tired and filthy, her hair a "nest of tangles" (49). Mrs Evans, her mother, is but a "larger, older version" of Vi (50), equally untidy, and wearing an old cast-off dress. By night, both women change, they style their hair, and, most importantly, Vi puts on "an alarming amount of make-up on her face" (52), echoing both Acton's apocryphal prostitute as well as Dickens's duo, Nancy and Bet. The similarities with Dickens's pair continue, as Vi and Mrs Evans get "decked out in their flamboyant but grubby dresses, their cheeks bright with rouge and their hair piled up in frizzy curls, ready for a night outside the Opera House" (114). Vi's "meagre (possibly non-existent) underwear" (*Rocks* 202) signals her sexual availability and her potential promiscuity — recalling Acton's claims of "lax morals" among the working classes.<sup>60</sup>

Being a prostitute is mainly signalled through clothing and physical appearance. This is clear in the way *Montmorency*, giving Cissie a note to deliver for him to the hatter's, makes her pass for a prostitute without her knowledge. Cissie is annoying, flirty, and silly. She is slender, but graceless: her lip droops, she has a lump on her nose, and garish ribbons tie her yellow hair (*Montmorency* 80). When the owner of the elegant shop sees her walking on the street, he judges her "No better than she looked" (118). He is then surprised when Cissie walks into his shop, but the note she gives him confirms "his assessment of her character and lifestyle. No better than she looked indeed" (118).

As with Victorian fiction, the word "prostitute" is never used, but, besides their appearances, the women's actions denote their profession.<sup>61</sup> The depiction of Vi and

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<sup>60</sup> Once Vi goes to live in the West side of London, garments are provided, including underwear.

<sup>61</sup> In a later book, Vi is called a "hussy" and a "trollop" (*Rocks* 368–9), but these words are also vague (as they can be merely insults).

her mother standing outside the opera, interacting with rich West London men is clear enough.<sup>62</sup>

... the mean poverty of the area gave way to the arrival of carriages, cabs, and the raucous braying of the rich. They [Vi and her mother] watched the audience arrive and leave. Sometimes they would bring men back with them. Sometimes they would be gone all night. (97)

In a later adventure, Vi's discussion of her clients reflect other Victorian ideas. Firstly, that these women primarily "service" people from higher classes is upheld, despite historical claims to the contrary. Vi indeed lists judges, admirals and politicians among the "sorts" that she and the other girls get (*Rocks* 175). She mentions these men's need for "a kiss and a cuddle", then talks about "the morning after" and how many are ashamed of what has happened once they are sober (*Rocks* 177–78).<sup>63</sup> Secondly, there is an implicit excuse for these men's behaviour: they are drunk. The subsequent shame indicates this is not the way they normally behave. This also presents the Victorian attitude, reflected in fiction, that men are blameless while the women who behave in such a way are almost unforgivable.

Updale's fiction is not endorsing an entirely coherent Victorian worldview. The logic behind why Vi and her mother take to the street is never explained.<sup>64</sup> They are a cheerful duo, and, although poor, are never described as starving. In fact, they have the income from their boarding house. In this sense, Updale's Victorian world shows the seams of its construction, merely imitating fictional Victorian tropes without a deeper understanding of their origins. It also takes on board Victorian prejudices regarding the working classes by depicting women with an income as working prostitutes.

In neither Victorian literature nor Updale's series would the upper classes publicly interact in a social manner with such women.<sup>65</sup> When Montmorency goes to the opera, he sees Mrs Evans and Vi. He almost smiles at them, but then "he

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<sup>62</sup> The idea that the West comes to the East for all their entertainments is thus reinforced, highlighting the exploitative dynamic of the city.

<sup>63</sup> The need for "a kiss and a cuddle" suggests companionship rather than sordid lust. However, the choice of words is more likely out of a wish to avoid specifics about what type of services Vi offers.

<sup>64</sup> A book later, when five years have gone by, Vi says their financial circumstances have changed, as her mother is sick and the boarding house has been empty for a while. This confirms the idea that they had enough to live on before.

<sup>65</sup> They would address them to solicit their services, or to try to rescue them from prostitution.

remembered *who* he was” (*Montmorency* 121, italics mine). Despite his sense of friendship with the women, he understands that his newly acquired social position does not allow for such connections. However, Scarper’s transformation into Montmorency is such that Vi gives him “a sideways grin, with a pout and a flick of her curls” (121–22), simply seeing him as one of the many rich men she is targeting.

The conclusion of the first adventure is consistent with the Victorian depiction of East Enders. Vi finds a series of valuable jewels Scarper has accidentally forgotten in their boarding house. Once they sell them — and despite meaning to spend it “wisely” (218) — the money quickly goes to clothes and drink, leaving the pair where they started. Their inability to better their lot even when given a chance says much about them as denizens of the East End, and as women. The frivolous nature of their expenses echoes Acton’s causes of prostitution, namely the love of drink and dresses (165).

Even when Updale differs from Victorian fiction, there are certain aspects that still respond to nineteenth-century ideas. In the second adventure, *Montmorency on the Rocks* (2004), Vi experiences a change of circumstances which challenges the Victorian stereotypical downward spiral. The change has little to do with Vi bettering her own situation; it is only through external help that she can advance socially.<sup>66</sup> Montmorency plays the role of the external benefactor when he runs into a twenty-year-old Vi accosting men outside the Opera in a “bored, routine way” (170). It is not out of a Victorian sense of goodness, charity, or morality that he helps Vi. Due to her profession, Vi is a valuable source of information. Her usefulness regarding Montmorency and his companions’ current mission is why they decide to help her out of her current situation, reflecting a disturbing view of Vi as a commodity.

The relationship between Vi and the three significantly older men she associates with — Montmorency, his colleague Fox-Selwyn, and their friend Doctor Farcett — is what allows her to change her life, in defiance of the Victorian model. However, Updale’s attitude oscillates between social critique and mere representation of the Victorian mind-set.

On the one hand, the relationship underlines and criticises the hypocrisy of Victorians regarding prostitution. When Montmorency first introduces Vi to Fox-Selwyn and Farcett, both are “embarrassed and shocked by the encounter” (170). That

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<sup>66</sup> This indicates that these women cannot help themselves, but need others to reform — an attitude that perfectly mirrors the mentality of middle and upper class Victorians.

these men would not acknowledge a prostitute in public does not mean they would not use her in private. By having all three of them sleep with Vi, Updale emphasizes the duplicity of these gentlemen's moral standards. Once Vi has helped them out with their investigations, they realize there is "no real need to keep Vi" but they also admit to not having the heart to return her "and her mother ... to the damp of Covent Garden" (319). In retrospect, this is shocking, as shortly afterwards Vi announces she is pregnant. Their consideration of sending Vi back indicates not only how she is no longer useful to them in their mission, but that, since they have slept with her, she is no longer desirable either.

On the other hand, Vi's portrayal is implicitly Victorian. When she, slightly drunk, announces her pregnancy, "First Montmorency, then Doctor Farcett, and then Lord George Fox-Selwyn blushed very red" (344). Their individual belief in possibly being the father clearly suggests that, within a brief period of time, they have each pursued Vi in her capacity as a prostitute. In the next book, the narrative adds Chivers, Fox-Selwyn's servant, to this list. Vi's sleeping with four men in quick succession shows her either to be a prostitute (if she was paid, which is never specified) or a stereotypically promiscuous East End woman.

The men's attitude towards Vi afterwards show once more (although it does not criticize) Victorian's double standards. The men can be shocked about Vi being a prostitute, but their statuses and lives do not suffer in the least from having slept with her. None of them have a romantic, as opposed to a sexual, relationship with Vi — nor do they attempt to start one, or marry her, after the announcement. The latter, of course, would be out of the question: both Doctor Farcett and Montmorency have other love interests who belong to their own social circle. Montmorency even declares that the young Mary Gibson is the *only* woman he has *ever* loved (*Montmorency's Revenge* 250). This stresses Vi's precarious position and is reminiscent of women in similar situations in Victorian literature. Vi becomes important only in terms of her baby; once Tom is born, the men's attention shifts towards him.

In contrast with Victorian literary norms, Vi does not die during, or immediately after, childbirth. Like *Oliver Twist*, her son enjoys a reversal of fortunes in the vein of *Oliver Twist*, but Vi lives on. She does become a subdued character, however. While nobody "reforms" Vi, she "naturally" moves away from prostitution to fulfil her motherhood role, transitioning from Victorian harlot to Victorian Madonna. Vi's income, and her new societal role are, as mentioned, courtesy of others. She becomes



Fox-Selwyn's housekeeper — not in his London home, but in an alternative abode in Tarimond, a remote island off the coast of Scotland. This is significant because, as in Victorian fiction, the reformed prostitute must be physically removed from her environment. Tarimond is Vi's Australia. The role she occupies represents the reversal of the Victorian stereotype of the "fall" into prostitution: instead of being the servant who the lord of the house gets pregnant, and who is then fired and becomes a prostitute, Vi has a reversed path.

Besides the inversion of the downward spiral, Updale departs from the Victorian fiction model by allowing Vi to be happy. She is a savvy, cheerful, and knowledgeable girl who never "repents" from her past, as even Pullman's Adelaide does. This is shown by having her expertly navigate her "home territory" (*Rocks* 230), the mazes of the East End and all its pubs, drinking a good deal of gin (225), while also showing her as caring — she nurses both her mother and Montmorency when needed. Dickens's Nancy has some of these qualities, but she is never truly happy or carefree. In contrast, Vi still has a sense of innocence. At heart, she is just a girl who giggles when Doctor Farcett tries to take her measurements and parades her new clothes to the men, unaware of their embarrassment.<sup>67</sup>

Even so, Vi never becomes a true part of the higher social circle she mingles with. There is a Victorian conservative morality which is approvingly carried on in the modern text. While her son Tom, like Oliver Twist, inherits a fortune, and is considered Fox-Selwyn's heir, this does not affect Vi's status.<sup>68</sup> She is never truly integrated, like Montmorency, nor is she ever freed from her past.<sup>69</sup> While Montmorency can be his new self effortlessly, it is different for Vi. About thirteen years later, within a couple of hours of walking through her old haunts in London's East End, Vi's "old voice" comes back (*Assassins* 165), even though she considers herself to have "changed" just as Montmorency has (*Revenge* 74). But she has not. In a visit to the United States, Vi gets into a fight: "It was a long time since Vi had fought with a woman but in the Covent Garden slums she had not been above solving problems with

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<sup>67</sup> Again, the men's embarrassment is duplicitous and suggests criticism of Victorian society, as one in which a man would blush at such things, but still engage a prostitute's services.

<sup>68</sup> In reality, Tom is not Fox-Selwyn's son. Indeed, Fox-Selwyn's twin brother believes that Tom can pass himself off perfectly as a servant "despite his origins", and laments that such a "rough boy" should be Fox-Selwyn's son (*Revenge* 157). Secretly, these qualities can be attributed to Tom's real origin, as the son of a thief and a prostitute: Montmorency and Vi.

<sup>69</sup> Years later, even fifteen-year-old Frank, Fox-Selwyn's nephew, suggests that Vi does not know who Tom's father is (*Assassins* 119), something Vi herself admits (370).

physical force” (*Assassins* 366). Despite the thirteen-year gap, her past self quickly emerges as she exchanges insults in a shrill voice and rolls on the floor, tugging her opponent’s hair and spitting (367). The scene may be intended as comic relief, but it is carried off at the expense of Vi’s character, who had otherwise seemed to be on the verge of becoming, as the narrator puts it, “a more sophisticated version” of herself (219). While Montmorency can meditate on how America is a place for “new beginnings and forgiven pasts” (307), this opportunity only applies to him, Scarper, and his secrets. For Vi, the past is always ready to burst through, and the reason why being a housekeeper represents the peak of her possibilities. Vi’s past sins are too great to allow her to completely re-enter herself in society. While Montmorency can redeem himself by using Scarper’s skills for the good of the nation, Vi’s former profession means she cannot offer anything of the sort. Correspondingly, there is a limit to the reversal of fortune she can achieve.

*Y.S. Lee’s Mary Quinn series: Prostitutes, Mistresses and Feminism*

Y.S. Lee’s approach in her *Mary Quinn* series (2009–2011) is very different from that of the previous authors. The stories are a vehicle for feminism; the strong women that Mary, the protagonist, encounters are meant to be role models for her as well as for the reader. Women in Lee’s texts embody contemporary attitudes, refusing to become sexual objects. There are stereotypical Victorian plots regarding prostitutes and fallen women, but the narrative takes care to underline their fictional status. However, the modern innovations Lee makes are, at times, still accompanied by Victorian attitudes.

There are instances within the series that signal pastiche. The story Mary tells about her mother follows the Victorian downward spiral prostitutes and fallen women were condemned to. In accordance with Acton’s and Mayhew’s beliefs, it is primarily economic reasons that push the East End Irish seamstress towards prostitution. She then falls ill and dies. Superficially, this corresponds exactly to the stereotypical Victorian stages. Indeed, when Mary talks about her past, she says “[i]t’s an old story” (*The Agency: a Spy in the House* 22). This phrase suggests Lee’s awareness of the pattern being followed. It echoes the same words said by the workhouse surgeon in *Oliver Twist* when Oliver’s mother is brought in, dishevelled and pregnant, from the streets. The metafictional reference is slight, but it alerts the reader to the mechanics at play here. In a later episode, Mary refers to “the old pregnant mistress plot” (116). She

also considers a parlour maid to be “only following the usual script” (*The Traitor and the Tunnel* 98) when she decides that the way to convince her gentleman-friend to marry her is to have some private time with him in her bedroom.

The philosophy embraced by the texts is feminist. At Miss Scrimshaw’s Academy for Girls, Mary is introduced to concepts regarding women and sexuality that contest Victorian ideas. When Mary turns seventeen, the Academy’s tutors, Miss Treleaven and Mrs Frame, meet with her to discuss her future employment prospects. One of them openly explains how some girls marry to escape poverty while others “find lovers to provide for them” (*Agency* 20); she then implies that Mary’s exotic looks could be an advantage in procuring such lovers. To her tutors’ satisfaction, Mary rejects this prospect, but not on the grounds one would expect. It is not morality but the lack of freedom that puts Mary off, because “a mistress is just as dependent as a wife” (20). Mary’s answer is celebrated by Mrs Frame: “You have been well trained in the philosophy of the school, Mary. We do not encourage girls to build their lives on the whims of men” (21). There is no talk of “fallen women”, but a frank discussion of how some women use their sexual power to survive. The Academy’s purpose is “to offer girls an independent life” (14), and this constitutes the key criticism against being a prostitute or mistress. Although it can be a woman’s choice to become either one, it is still seen as a disempowering position. This is a compelling way of dismissing prostitution for a modern audience rather than condemning it on the basis of Victorian virtue and decency, something especially true considering that prostitution is, to a certain degree, legal in Canada, where Lee is from.

Nevertheless, the difference established between being a “mistress” and being a “prostitute” is closer to a Victorian conservative position. While Mary’s mother’s initial profession and ethnicity play a role in, and almost justify, her descent into prostitution, this is not a topic that educated Victorian women would openly discuss. Neither was it acceptable to suggest such an occupation for somebody who has received an education, as Mary has. Nevertheless, Mary’s tutors — representing educated and modern women — discuss having lovers who provide for a woman as a “mistress”, whereas Mary’s mother is a “prostitute”. Both entail the exchange of sexual favours for money, although being a mistress implies a more subtle operation than being a prostitute. This indicates a difference in social spheres — a distinction that betrays a quasi-Victorian elitism.

Lee's depiction of the working classes mainly follows Victorian views, bordering on a Victorian conservative classism. In a nineteenth-century fashion, the working classes lack a sense of "decorum" when it comes to sex, reflecting "lax morals". They are also, in Victorian fiction style, victims to those above them, who abuse their positions. While Mary works at the Thorolds's as a companion to their daughter, people speculate that she must instead be Thorolds's "paid companion" (65). This connotes working women as nothing more than sexual objects in the eyes of their employers, with a dose of Stead's sensationalism. In a later adventure, Mary works at Buckingham Palace as a parlour-maid where she is surrounded by sexual danger. Not only does the Prince of Wales have designs on her, but his equerries look at her as a "piece of horseflesh: not good for much, but perhaps worth having anyways" (*Tunnel* 197).<sup>70</sup> One actually attempts to rape her.

This explicitness of sex is another one of the changes that Lee introduces in her Victorian world. Dickens wanted to avoid offending his readers, and so the word "prostitute" was never part of *Oliver Twist*, in accordance with the "manners of the age" (36). As discussed previously, this absence is pervasive in nineteenth-century fiction,. However, this Victorian silence is shattered in Lee's work from the very beginning. Although there is only one prostitute in the series (Mary's mother), there *is* one. What happens is not implied, it is actually voiced: "soon [she] had no choice: she became a *prostitute*" (*Agency* 22, italics mine). This not only indicates how much the "manners" of our contemporary age have changed since Victorian times, but it is yet another intrusion of contemporary manners into what is a supposedly Victorian setting, once again demonstrating how much these are neo-Victorian texts. The use of the word acts as a declaration of the story's intentions to be direct.

Victorian classism and modern explicitness are merged, with the lower classes, represented by the servants, being the most explicit when it comes to talking about sex. A maid comments on how "men like a bit of meat on a girl's bones ... Something to hold on to" (*Tunnel* 125). When another servant gets a parcel, exclaiming she has never seen one that big, a footman comments: "Sadie, my sweet ... That's what you said to me last night" (134).

It is also the members of the lower classes who are violent when it comes to sex. The equerries are depicted, regardless of their historical status, as servants. In the

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<sup>70</sup> An equerry is "an officer of the royal household, charged with the duty of occasional attendance on the sovereign" (equerry, *n.2.b*).

explicit scene where an equerry attempts to rape Mary, he, in an “ugly tone”, calls her a “common bit of skirt”, “a worthless jade”, and, hitting her, says: “I’ll give it to you rough” (262–63). When the Prince of Wales attempts to have sex with Mary, the scene is highly contrasted to her encounter with his equerry. It is in a bedroom, instead of against a corridor wall, and the Prince is gentle to the point of being effeminate.<sup>71</sup> Indeed, when it becomes evident Mary will not have sex with him, the Prince suffers something close to an episode of hysteria, despite it being an “exclusively female ailment” (274). Likewise, Mary’s love interest, James Easton, is a gentleman and therefore his advances are also gentle.

As the series advances, sex becomes a much more prominent topic — and one that is spoken of in an explicit way which is absent in Victorian fiction. When Mary, working at Buckingham Palace, first catches the eye of the Prince of Wales, the housekeeper warns Mary in a Victorian fashion, “That’s not the way to promotion in this household, my girl; that’s the swiftest path to a Home for Fallen Women” (*Tunnel* 125). What follows is not the Victorian plot of the maid abused and dismissed. Although her servant position implies Mary cannot refuse, it is made clear that she could equally take advantage of the situation. Indeed, the lady-in-waiting complains that Victorian girls are “timid things, full of shuddering prudery”, and suggest to Mary to go ahead, explaining how a “woman who beds a man holds a great deal of power over him” (207). Even if she has her own motivations, what the lady-in-waiting is implying is similar to Mary’s tutors’ talk of mistresses. Rather than be abused by men, women can use them instead. The lady-in-waiting’s suggestion is rejected, and Mary reflects that uneducated housemaids engaging in such activities are likely “to end up pregnant, discarded and in the poorhouse” (208), as in Victorian fiction. Mary, of course, is no uneducated housemaid, and, although she does not want to manipulate the Prince, she is *willing* to lose her virginity to him to obtain information, for “[t]he Agency’s sake” (268), even if, in the end, she is unable to do so. The reasons evoked do not make sense in terms of a contemporary discourse, but are closer to a Victorian sense of womanhood. Mary cannot have sex with “Bertie” because she refuses to sacrifice her “womanly self-respect” (268) and dignity.

There is another aspect of Victorian assumptions that Lee challenges. While Mary will not have sex with the Prince of Wales, she admits the possibility when it

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<sup>71</sup> Even when the Prince forces a kiss on Mary, there is never a sense of danger as with the rape scene. Mary evaluates the Prince as a small, soft man that she can physically hurt, if she had to (*Tunnel* 272).

comes to her love interest, James Easton. The sexual tension between them is present throughout the series, making it evident that in *this* Victorian world, both women *and* men have sexual desires: “[Mary] was on fire. She lost herself in a haze of textures, of flesh against flesh, of silk on skin, of breath caressing lips and lashes” (371). Despite their “long-repressed desire” (370), Lee does not allow her protagonist to sleep with her lover, as Pullman does. Instead, the last book ends with the implication that marriage will come first.

It is clear from the start that Mary and her tutors are “intruders” in this Victorian world — much like Pullman’s Sally. After all, the Academy doubles as an all-female detective organisation that even Scotland Yard (traditionally associated with men) resorts to when they cannot solve a case.<sup>72</sup> Mary grows up to embrace their principles. This is evident in how, later, she refuses to accept the double-standards of characters Lee portrays as true Victorians. Historically, as the letter from a mother to a newspaper suggests (see pg. 45), Victorian women were aware of the existence of prostitutes, but it was expected they would feign ignorance. In *The Agency* Mary refuses to participate in such hypocrisy. Talking about nurses at the war front, James Easton — then a young engineer — argues that these women risk endangering themselves and distracting the soldiers by being there, to which Mary retorts that nurses are not the only women in an encampment (*Agency* 80). Her awareness of the existence of prostitutes and her public reference to them shocks those present, not only because of the social context — a parlour conversation — but also because she is a woman. She thus articulates Lee’s feminist subtext. Her views are akin to those of a modern woman. Existing as she does in an old-fashioned and misogynistic and xenophobic world, she is a vehicle of identification for the modern reader.

### *Walking the Streets: Further Examples of Prostitutes*

Fallen women can be found in most of the young adult “Victorian” stories discussed within this thesis. The adventure in Brian Keaney’s *Nathaniel Wolfe and the Bodysnatchers* (2009) features the fallen woman as its central plot device, as does Michael Ford’s *The Poisoned House* (2010). Prostitutes never take centre stage, but are

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<sup>72</sup> The Agency is a clear contemporary space within the Victorian world, as shown by the strong feminism of its founders and agents, and the way these women are able to operate. Its existence also supports the neo-Victorian nature of the narrative.

nevertheless featured. As previously stated, these texts as a group reveal a consensus that prostitutes are a crucial element without which Victorian London cannot exist, and are intrinsic to the landscape and feel of the era. The following are two concise examples that illustrate how prostitutes are still depicted in line with Victorian aesthetics.

First, there is Nancy Springer's *Enola Holmes* mysteries (2006–2010) which feature the younger sister of the famous Victorian detective. *The Case of the Missing Marquess* (2006) is the first of the series, and it opens with an East End scene. After dark, in the faint light of gas lamps, a cloaked young woman walks among the smells of gin, sewers, and the Thames' rotten fish, among rats, drunken men, and barefoot children (1–2):

At the next street-lamp, she sees a woman with painted lips and smudged eyes waiting in a doorway. A hansom cab drives up, stops, and a man in a tail coat and shinning silk top-hat gets out. Even though the woman in the doorway wears a low-cut evening gown that might once have belonged to a lady of the gentleman's social class, the black-clad watcher does not think the gentleman is here to go dancing. She sees the prostitute's haggard eyes, haunted with fear no matter how much her red-smeared lips smile. One like her was recently found dead a few streets away, slit wide open. (2–3)

While brief, the passage manages to reference all of the classic Victorian elements of the prostitute figure: the second-hand clothes, the heavy make-up, the dark street location, and even the class difference between the prostitute and her client. In contrast with nineteenth-century narratives, the subject is explicitly emphasised. Although the sense of violence and sensationalism echoes Stead's articles, the sadistic detail of a woman being "slit wide open" is more than would be encountered in the *Pall Mall Gazette*. Springer links the figure of the prostitute with "Jack the Ripper" (a connection all our other authors have avoided), and the final picture is disturbing.

In Mary Hooper's *Fallen Grace* (2010), the central plot resorts to Dickens and Victorian fiction to construct the story of its protagonist. Grace unwillingly "falls" when she is raped, but then has a reversal of fortune that would never have been allowed in Victorian fiction: she turns out to be a rich heiress and is able to leave her past behind. But what is more interesting is the discourse around prostitution. The

women that resort to working the streets do so out of necessity — “sad young women ... with matted hair, sores, bruises and utterly wretched expressions” (77). Grace prays that this will not be her fate or her sister’s — unsurprising given that prostitution is painted in the most horrific terms, resorting again to Stead’s stories and the end-of-the-century atmosphere. Indeed, Grace believes at one point that her sister has been taken against her will to the houses where “women are kept to satisfy men’s desires” (203). The fate of these women rivals Martha’s “worse than death” (Dickens, *David Copperfield* 612) destiny:

Mrs Macready had once told her of a poor unfortunate kept in the grimy cellars of the house next door expressly for the purpose of prostitution. ‘Never allowed to take a bit of air’, she had said. ‘Always kept short of food, suffering from disease and chained up. The poor woman died in the end. When they found her body it had rat bites all over it ...’ (Hooper 201)

The account has Stead’s lurid sensationalism as well as the Gothic undertones of his padded room where virgins are abused. Even though the prostitutes are to be pitied, since it is poverty that drives them to the streets, the Victorian downward spiral is not challenged, but rather endorsed, and the ends such women suffer are even worse than those experienced in Victorian fiction.

## Conclusion

In the Victorian era, the figure of the prostitute emerged as something more symbolic than real. Ideas of sexual deviance, class stereotypes, and corruption, both physical and moral, determined her to be a sometimes tragic-and-pitied, sometimes sordid-and-rejected, figure. When she is used in modern young adult texts, it is not through the obscure euphemisms of Victorian texts but in response, it seems, to an important change in the audience, as authors assume that modern teenagers possess an awareness of sex which would have been denied in Victorian times.<sup>73</sup> More significantly, a tension emerges between authors’ attempts to condemn what are seen now as politically

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<sup>73</sup> It is mostly the non-British authors who use the word “prostitute”, like Canadian Y.S. Lee and American Nancy Springer.



incorrect or sexist assumptions, while still making use of an iconic Victorian character who is heavily charged with social and historical meaning.

There are elements, inherited from Victorian writings, which are retained such as the prostitutes' origins — without exception, they all belong to the lowest social class. Adelaide is seen as capricious and illiterate — she has to sign her name with an X. Vi is coarse and often drunk. Mary's mother is Irish and married to a Chinese sailor.

The aristocratic clients of Victorian fiction are also present; they are wealthier men from higher circles in society, which allows Mary to rob them, Adelaide to marry a prince, and Vi to have three rich candidates to choose from as fathers for her son. The perpetuated idea that the “depraved” aristocrat is the main client has been previously discussed and contested.

Their appearance also imitates nineteenth-century examples: prostitutes look worn out, are gaudily dressed, and wear excessive makeup — once more citing Acton's prostitutes. The women are also associated with night and darkness, as it seems they are not to be part of public life until they have become “presentable”. Scarper and Vi, Mary and her mother, also indulge the association that Dickens had made in *Oliver Twist*: prostitutes and thieves go together. The prostitutes are also shown as shrewd and calculating. In summary, prostitutes and girls who trade in their virginity are low class, ignorant, and poor; higher class, educated girls are never in danger, not even of “falling”. There is also a sense of embarrassment, as shown by Vi and Mary, (in talking about her mother), and guilt, revealed by Adelaide, which betrays the social stigma that is still associated with prostitution. It is seen as something wrong, that mars a woman's character, sometimes — as in Vi's case — forever.

Once the girls are “removed” from their usual haunts, all connection with that past life is severed, as in Victorian texts (Martha and Emily). Vi's mother conveniently dies and Vi relocates to a remote island full of people of rough manners but good hearts. Adelaide is put up in a posh house in West London. Mary too is removed from the East End. There seems to be an element of unconscious nostalgia for class, even when the authors believe they are exposing the horrors of the past. The improvement in these women's lives comes from gaining access to social echelons above theirs. The rigid social structure invented by these authors offers a very clean-cut map of society that separates the “good” people (who are usually wealthy, even if modestly so) from

the “bad” people, a Victorian perspective that is mirrored not only in relation to the prostitute but also, as will be seen, with the orphan.

Despite such Victorian aspects, the figure of the prostitute undergoes modifications, as modern elements infiltrate these pseudo-Victorian worlds. The authors try to break away from the Victorian stereotype of the downward spiral. It is still used, but mostly for background stories and plot devices, such as the tale of Mary’s mother. Central characters that are prostitutes, such as Vi and Adelaide, are introduced as strong women who are able to gain new positions in society, following Acton’s idea of reintegration. The idea of a penitent woman that has to “purge” her past sins is also gone. The fact that assuming a different role in society is considered a “happy ending”, coupled with class issues, is perhaps a more conservative (Victorian) position than the texts originally seem to indicate.

Some of these authors reveal other intentions. As discussed earlier, Pullman deals with a concern that is as modern as it is Victorian. He associates prostitution with abuse and sexual violence, in the same manner Hopper and Springer do. This perspective presents prostitution as a form of male domination, intrinsically violent, whose victims are women. Contrastingly, Lee tries to discuss prostitution in terms of a profession taken up freely as a means of generating a living, reflecting the modern discourse on prostitution, which has after all been legalised in many countries. Her text reflects modern views which challenge prostitution as oppressive exploitation and proposes an alternative model where women are in control of what can be seen just as another organized economic transaction between two parties. While the authors use the same Victorian elements, they use them to support conflicting views on modern clashes rather than past debates on the topic.

These modern authors have far more similarities in how they approach the figures of the prostitute and what was once the fallen woman. Fallen women are sparser than prostitutes and live on the edges of the narratives, as mere background flavour. They come from the working classes, are usually maids in big houses, and are perceived to be “fallen” not by the (modern) protagonists, but by other (Victorian) characters. The key to understanding why prostitutes are portrayed using Victorian tropes while the fallen woman is discarded as backwards has to do with the modern sexual norms at play. The sexual liberalism of the late twentieth century has meant that sex before marriage is no longer taboo, invalidating the idea of the fallen woman. However, sex work, while legal in some countries, is still at the centre of a debate that

has become “increasingly widespread in recent years” (Levin and Peled 590).

Prostitution represents a blurry area where Victorian concepts are valid to some extent — at least according to some of these authors. Just like in Victorian fiction, prostitutes are mostly outcasts, existing outside the moral boundaries of society, and only able to re-enter the civilized world once they have reformed.

It is worth noting how much more explicit the content has become in contemporary instances, taking into account the reader’s age. The Victorian examples were aimed at adults but they did not discuss what fallen women or prostitutes did; sex was never shown and barely hinted, like Oliver’s mother “trusting” too far. The same material is treated in a much more overt manner in these young adult texts. Within a modern context, it can be said that sexuality “saturates adolescent life” (Ashcraft 2145). These young adult narratives acknowledge this. The language is carefully manipulated — only a few authors used the word “prostitute” — but there is not a complete silence over sexuality. The narrative gaps do not need as much work as the ones in Victorian fiction, showing the authors trust the readers’ capabilities to fill them in — Sally leads Fred to her bedroom; Mary talks of long-repressed desire and flesh on flesh. While these narratives might seem liberating in this sense, they are regressive in another aspect. While the physical exchanges between consenting parties who are in love are much more explicit, silence still surrounds what Adelaide or Vi do, with the latter using the euphemism of “a kiss and a cuddle”. The authors take their modern audience’s cultural background into consideration, but manipulate the language to make a point. The sexual scenes fit into a model where, mostly, sex for love is positively seen yet sex for trade falls outside language, back into the silent realm of the Victorians.

### CHAPTER THREE CHASING THE DRAGON: EAST END OPIUM DENS

During the Victorian era, London's East End was believed to be plagued by opium dens. Sensationalised by investigators, and further transformed by Victorian fiction, they grew into places of decadence, moral corruption, and racial contamination, reflecting the fears of upper- and middle-class Victorians. The (mostly fictional) opium den is one of the Victorian elements that is copied in most of these young adult fictions. At times, the den is only named in passing or a postcard glimpse is given; occasionally, it features as an important part of the story. While all the authors under discussion resort to the same stereotype, their dens reflect their own specific agendas, their attitudes to, variously, colonial exploitation, drug use and immigration.

#### **A Brief History of Opium**

During the first half of the nineteenth century, opium was a widely used over-the-counter drug in England, "recommended for everything from influenza and earache, to hydrophobia, haemorrhage, and heart disease" (Berridge 441). According to Virginia Berridge's study of opiate use during the nineteenth century, laudanum was common in working-class homes (29). Although usage was widespread, its consumption within the literary scene attracted particular attention. It is important to understand the difference between the taking of opium as "laudanum" (common among the English) and the smoking of opium, which was considered "foreign" and "oriental". Moreover, as John Barrell points out in his study of de Quincey:

... the phrase 'English Opium-Eater' itself can be read as a prime example of inoculation ... to describe oneself as an 'eater' of opium was to claim kinship with a recognisable Turkish identity — a kinship qualified, however, and hopefully made safe by the adjective 'English'. (17)

Some of the Romantic writers — especially Coleridge and, later on, Elizabeth Barrett Browning — were known for using opium to inspire their reveries and dreams. When Thomas De Quincey first published *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* in 1821, the literary reaction was interested rather than concerned. De Quincey's text dealt with opium eating at home, while past narratives had mainly represented it as an Eastern

habit (Berridge and Edwards 53). Figures such as Byron, Shelley, and Keats all used it at one point or another, and, for them as well as “for their contemporaries, opium was a simple part of life, neither exclusively medical nor entirely social” (61).

However, the status of the drug had changed drastically by the end of the century. Institutions such as the “Society for the Suppression of the Opium Trade” (1874) were a testimony to an increasingly negative perception of opium, strengthened by criticism of the two Opium Wars between the British Empire and China (1839–42, 1856–60). These were fought so that the British East India Company could expand its monopoly on the production and export of Indian opium into China, despite a Chinese ban on the drug. Most of the opium consumed in Britain came from Turkey or Persia. Barry Milligan points out in his study of opium and the Orient that, in addition to this, the British hold on the Indian opium industry and the forbidden trade with China helped further reinforce the drug’s Oriental associations within British culture (20). Although opium consumption was considered a “vice” as much as an “illness”, concerns over its abuse caused health professionals to talk about “addiction” in the 1870s, and discuss its use as “an indication of a general decline in the physical and moral health of Britons as a whole” (25).<sup>74</sup>

Opium smoking was associated with the Chinese communities settled in London’s East End. These Chinese immigrants’ smoking was not a source of concern because the practice was associated with a type of “racial degeneracy” (Berridge and Edwards 199). The alarm came from the danger of contamination such a habit posed to English people. These concerns were articulated by those institutions created not only to protest against the Indo-Chinese opium traffic on moral grounds, but — more importantly — to criticise its consequences in England. As Reverend George Piercy put it in a speech given in 1883:

If I speak again of what has been seen of the Chinese who smoke opium in London it must be understood that it is to raise a warning voice against the evil they have brought. It begins with the Chinese, but does not end with them! (qtd. in Milligan 83)

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<sup>74</sup> Indeed, the changed perception of opium use was closely linked to the regulation of its consumption by the medical and pharmaceutical establishment and new perceptions of disease and treatment. For more detailed information, refer to “The professionals and Opium” in Berridge and Edwards’s *Opium and the People: Opiate Use in Nineteenth-century England* (1981).

Piercy's fears, as Milligan points out, were representative of a trend in the last three decades of the nineteenth century, which located this Chinese vice in the East End of London (85). As discussed in Chapter One, the East side of the city had already been characterised as "uncivilized" by William Booth's *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (1890). Milligan notes that East London was repeatedly represented as "a miniature Orient within the heart of the empire" (85). Descriptions of the Chinese opium smoking as a "domestic phenomenon" started in the 1860s, but, as he explains, the dens — though squalid and poor — were calm environments that had nothing mysterious and threatening about them (196).

A sub-genre emerged during the last decades of the century. Magazine and newspaper articles featured intrepid journalists disguising themselves as poor East Londoners, sidestepping all sorts of threats — dangerous people, filth, and rats — to bring to their readers supposedly authentic accounts of the opium dens. Popular articles, such as "Lazarus, Lotus-Eating" (1866), the 1868 *London Society's* "East London Opium Smokers" which exposed the "carnal delight that over which opium rules" (68), Jerrold and Doré's *London, A Pilgrimage* (1872), and James Greenwood's *An opium smoke in Tiger Bay* (1883) added another layer to the imagery of dilapidated houses and acute misery of earlier accounts. The racial and cultural hostility caused by rising Chinese immigration, from the 1860s onwards, made its mark in the opium den genre. To quote Matthew Sweet, "Nineteenth-century writings on opium dens ... rarely let the facts impede the flow of Gothic extravagance" (91). The "yellow peril" fear was translated into exaggerated and disturbed representations featuring opium dens as places of moral corruption, mysterious dark lairs controlled by cunning Chinese. The formulaic accounts helped to consolidate a racial stereotype.

In actual fact, there were in 1884 only about half a dozen of these dens. Some investigators believed there were none at all, since opium smoking was simply an activity undertaken alongside gambling at Chinese social clubs, and not at any specially designed establishment (Berridge and Edwards 201). But the pervasiveness of the distorted images is demonstrated by how the surgeon-major of the British Medical Association felt compelled to declare in 1892 that the urgency of eradicating the dens could not be overestimated (Milligan 28). Furthermore, as we shall see, the fictional descriptions of opium smoking and East London dens in the writing of Dickens, Conan Doyle and Wilde made use of the same type of imagery and language as their "journalistic" counterparts.

## The Opium Den Myth in Victorian Literature

Among the most significant Victorian “original” literary depictions, one of the first to disentangle opium smoking from its romantic associations was Dickens, in his unfinished novel *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870). The opening plunges the reader into the opium-induced delirium of choirmaster John Jasper:

An ancient English Cathedral town? How can the ancient English Cathedral town be here! The well-known massive gray square tower of its old Cathedral? How can that be here! ... Maybe, it is set up by the Sultan’s orders for the impaling of a horde of Turkish robbers, one by one. It is so, for cymbals clash, and the Sultan goes by to his palace in long procession. Ten thousand scimitars flash in the sunlight, and thrice ten thousand dancing-girls strew flowers. Then, follow white elephants caparisoned in countless gorgeous colors, and infinite in number and attendants. (37)<sup>75</sup>

When Jasper awakes from the opium stupor, his East London surroundings provide a sharp contrast to this Eastern imaginary luxury. He is in “the meanest and closest of small rooms”, with a “ragged window-curtain”, a “miserable court”, and a “large unseemly bed” resting on a bedstead that has given way (37). He is lying along “a Chinaman, a Lascar, and a haggard woman”, all placed “across the bed, not longwise” (37). Even the use of the bed is foreign, echoing a description in the 1868 *London Society* article, where the reporter also observes how the opium den had a four-poster bed which was “not arranged according to English fashion” (70). Charles J. Rzepka notices the novel represents an “ominous ‘Orientalising’, through opium addiction, of an otherwise respectable English choirmaster” (213).

Another rendition is given in Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). Before getting to the opium den, we learn Dorian Gray is addicted to opium. He is overcome by a “mad craving” for the drug he both loves and loathes, the green paste of which he keeps inside a black and gold-dust lacquer Chinese box (152–3). In this manner, opium is associated with the Orient from its first appearance in the text.

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<sup>75</sup> The scene was famously based on Dickens’s visit to an opium establishment in 1869. However, the reliability of such description was questioned from the very moment the first instalment of *Edwin Drood* came out (Sweet 89).



Afterwards, we hear Dorian thinking of opium dens “where one could buy oblivion, dens of horror where the memory of old sins could be destroyed by the madness of sins that were new” (153). He takes a cab to the East side, and enters first “a long, low room which looked as if it had once been a third-rate dancing-saloon” (155) where some Malays are said to be “crouching by a little charcoal stove, playing with bone counters and showing their white teeth as they chattered” (155). He passes them and continues on: “At the end of the room there was a little staircase, leading to a darkened chamber” where “Dorian winced and looked round at the grotesque things that lay in such fantastic postures on the ragged mattresses. The twisted limbs, the gaping mouths, the staring lustreless eyes, fascinated him” (156).

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s depiction of opium dens in Holmes’s *The Man with the Twisted Lip* (1891) is similar. His London den is located in the docklands of the East side in “a vile alley”, between a “slop-shop and a gin-shop” (230). Here Watson has to go through labyrinthine passages, mostly in darkness except for flickering lights, up and down steep, worn steps that lead “down to a black gap like the mouth of a cave” (230). It is only then that he gets to the den, described again as “a long, low room, thick and heavy with the brown opium smoke, and terraced with wooden berths, like the forecastle of an emigrant ship” (231). His account of the place is similar to the one given by Dorian:

Through the gloom one could dimly catch a glimpse of bodies lying in strange fantastic poses, bowed shoulders, bent knees, heads thrown back, and chins pointing upward, with here and there a dark, lack-lustre eye turned upon the newcomer. Out of the black shadows there glimmered little red circles of light, now bright, now faint, as the burning poison waxed or waned in the bowls of the metal pipes. The most lay silent, but some muttered to themselves, and others talked together in a strange, low, monotonous voice, their conversation coming in gushes, and then suddenly tailing off into silence, each mumbling out his own thoughts and paying little heed to the words of his neighbour ... As I entered, a sallow Malay attendant had hurried up with a pipe for me and a supply of the drug, beckoning me to an empty berth. (231)

It is only when addressed that Watson realizes one of the patrons at the den is none other than Sherlock Holmes; we are told he has to use all his “self-control” to stop

himself from “breaking out into a cry of astonishment” (231). In the opium den, Holmes has kept little in common with his normal self. We are told he looks like an “old man”: “very thin, very wrinkled, bent with age, an opium pipe dangling down from between his knees, as though it had dropped in sheer lassitude from his fingers” (231). This is just a façade the famous detective is putting on in order to blend into the den. Once he has identified himself, he undergoes a transformation under Watson’s gaze, returning to his “gentleman” self: “His form had filled out, his wrinkles were gone, the dull eyes had regained their fire, and there, sitting by the fire and grinning at my surprise, was none other than Sherlock Holmes” (231–2).<sup>76</sup> Although the detective is just pretending, the form of this pretence neatly illustrates what Victorians thought opium smokers were like.

The description exhibits another characteristic that Milligan attributes to the opium den genre, that of portraying Orientals as living dead creatures (87). While impersonating an opium smoker, Holmes looks old, wrinkled, bent, and lethargic. This matches the descriptions of the cadaverous, mummy-like opium smokers in two Victorian articles — the anonymous “East London Opium Smokers” (1868) and “Lazarus, Lotus-Eating” (1866). The aging factor also plays an important role in these exposés, especially when the person who has become addicted to the drug is English, and not a foreigner. In the 1868 article, the writer remarks on how “Poor English Mrs. Chi Ki looks as though she is being gradually smoke-dried, and by and by will present the appearance of an Egyptian mummy” (“East London Opium Smokers” 72). In another article, visitors on an opium den tour discover that a woman they believe is around eighty years old is but twenty-six (qtd. in Jacobson 23).

The idea that there is a specific class which belongs to the den is emphasised by how Mr Neville St. Clair can, thanks to the den, lead a double existence, alternating between the “squalid beggar” and the “well-dressed man about town” (Conan Doyle 243). The third gentleman who comes into contact with the opium den in the text also suffers due to it. Conan Doyle refers to De Quincey as the start of Mr Isa Whitney’s troubles:

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<sup>76</sup> Although Holmes consumes drugs — morphine and cocaine (89) — these obviously do not have the same effect opium would have, as made evident by how to pass for an opium eater, Holmes has to appear gaunt and old.

The habit [smoking opium] grew upon him, as I understand, from some foolish freak when he was at college; for having read De Quincey's description of his dreams and sensations, he had drenched his tobacco with laudanum in an attempt to produce the same effects. He found, as so many more have done, that the practice is easier to attain than to get rid of, and for many years he continued to be a slave to the drug, an object of mingled horror and pity to his friends and relatives. I can see him now, with yellow, pasty face, drooping lids, and pin-point pupils, all huddled in a chair, the wreck and ruin of a noble man. (229)

The transformation he suffers not only has the characteristic aging effect but also insinuates an orientalising one, as he has turned yellow.

These Victorian opium den narratives all associate the dens with what might be described as a "double East". There is the Oriental East, and unsurprisingly it is the Malays, the Chinamen, and the "Lascars" who are found in the opium dens, either running them or inhaling their fumes. There is also the East End and its docks, the dirtiest and shabbiest part of London, inhabited by the poor and the immigrants. A suggestion of sexual deviance is incorporated in this double East, through both Dorian Gray and Watson's fascination with the intertwining of bodies which they see lying on the mattresses in the smoky shadows, as they note the "fantastic" poses the limbs adopt in the dark.<sup>77</sup>

### **Contemporary Versions of the Opium Den**

These mythical opium dens are represented anew in our young adult texts, where they are still attached to the poverty of the East End and to the exoticism of the Orient. Very few authors choose to challenge the Victorian stereotype. In most cases, their features are emphasised more strongly than in Victorian fiction: the dens are dark, promiscuous, and orientalising spaces while the drug can be a threat to the purity of the nation.

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<sup>77</sup> As Matthew Sweet explains in *Inventing the Victorian* (2001), Arthur Henry Ward, better known by his pen name Sax Rohmer, helped cement the opium den formula through his *The Mystery of Fu-Manchu* (1913). The detective story used all the stereotypes in its villain, "an opium-bibbing Chinese master criminal operating out of the East End" (90).

Phillip Pullman adheres to certain elements of the Victorian myth. He uses historically accurate locations, such as Wapping and Limehouse, to characterise the squalor and misery of the East End. In *The Ruby in the Smoke* (1985) there are “crumbling tenements and rat-haunted alleys”, comparable to hideous dungeons from a nightmare (16): a labyrinthine “maze of courts and sidestreets” where we find the usual display of “barefoot children, ragged and filthy” (87), and hostile men and women. Moreover, the East End is posited as the natural habitat of opium smokers, here also strongly associated with the Orient. Matthew Bedwell, a sailor just returned from the Far East, is walking in the East End:

... passing through an alley in Limehouse — a narrow, cobbled place, the bricks blacks with soot and crumbling with damp — when he caught sight of an open door; with an old man squatting motionless on the step. The old man was Chinese. He was watching Bedwell, and as the sailor came past, he jerked his head slightly and said, “Wantee smoke?” (21)

Pullman's approach to the subject is different to the Victorian model in more than one way. Unlike Victorian writers, he questions the identification of the opium den as an exclusively male territory. Sally accompanies Frederick to an opium den whose owner is not a man but a Chinese woman. Inside the den, Sally discovers that it is not only men who frequent the establishment: she sees two women — one her age, one older — both “respectably dressed, too” (89). That the opium den can be thus shared by men and women facilitates Pullman's elimination of any hints of sexual deviance from the scene. There are no women sprawled in beds next to men, as in *Edwin Drood*; the place is not a melee of bodies in fantastic poses, like in *Dorian Gray*.

Pullman's implicit critique of Victorian stereotypes extends to the opium den itself. In his text, there are four opium-related incidents, but only one truly takes place within an opium den. Its owner, Madame Chang, is said to take “care of her customers, and keep the place clean”; Fred speculates this is because she herself does not smoke (*Ruby* 86). At the same time, the den is described as a place of luxury and exoticism that seems to be the epitome of everything “Chinese”. Both the old “Chinaman” who opens the door and Madame Chang are dressed, accordingly, in richly silk-embroidered

clothes. He has a skull cap and a pigtail, while Madame Chang has “tiny feet” and hair that is “severely pinned back” (88). The den has delicate painted wallpaper, wood lacquered in a “deep lustrous red” (88), ornate Chinese lanterns, and ornamental “curling, snarling dragons” (89) carved in gold on door-posts and beams. The dragons are reminiscent of the ornamental black and red ones drawn on the opium den mats in Rudyard Kipling's short story *The Gate of a Hundred Sorrows* (1884). The entire décor also brings to mind the Chinese box that holds Dorian Gray's opium in Wilde's tale.<sup>78</sup> Incidentally, Kipling's narrator associates the smoke with something sweet (204), and for Sally, the smoke is indeed “sweet and enticing and curious” (*Ruby* 89).<sup>79</sup>

Despite this rich and “positive” depiction, Pullman's opium den is minimised as something of a dream. Sally says the room looks like it “had taken on the shape of the collective dreams of all those who had ever gone there to seek oblivion” (89). The people in the “smoky darkness”, sitting in low couches, appear to be “asleep” (89). Opium is associated with the fantastic, the unreal. Speaking of opium, Madame Chang says the “power of the smoke is unbounded. It hides secrets of the past ... and then it reveals them all like buried treasure” (91). While she explains this, Sally sees her as a “still figure [who] spoke out of the gloom like a priestess of some ancient cult, full of authority and wisdom” (92). This atmosphere is contrasted by Commercial Road, the “bustle of traffic, the gaslights, the glowing shop-windows” (92) that Sally and Fred find once they are outside. The “civilised” world that surrounds them on the street acquires a substance and reality against which, Sally says, the den seems “like a dream” (92).

Pullman seems to be pointing at the idea of the opium den as a dreamed space, self-consciously created by the conglomeration of specifically oriental fictional motifs. Significantly, the truly harmful opium den in *Ruby* is not oriental at all. It is in a lodging-house of ill repute in the East End where Mathew Bedwell's addiction is exploited by the landlady, the evil Mrs Holland. It is here that Pullman delivers a detailed description of the smoking process and how it renders Bedwell into “a staring, dribbling, helpless idiot” (*Ruby* 41). That it is within this space that the habit is made

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<sup>78</sup> Indeed, the intricacy and the amount of detail alludes to the same exoticism: “It was a small Chinese box of black and gold-dust lacquer, elaborately wrought, the sides patterned with curved waves, and the silken cords hung with round crystals and tasselled in plaited metal threads” (Wilde 152–3).

<sup>79</sup> This is in sharp contrast to Libba Bray's portrayal. The “opium fumes” in the den make her protagonist's eyes water and her throat burn (*Angels* 373). The opposition seems to correspond to the way each author wants the drug to be perceived.

explicit, that the horror of the addiction is shown together with the abuse and greed of those who provide the drug is no coincidence. The depiction subtly hints at how the exploitation of opium came from *English* hands. This helps to re-absorb the blame which has been placed for so long on the Orient, squarely placing the responsibility back at the centre of the Empire. The fact that Madam Chang is shown caring for her customers, while Mrs Holland's knowledge of the drug goes only as far as knowing how much she can administer without killing Bedwell before she needs to, is also significant. The appropriation of foreign habits without seeking to understand them first is symptomatic of England's imperial policies and is implicitly criticized.

Like both Victorian and other contemporary writers, Pullman links opium to the East. However, he also brings historical facts into the picture, and exposes the politics behind opium, balancing things somewhat by revealing the British Empire's involvement with the drug. When Sally wonders why the government does not stop people from smoking opium, Frederick states, to her disbelief, that it is "[b]ecause the government grows the stuff itself, and sells it, and makes a handsome profit" (87). He then talks about the Opium Wars, explaining that the English went to war to "force them [the Chinese] to take" the opium into their country (87). Later on, the sinister Hendrik van Eeder (who exhibits a racial duality, oscillating between the successful European entrepreneur and the feared Chinese leader Ah Ling) explains how he has been able to steal an official stamp, and thus can turn one shipload of opium into several adulterated loads for sale as "little *official* cakes with *Her Majesty's blessing and approval*. Very civilized" (197, italics mine). The irony of this last remark in the context of the imperial "civilising" discourse needs no elaboration.

It is important to notice how differently Pullman handles the idea of drug use compared to the Victorian writers. For them, as Milligan points out, the persistence of the myth arose not from actual activities in the East End but from a series of circumstances, among which were Oriental stereotypes, imperialist anxieties, and the fear of invasion and contamination (28). The drug became a transforming agent that appealed to the worst side of people.<sup>80</sup> Pullman's narrative blames not the drug itself, but how and why it is used.

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<sup>80</sup> This applies, as we will see, to both Updale's and Bray's narratives. Their characters, Montmorency and Father, both exhibit "Eastern" behaviour when under the influence that carries the same political connotations it did for the Victorians.

The sailor, Matthew Bedwell, comes back from the East “a slave to the mighty drug” (*Ruby* 22), a phrase that almost mirrors Conan Doyle’s description of Mr Isa Whitney, discussed previously.<sup>81</sup> Although Bedwell tries to stop consuming, his desire is stronger, despite the fact that the drug has obviously altered not only his body but his mind too:

Anyone watching him would have thought he was drunk; but there was no smell of alcohol around him, and his speech was not slurred, and his movements were not clumsy. A more compassionate observer would have thought him ill or in pain, and that would have been nearer the mark. But if anyone had seen into his mind, and sensed the chaos that reigned in that dark place, they would have thought it remarkable that he managed to keep going at all. (21)

All of Matthew’s experiences with opium are negative. After consuming it, he becomes “delirious ... raving at the visions which crowded in from the dirty walls” (39). We are told that, in his “madness”, “the room filled up with ghosts and Chinese demons and visions of torture and poisoned ecstasy, and abysses yawned sickeningly below” (43). He describes himself as “all ... corruption and darkness” (43). The opium eater of Kipling’s *Gate* also talks of hallucinations; after a person has had three pipes, the dragons drawn on the mats “move about and fight” (204). But this is a show to be enjoyed, as the narrator says he has watched them “many and many a night through” (204). However, Pullman’s imagery suggests a nightmarish and hellish landscape, a horrific journey from which Bedwell does not escape. The colonised East seems to have come back to haunt the West for its past crimes. Bedwell is murdered as he begins his path to recovery.

Readers are not left with the bitter taste of Bedwell’s experience as the only possible outcome with opium. Remarkably, the female hero, Sally, provides a more positive instance of drug usage, alluding to the medical uses opiates have, which seem to have been obscured or simply forgotten by most Victorian narratives.<sup>82</sup> Sally has, unknown to herself, smoked opium as a toddler in India, and this past re-emerges to

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<sup>81</sup> This constitutes a jump back to the Victorian stereotype, tying the drug to the East. Furthermore, and similarly to Montmorency, the addiction is something he has acquired abroad, an idea that carries related notions of “contagion” and “foreignness”.

<sup>82</sup> This is remarkable not only because it is a *girl* who is depicted smoking opium — against all Victorian conventions — but also because this is a young adult book, where depictions of drug use can be extremely controversial, especially if the material is not mainly about drug consumption and abuse.

provide not a descent into a lugubrious personal abyss, as it does for Matthew, but rather a journey towards knowledge and enlightenment. In both of Sally's experiences, the smoke smells bitter as well as sweet (*Ruby* 170), which points to the dual possibilities it can unleash. Nevertheless, Sally's nightmare (89) is a repressed memory she needs to bring to her consciousness, as it is the key to the events surrounding the precious gem of the narrative's title. Just as on a hero's journey, the memory has a transformative power and Sally emerges on the other side, holding knowledge that changes her view of herself. The memory yields not only a key to the mystery, but also allows her to understand and accept the identity of her real father.<sup>83</sup> Once the drug has been used for this purpose, Sally never returns to it nor is tempted to do so. This sort of restraint seems attached to the fact that, while Matthew was addicted for the pleasure the drug provided him, Sally only wants to use the drug's power to fulfil a specific objective. There is a slight similarity to Sherlock Holmes's habitual drug taking. Holmes justifies his drug intake by explaining that it has a "stimulating and clarifying" (89) effect on his brain. The presence of Watson's disapproval, however, makes for a less ambiguous text than Pullman's.

The matter of the drug providers is also used to contrast positive and negative depictions of the drug. Matthew Bedwell's nightmarish journey is facilitated by an English woman, Mrs Holland. She uses the drug to control Bedwell out of her own greed and hunger for power, supplying him with small portions "in exchange for details about the things he said in his madness. Little by little the story emerged — and Mrs. Holland realized that she was sitting on a fortune" (*Ruby* 39). Thus Bedwell's life is measured in terms of the profit it can bring Mrs Holland:

She was not quite sure that she had extracted all the knowledge that lay fuming in his brain — which was why she kept him alive, if he could be said to be living. As soon as she decided that the back bedroom was needed ... Death and Bedwell, who had missed each other in the South China Sea, could finally keep their rendezvous. (40)

This provides a sharp contrast to the other drug provider of the book, the beautiful Madam Chang. While Mrs Holland (like presumably all Westerners) understands that

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<sup>83</sup> As it turns out, Matthew Lockhart is Sally's adoptive father, while her real father, George Marchbanks, traded Sally for the ruby.



drug use leads to devastating consequences, Madam Chang reveals other possibilities —that the smoke can reveal the past. The cleanliness of her practices, her lush and beautiful establishment, the dream-like atmosphere: they all seem to point to her absolute mastery of the drug's usage. She acknowledges this, saying she “can see plainly what is invisible to you, just as a doctor can see plainly what is troubling his patient. There are a hundred and one signs by which these things may be read, but if you cannot read them, you will see nothing” (92). It is, apparently, a fact that opium can be, and has been used, as a medicine, perhaps more expertly so by Easterners (Fred's helper, Trembler, says his mother used to give him laudanum for toothaches, as people really did at the start of the century). Westerners can be, and are, destroyed by opium due to their ignorant use of it. Madam Chang also makes it clear to Sally that hers is not a physical addiction: “If you are in danger, it is not from the drug” (92). The fact that there can be another way of using the drug is the reason why Sally does not crave it in the way Matthew Bedwell did; she uses it in a way Madam Chang would approve. Unlike Mrs Holland, who uses the drug to torture and control (as she does with Bedwell), Madam Chang uses opium to help her costumers, (including Sally) whom she takes care of (86).

Through these two scenarios, Pullman complicates easy associations — opium and evil — that tie together East, and refuses to agree with the classical Victorian conventions. The narrative makes it clear that opium can be used and abused. This power lies with the people. The first instance of opium — when Bedwell gets to port — might be tied to Victorian stereotypes, but this image is brief and superseded by later ones. Each opium den depiction adds a further layer to provide a diverse picture that avoids demonizing the drugs or its ethnic ties and ultimately reflects the complexity of issues surrounding it. The economic manipulations and the government complicity in the drug trade are also exposed. The presented picture challenges Victorian stereotypes, but can also be seen as challenging modern stereotypes. The mid-80s was a time when drug dealers were part of popular media (particularly in the United States), where they were stereotypically depicted as African or Latin American (Boyd 87). By challenging past racial associations and exposing drug consumption as simply an individual's choice, Pullman seems to encourage readers to challenge and examine contemporary prejudice.

*Eleanor Updale: Drug Abuse and Duality*

In the *Montmorency* series, and in *Montmorency on the Rocks* (2004) in particular, Eleanor Updale draws on the Victorian opium myth almost without modifying it. Indeed, her narrative plays heavily on the contrast between the drug-associated East and a respectable, almost pastorally pure, West. The protagonist has two personas: Montmorency — a respectable West End, opera-loving gentleman — and Scarper — an East End thief and drug addict. Thus one body is inhabited by two identities which dwell on opposite sides. Correspondingly, one consumes the drug while the other (seemingly) refuses to yield to it.

Regarding the drug's origins, the Victorian model associating it with both the Oriental East and London's East is adopted here. It is repeatedly mentioned that the drug comes from Turkey, from the "Ottoman underworld" (*Rocks* 7); it is a "dark powder" from "the *filth* of the Turkish market" (34, italics mine) where a "*filthy* hand" (77, italics mine) passed it to Montmorency. In England, the drug's natural environment is London's East End, where a stereotypical opium den scene takes place (or rather, in Updale's words, a "drug" den). The narrative employs usual Victorian tropes:

The streets grew narrower and dirtier at each corner, until at last he came to an ancient group of houses whose upper floors bulged out above their lower rooms, so that the top windows on either side of the little lane almost touched, and the alley below became like a dark tunnel ... In the gloom ... a low murmur of voices seeped out, but that meant less to Scarper than the smell that stole into his nose. It was sickly-sweet: tempting and offensive at the same time. He identified it instantly. It was the devastating Turkish drug. (251)

We find the usual binary opposition between East and West, although Updale's "West" is, as we have already seen, represented by the countryside rather than by the wealthy West End of London. While Montmorency/Scarper remains in London he is susceptible to temptation and consumes the drug on two occasions. Once in the countryside, at the Glendarvie castle and especially later at the remote Tarimond island,

he begins to heal and in fact regains his physical strength.<sup>84</sup> The contemplation of an untouched nature plays a part in the process, as when he observes the rugged island landscape: “He had never seen anything like it. Certainly not in the filthy Thames” (134); “He had seen grand buildings in London and all over Europe, but he had never seen anything as magnificent as this” (135). The purity of the surroundings provides a frame within which Montmorency cannot stay sick. His healing is helped not only by the island’s inhabitants, but also, implicitly, by nature itself. In Tarimond “he rejoiced in feeling truly healthy for the first time since the trip to Turkey” (139). The healing power of this idealised and pastoral West is further shown in Fox-Selwyn’s love for his friend, in Dr Farcett’s help, and in the islanders’ hospitality; it is there that healing and forgiveness occur. Later, when Montmorency is tempted by drugs in the East End, “[t]he lapping of the water, the filthy water of the Thames, reminded him of the clear cold water of Tarimond, and the sparkling unfamiliar healthiness he had felt there” (254), an image that gives him the strength to “force himself past the front door” of the den (254).

Within this context, the drug is an outsider, a polluting agent capable of destroying all beauty. While East London and the Turkish market are linked together — both repeatedly and emphatically described as filthy — the country is seen as a positive space that represents the best English values. How pernicious an effect the drug could have in this environment is illustrated by what happens after Fox-Selwyn throws the drug out the window: “... far behind in an *English* field lay the corpse of a goat, who had been tempted by the strange pungent package, and swallowed it almost whole” (42, *italics mine*). The idea of a deadly foreign body being introduced encompasses the country’s land and its people too. One recalls Milligan’s attribution to the late nineteenth century of a fear that the Orient was to “enter, colonize, and conquer the English body in the form of a contaminating contagion enabled by opium” (83). When a cover-up story is needed for Montmorency’s addiction to the Turkish drug, his withdrawal symptoms are said to be the result of contracting “some terrible *foreign* disease” (*Rocks* 63, *italics mine*) that “might be contagious” (78).

As already explained, in her *Montmorency* series Updale creates a character in which both “East”s are incorporated. Montmorency is a British gentleman who works

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<sup>84</sup> This method cannot be compared with the Victorian stories, as nobody that takes opium regularly survives the habit, neither are they ever treated for it. Berridge mentions Edward Leinstein’s treatment in the late 1870s, which consisted in locking the patient in a room to be guarded by preferably male nurses (457).

for the government as a spy, frequently in the guise of Scarper. As a low-life dirty East End thief, Montmorency thus occupies a shaky position, as it is his underworld actions as Scarper that allow for his luxurious existence in the West. He consumes alcohol heavily, but this is always excused as part of a gentleman's nature. Lord Fox-Selwyn admits to having seen his friend "drunk a thousand times" (*Rocks* 13) while Montmorency himself talks about going home "many a time ... much the worse for wear, sometimes smelling of his own or other people's body fluids" (14). However, these are cheerful occasions when they all drink together (169). When it comes to opium, the consequences of its consumption are a serious matter. Thinking of his friend, Fox-Selwyn is sure that "this was something different, something more destructive and even more uncontrollable" (8). Montmorency himself describes the experience in a different tone:

He knew that the initial rush of energy and clear-headedness ... would soon make way for the sickness and oblivion that had concerned his friend on the way home from Turkey ... In the darkness he started to shiver and sway, and images of violence and terror played themselves out in brilliant light on the inside of his eyeballs, which felt as if they were about to burst. His ears rang with the clang of battle and the throb of fear. (13)<sup>85</sup>

Drinking and drug consumption, then, are vices placed in direct opposition. Neither is seen in a positive light; but drinking is socially acceptable and normalised, part of Montmorency's existence and in accordance to his social position; it is an *English* habit.<sup>86</sup> On the other hand, drugs are seen as a fearful and uncontrollable "unknown", a *foreign* vice. It comes from the filth of one East (Turkey) and, the narrative shows us, belongs to the filth of the other East (London's East End), where it must remain.

The struggle and attraction the drug holds for Montmorency echoes Dorian Gray's experience. The latter is fascinated and afraid of the drug; it is something he "longed for and yet almost loathed" (Wilde 152). Similarly, Montmorency observes

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<sup>85</sup> Again, drug taking produces violent hallucinations, like those that Pullman's Bedwell experiences, which is very different from the lethargic Victorian model. This is a modern take that reflects contemporary drug taking rather than Victorian opium smoking.

<sup>86</sup> Attempting to compile a list of what is quintessentially English, Jeremy Paxman includes "drinking in excess" together with Shakespeare, Dickens, double-deckers, fish-and-chips, and civility (22–23).

that “[t]he drug had long-since ceased to bring him happiness, and yet he couldn’t help himself” (Updale, *Rocks* 13). Once Montmorency falls into drug consumption, it is actually Scarper who is to blame:

Scarper — his rough and dangerous self — the rough and dangerous self who had taken the brown granules from the leather pouch hidden ... and crumbled them into a tumbler of whisky ... had *crept up* on Montmorency ... as he was getting ready to set off ... Montmorency had been doing so well. He had washed and shaved, and dressed in his best evening wear. (13, *italics mine*)

The separation between the two personalities is almost complete. Once he has consumed what has been described as a “disgusting concoction”, a “nauseating potion” (13), and a “vile drug” (82), Montmorency feels that he now does not belong to the West world where he lives: “He gulped the liquid down. But as he swallowed it he knew that here in London he couldn’t risk being seen under the influence ... and he sensed that the secret stinking darkness of the squalid tunnel was the place to be when the mixture took effect” (13).

The association of darkness and tunnels echoes the previous drug den passage; the underground world of the sewers belongs to the East.<sup>87</sup> So while drinking is a part of British identity and an activity that can be undertaken on the “surface”, drugs are part of the Eastern world (both Easts), an uncontrollable foreign presence which belongs to the underground, where it can at least remain unseen. It is the agent that transforms Montmorency, the British gentleman, into Scarper, the East London thief.

This dichotomy transcends the personal level: there is also a link between Montmorency’s health and national security. Most of Montmorency’s debacle is focalised through Fox-Selwyn, the quintessential British gentleman, who points out the “indignity” (8) of his friend’s behaviour. When he urges Montmorency to mend his ways, he explains that they cannot be out of control, as “lives, and not just our lives, could be endangered by one wrong word” (44). Then he insinuates that if Montmorency slips into “an abyss of depravity” others will make sure he is destroyed; finally, he issues an ultimatum: “Conquer this frailty and I will never say a word. But I have to

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<sup>87</sup> Montmorency here imitates Dorian Gray’s actions. Gray goes from his house, in the respectable (English) West, to search for opium in the East (Oriental) End — the side of the city that represents and contains ‘otherness’.

tell you now that if you let me down, and if your weakness should in any way threaten this nation even I will withdraw my support” (44). The drug is seen to exploit a moral flaw which can be conquered only by exercise of will. This conceptualisation of the addiction corresponds to the way Victorians viewed such things in the earlier decades of the nineteenth century, as a "self-inflicted disease" and a "bad habit" (Berridge 456). Overcoming the addiction is not only a matter of will but most importantly a question of patriotic duty: the nation is at stake here. The tone of Fox-Selwyn's ultimatum is not ironic; it is imitating the type of imperial discourse to be found in penny dreadful adventures as well as in the narratives of R.M. Ballantyne, H. Rider Haggard, and G. A. Henty. When Montmorency reproaches Fox-Selwyn for throwing away his drugs, Fox-Selwyn replies that he had more than a right, he had a "duty" (*Rocks* 80).<sup>88</sup>

Montmorency, by succumbing to this habit, has introduced an Eastern agent into the heart of the Empire, with the consequence that he might end up betraying his country. In this way, he positions himself as the Other: the East End thief as opposed to the West side gentleman, the Eastern as opposed to the British. Thus Scarper is to blame for the addiction: "Scarper's wits had preserved Montmorency's lifestyle. *But Scarper's weaknesses were in danger of undermining that lifestyle too*" (17, italics mine).

The addiction is part of all that is abject and repulsive; part of what characterises Scarper, who is responsible for "luring" Montmorency into the vice (34). When Montmorency is under the influence, he calls himself Scarper in front of others (47). Just like Hyde acts on the "leaping pulses and secret pleasures" (683) Jekyll denies having in R.L. Stevenson's story, it can be said that Scarper's drug addiction is Montmorency's secret pleasure. To overcome his drug addiction, Montmorency must repress Scarper, in what looks like denial. When, after almost caving in the East End, Montmorency returns, Fox-Selwyn points out that "Scarper nearly did [go into that drug den]. Montmorency came home" (*Rocks* 258). What must remain pure, above all, is the nation. Since the nation's core, its very heart, is represented by both its countryside and its upper class, Scarper, the drug, and the East (its natural habitat) must be left behind.

The drug in question is never once called opium in Updale's series, although a number of details hint that it is an opiate derivative. It comes from the East, specifically

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<sup>88</sup> There are many instances when such a tone is used, especially since — as will be discussed in Chapter Six — national security and patriotism are concepts that are pivotal to the *Montmorency* series.

Turkey (13), where (as previously mentioned) most of Britain's opium supply came from during the nineteenth century. It takes the form of "brown granules" that can be crumbled into a drink (12), which can indicate a number of opium-based drugs. In addition, it is smoked at an East End "drug *den*" (253, italics mine), while the "pungent" (42) aroma of Montmorency's stash is also characteristic of raw opium. While these are very precise details, Updale's suppression of the term "opium" cannot be accidental. The range of effects the drug produces gives a hint. As in Victorian texts, it is soporific; Montmorency is said to spend time "paralysed, staring ahead in a trance" (8). However, the drug also produces giggling, laughing, mumbling (7), shouting, raving (8), and even violent and aggressive behaviour — indeed, Montmorency tries to provoke a Turkish official by muttering insults and addressing him generically as "Ali" (7). This sort of energetic and violent behaviour is absent from Victorian texts and creates a link with the present. By avoiding the term "opium" and leaving that part of the canvas blank, and by adding "new" side-effects in addition to the Victorian ones, Updale allows the drug to fit the profile of any contemporary addictive substance even while she maintains her Victorian atmosphere. Montmorency's struggle to overcome his drug addiction can stand for the same experience in modern times. The nineteenth-century backdrop is used as a shield, giving Updale more freedom regarding drug consumption and the attitudes surrounding it.

### *Libba Bray: The Sexualized Opium Den*

When Libba Bray invokes the ghost of the opium den in *Rebel Angels* (2005), she replicates both the squalor and poverty of the East End, as well as the drug's corrupting sexual and Oriental connotations.

The relevant episode takes place when her teen protagonist, Gemma, and her Indian guardian, Kartik, go into the East End to rescue her father, who has been lost at an opium den for two days. Bray places her opium den in Bluegate Fields. This location was visited by a number of Victorian journalists writing opium den investigative pieces, such as Joseph Charles Parkinson's "Lazarus, Lotus-Eating"

(1866).<sup>89</sup> Bray thus fuses a historically verified location — or at least one believed to be so by Victorians — together with tropes of Victorian fiction.

The slum is described in the usual Victorian terms, as a run-down and extremely poor place, full of “ramshackle buildings that stand stopped as beggars”, inhabited “by thieves, addicts, murderers, and the like” (*Angels* 371). Poverty and crime are grouped together in an environment that seems near collapse, full of crooked elements which signal a lack of order and symbolise a bent morality.

Like the Victorians, Bray also presents the East as a sexualised space. Indeed, she goes further than Victorian texts by being explicit about it. When Gemma initially asks to be taken to Bluegate Fields, Kartik refuses. His explanation is tainted with sexual danger: “Bluegate Fields is not the sort of place for ladies ... Do you know what could happen to you there?” (370). Faced with Gemma’s insistence, Kartik relents, but states that the only way to go in is dressed as a man (370). This discourse is part of a twenty-first-century version of Victorian propriety that Bray adopts, which contrasts with Pullman’s treatment of the same issue. In his story, Sally requires no disguise to go into the den, and it does not represent any sexual danger. For Bray, the East End is not only a male space, but also a sexually dangerous place for women. Inside the den, just like Dorian Gray and Watson, Gemma is fascinated by the abundance of bodies. She trips “over something” (373), only to then realize it is a prone person. In the “low, cramped room” she observes: “Everywhere I look there are bodies. They lie about, eyes fluttering; some jabber on in long strings of sentences that mean nothing” (373). This proliferation of nameless bodies echoes the “bodies lying in strange fantastic poses” that were part of classic Victorian opium den narratives — such as *The Man with the Twisted Lip* (Conan Doyle 231) and *Dorian Gray* (Wilde 156). The den’s role as a sexual space is also illustrated by the woman, heavily asleep, “draped” around Gemma’s father (*Angels* 376).

It is Gemma’s father who Bray uses to emulate yet another Victorian aspect of the drug: its Eastern ties. Just as Dickens’s English choirmaster is corrupted by opium, Gemma’s father follows a similar pattern. The man is never given a name, simply referred to as “Father” — a generic designation that allows him to stand for any man, or all. “Father” was once a “proper British gentleman” in India, wearing white suits,

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<sup>89</sup> A chapter called “Whitechapel and Thereabouts” in Blanchard and Doré’s *London: a Pilgrimage* (1872) also talks of a den in Bluegate Fields, in all probability the same one. As Matthew Sweet puts it, all opium den articles seem to have been based on the same two establishments “in New Court, Shadwell, and the shifting cast of characters that occupied their beds and floors” (92).



eating pomegranates with a silver spoon, and entertaining his children with wild tales (*A Great and Terrible Beauty* 3). It was back in England, after his wife's murder, that he became addicted to both laudanum and opium, addictions which affected his health and weakened his character. The state he is reduced to is reminiscent of the passivity and weakness associated with opium eaters in Victorian narratives, such as in Rudyard Kipling's *The Gate of the Hundred Sorrows*, whose narrator's experience with the "Black Smoke" means he does little besides smoking and sleeping (203). As in Kipling, the habit is also associated with the East — in this case, both India and China. During an exchange between Father and his son, Tom, regarding a new carriage driver, Tom protests against his father's desire to hire an Indian instead of an Englishman for the job by reminding Father how the Indians have "habits" which have led him to trouble before (*Angels* 136). Father cuts Tom's complaints short by stating that his driver takes him where he needs to go, to which his son replies "that is my concern" (313). It is thus insinuated that the driver will take Father to a den *because* he is Indian, whereas a good Englishman would not. Rather than challenge this, the narrative confirms such suspicions as the new Indian driver does indeed take Father to the said establishment.

The opium den is a space where, just like Victorians feared, races seem to mingle and identities dissolve. This concept is articulated much more explicitly here than in Victorian fiction. The drug seems to cause a downward spiral that responds to a two-stage process, starting with a loss of "Britishness" and then developing into an "Orientalisation". This negative progression is illustrated once Gemma and Kartik find her father. First they must walk through "throngs of opium eaters" (377), a labyrinth of bodies belonging to different ethnicities. Indian sailors and "Chinamen" circulate, but Bray also incorporates "several well-to-do gentlemen" (373) — that is, Englishmen. Here, Gemma does not immediately recognise her father; she fails to identify either the hoarse, urgent voice asking for more opium or the shaky hand searching for a pipe. She recognises him only by his wedding ring and the "fine gold watch fob dangling from thin fingers" (376). These, like his white suit, seem to epitomise his "Britishness". Although Gemma has already seen her father's deteriorated condition at home, the den has advanced it even further. Her father never smoked while in India itself. The fact that he acquires the habit only after returning to England suggests the inversion of the colonising order, a variation of Freud's "return of the repressed".

Free from constraints, he has also indulged in sexual liberties, recalling Oscar Wilde's *Dorian Gray*: "There were opium-dens, where one could buy oblivion, dens of horror where the memory of old sins could be destroyed by the madness of sins that were new" (153). In *Bray*, this "new" sin is implied by the woman lying across her father, asleep, who has, incidentally, borrowed some of his clothes (*Angels* 376). This loss of identity implies a reversal to a "savage" and less "civilised" state, also suggested by how he is lying on a "soiled, torn mattress in only his trousers and shirt", that his "fine cravat and boots are gone", and he is surrounded by the "stench of urine" (376). As we have seen, Victorian addicts — unlike twentieth-century contemporary "junkies" — were mostly depicted as lethargic. But her father's physical aggression — he pushes Gemma hard enough that she falls (377) — not only emphasises his ungentlemanly manners but is part of a contemporary discourse regarding present-day drug addicts, whose image is much more violent than that of the passive, almost comatose Victorian opium eater.

The "orientalising" properties of the opium den are emphasised through the den's owner, Mr Chin-Chin. Indeed, when Kartik is looking for him, he is lead to a "fat Englishman" (376), whose other name is Uncle Billy. It seems that Uncle Billy has acquired a dual racial identity, and that the Chinese side dominates.<sup>90</sup> This is a throwback to the "Orientalisation" that characters like Conan Doyle's Isa Whitney suffer. As mentioned, Whitney was a college student whose opium habit turns him literarily "yellow" (229). The mention of his brother, the Principal of the Theological College of St. George, offers a sharp contrast between the noble man Whitney could have been without the drug and the ruined, Orientalised one he is.

Bray's opium den is a concentration of all the Victorian tropes. It is an East where both Indians (as in Kipling's narrative) and Chinese are present. Indeed, when Gemma and Kartik first enter the den, they are greeted by "... an ancient Chinaman. The shadows under his hollow eyes make him seem more an apparition than a flesh-and-blood man, but then he smiles, showing a handful of teeth mottled brown as rotted fruit" (*Angels* 373). Previously, Tom had referred to Father's addiction as his "demons" (380), and indeed the Chinese man has the nightmarish appearance of a living-dead creature. This portrayal of Orientals as, to quote Milligan, "vampire like parasites" (87) was characteristic of the opium den genre. It also reflects, as Milligan

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<sup>90</sup> This is similar to what Pullman does with Ah Ling, who is half-Chinese, half-Dutch.

notices, the Victorians' anxiety and fear of a reversal of the Empire's order: the drug, representative of the Orient, was seen as a corrupting agent that could contaminate the British in retribution for "England's dishonourable imperial policies" (83). This contagious "Orientalness" meant British people could lose their identity and become more Oriental — like the English women Victorian explorers found in the dens. It is easy to see how this domestic threat could be perceived as a menace to the British imperial project as a whole. Bray may be using this particular portrayal of Chinese people merely as "period colour", but it means that overall the ethnicity is depicted in a negative light. By refusing to challenge such formulaic conceptions, Bray does nothing but reinforce a vicious stereotype.

Bray's "modern" opium den, then, is a warped space of crooked morals that reflects the same racial fears present in Victorian texts. Indeed, Bray embraces these stereotypes more fervently than Pullman and Updale. On the one hand, the Victorian façade Bray employs could mask the same racial fears regarding that "other". On the other hand, Bray's insistence on the horrors of the East End and its foreign inhabitants seems tied to a depiction of England as a decadent Empire, a world crumbling under the weight of its own sins and suffering the incestuous and vicious circle of colonisers and colonised.

Bray introduces a contemporary element that is foreign to the den genre: even though Gemma is disguised as a man, Victorian texts would have never had a woman entering an opium den, much less willingly so. The women that can be found in Victorian opium dens are, as mentioned, addicts that are either foreigners or have been "Orientalised". In *The Man with the Twisted Lip*, Watson goes into an opium den *on behalf* of a woman who is looking for her husband, whereas both Sally and Gemma, while accompanied, decide to go in themselves. Once in Bluegate Fields, Gemma — dressed as a man — is approached by a group of poor children, offering shoe shines along with sexual favours — one suggesting he can "be kind" to her for as long as she likes (*Angels* 372). This type of episode is unheard of in the opium den genre, not only because of the sexual nature of the comment, but because this is supposed to be same-sex solicitation. While having a girl enter the den is perhaps unsurprising; from a contemporary point of view, the sexual offer is more difficult to understand. Bray seems willing to go further than the Victorians in her depiction of the East End as a sexually sordid environment. She employs this model to superimpose a contemporary fear regarding street children and sexual predators onto the Victorian notion. Thus, her

East End becomes a truly neo-Victorian space. It merges the Victorian past with aspects of our present, revealing in the process the endurance of particular Victorian anxieties while also forcing these modern concerns into the inherited opium den myth.

#### *Further Examples of Opium Dens*

Opium dens also feature in Paul Bajoria's *The Printer's Devil* and Nancy Springer's *Enola Holmes* series, showing they have become almost obligatory in neo-Victorian narratives. In what follows, I focus on just two examples.

In Brian Keaney's *Nathaniel Wolfe and the Bodysnatchers* (2009), Nathaniel notes that these establishments are part of London's "darker and more desperate" layer, how they "festered down by the docks, like sores upon the body of the city" (79–80). This image of sickness and disease corresponds to the Victorian perception of opium dens as corrupting agents, posing a danger of contamination to the nation. Along with the East End location, there are also the usual oriental associations: a Chinese girl and a "very old Chinese man" (86) are in charge of the den. The place exhibits the typical misery of filthy mattresses and people dressed in "little more than rags" (89). The den is also occupied as a space by the "other", part of the dark and dangerous underworld — the sewers which are tied to the East End and to the lowest and most dangerous of people. Here, "the shadows were more strange and threatening, the stains upon the wall more intricate and bizarre, the faces of those who lay about ... more twisted and devilish than any Nathaniel had ever seen before" (85–86). Just like in Victorian and modern writings, the presence of bodies is underlined, their abundance implying a lack of shame and a sense of promiscuity that goes back to Victorian discourses. Nathaniel and his companion have to pick "their way among the bodies as if they were walking through the aftermath of a battle, where the dead lay just as they had fallen" (88). This military image indicates that this is the enemy's territory which is now being visited by the victors; the passiveness of these "bodies" that refuse to get up is a negative stain on their characters; thus, they are not only associated with the Orient and the underworld. These people are the "other" among which Nathaniel, the English gentleman, braves on. His entrance into the den (like Sally's in *Ruby*) is almost trancelike: "The world outside had been exchanged for one in which things moved at a slower pace, and everything seemed dream-like" (85). However, the impression here is more directly linked to the drug's soothing effect, as Nathaniel feels it "subtly changing" his consciousness (85).

This dream-like aspect does little to undermine what is an extremely Victorian depiction of the opium den.

Opium is also involved in Y.S. Lee's narrative, where the Prince of Wales goes into the slums for a tour of the "dark side" (*The Traitor and the Tunnel* 39) that ends in an opium den.<sup>91</sup> The establishment's patrons are — unsurprisingly — "Lascars, mainly, on shore leave", and most are, "of course, in a drug-induced stupor" (41). Despite depicting a Victorian double East, Lee does play with other stereotypes. One of the characters, James, has been consuming a drug for the malaria he caught in India, and is then asked about it:

"What — what the devil was that?"

"Willow-bark powder, of course. What did you think?" Amusement flickered across his weary features. "Some dangerous poison brought back from my Oriental travels?" He grinned ... "Powdered opium? The demon that's sapping my youth and beauty?" (*The Body at the Tower* 305–306).

James is engaging ironically with the — typically Victorian — assumptions of his questioner, at the same time that Lee is drawing attention to the reader's preconceptions. Moreover, although James admits it is more than willow-bark, the drug he is taking comes from Germany (*Tower* 307).

## Conclusion

The ideas used to construct these opium dens are the result of the interplay between Victorian assumptions and modern agendas, which contradict historical evidence. Although they draw on the same sources, Pullman's, Updale's, and Bray's portrayals of drug usage and opium dens are hardly the same. Pullman uses the Victorian elements of the opium den genre, but strives to give them an additional dimension. The poor of the East are thus rescued from becoming merely Gothicised figures. Equally, he presents the opium den to be the result of a collective dream, as Sally experiences it. Opium itself is a powerful drug that can be used and abused by either gender and any nationality. The emphasis is placed on people, and their actions determine what the

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<sup>91</sup> Although Lee makes no historical references, the Prince of Wales did in fact visit an opium den (Sweet 95).

drug does to them. His dens are but symptomatic; instead of condemning those who consume it, Pullman chooses to speak of “things in London that make opium look no more harmful than tea” (*Ruby* 88). Indeed, he chooses the opium den frame as a way of exposing Victorian politics and highlighting a discourse of exploitation that continues, in different shapes, all along the series (see Chapter Six). What he delivers as the true horror are the historical conditions partly responsible for the creation of the opium den myth in the first place.

Updale’s appropriation tries to bridge the gap of a century by allowing opium to be a stand-in for any drug, linking it with any number of modern substances. Nevertheless, her narrative offers less resistance to the stereotypes surrounding the opium den space and thus aligns itself with a Victorian viewpoint. It blames both Easts for the invasion and corruption the drug causes, unblinkingly mirroring Victorian anxieties that are never challenged. Updale’s nationalist and conservative agenda (see Chapter Six) is evident in her treatment. When the drug threatens the purity of the nation — embodied in its countryside — the cleansing and healing process involves getting rid of what is seen as a foreign element, or at least returning it to its natural habitat: out of sight in the secrecy of the East and its dark underground tunnels.

Bray’s text, meanwhile, perpetuates popular Victorian notions of the opium den. It is an alien space in the poverty-ridden East End, conducive to the loss of identity and morality, encouraging the emergence of deviant sexual appetites. The American author seems to be using the opium den as a way to critique the British Empire and deploy a national agenda of her own. She ends her trilogy with her heroine’s departure for New York. The city is described briefly in bright and vibrant terms, a place of hope that offers a sharp contrast to London, which is portrayed as the capital of a crumbling old world, with its opium dens, barefoot children, and hypocritical upper class.

Keaney’s “devilish shadows” are there to merely authenticate the story’s Victorian backdrop. The emphasis on the sensational elements truly mimics Victorian fiction, but, by doing so, helps to further alienate the East and posit the West as its benign opposite. Conversely, Lee defies stereotypes, as the “demon” powder is European, which is similar to Pullman’s placement of an “opium den” in Mrs Holland’s lodging house.

A final note: Pullman and Lee aside, many of our authors mimic the Oriental associations of the originals. If China’s globalization during the past decade is taken into account, the insistence on this aspect can be seen as implying the Victorian’s

“yellow peril” fears because they respond to modern anxieties. Oxford academic Frank Pieke notes that “In Western Europe, fear of the coming Chinese age connects seamlessly with the fear of migration” (Pieke). This fits in with the depiction of the double East as decadent, dangerous, and ultimately undesirable.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RAGGED ORPHANS: STREET ARABS OLD AND NEW

We have seen that Victorian literature represent the East as populated by the “abject poor”. Prominent among them are the “street Arabs”, ragamuffins, guttersnipes, waifs, and strays: orphans. Victorian visual and written culture made “the ragged child, trapped forever in the spectacular and iconic poverty of torn clothes, bare feet and unkempt hair” (Koven 133) a part of British cultural imagination, a synonym not only for poverty, but of the Victorian era and London’s streets in particular. This nineteenth-century orphan is not only part of Victorian writings; the figure has become so integral to our conception of nineteenth-century London that it is also present in our young adult stories. Victorian middle and upper-class anxieties regarding the poor are perpetuated in a portrayal which insist on separating the intelligent orphan protagonist — but a lost heir in disguise — from the truly unkempt children of the street who remain beyond hope. At the same time, our authors tend to employ the orphan figure to project agency and thus to empower their readers.

#### **“The Raw Material as We Find It”: Orphans in the Victorian Era**

The Victorian orphan archetype is a product of both fact and fiction.<sup>92</sup> In *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851–61), Henry Mayhew writes about the “mudlarks” as a “type”, who, more often than not, are young children:

... there was a painful uniformity in the stories of all the children: they were either the children of the very poor ... or else they were orphans, and compelled from utter destitution to seek for the means of appeasing their hunger in the mud of the river. That the majority of this class are ignorant, and without even the rudiments of education, and that many of them from time to time are committed to prison for petty thefts, cannot be wondered at ... As for the females growing up under such circumstances, the worst may be anticipated of them ... unfortunate creatures who swell the tide of prostitution. (2: 156)

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<sup>92</sup> Factual in that social exploration texts, and similar material, purported to be so, but, as we have seen previously, these renditions’ objectivity is questionable.



Andrew Mearns's *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London* (1883) discusses how one-parent children receive the worst and most cruel treatment at the hands of their own relatives: "Children who can scarcely walk are taught to steal, and mercilessly beaten if they come back from their daily expedition without money or money's worth" (62). He talks of mothers urging "tender infants" to drink gin (62), and describes orphans as barefooted, ragged children, almost naked, starving, left to their own devices by drunken or dead parents. Most importantly, Mearns believed that the children's misery was "inherited" from these drunken parents, resulting in creatures who are "stunted, misshapen, and often loathsome objects" (67). Blanchard and Doré's description in *London: a Pilgrimage* (1872) is built out of the same basic elements, implicitly foreshadowing the children's transformation into animalized, savage "others". The streets swarm "with wretched children, covered with black rags, bare-footed and bare-headed-with *claws for hands* and with *voices hard and harsh* as those of costermongers" (217, italics mine).

Such writings made no distinction between those children out on the streets, who had a job and family, with those who had neither, putting them all together under the same designation. "Street Arab" identifies these children (and their relatives) as a separate breed, linking them with the uncivilized colonial subject.<sup>93</sup> Thomas Holmes' *London's Underworld* (1912) notes that "[t]he parents evidently have been bred in vagrancy, and the children, and, unless the law intervenes, their children are destined to continue the *species [sic]*" (41, italics mine). William Booth's *In Darkest England and the Way Out* (1890) asserts that although the adults (drunkards, commonly guilty of incest) are lost, there is hope for the children (62). The "hope" Booth mentions — and this point is important — conceptualizes the children of the poor as subjects to bring in line with a national and imperial project, an idea that reflects end-of-the-century anxieties, when the term "street Arab" came to express "fears of domestic decline and urban disorder" (Murdoch 25). W.T. Stead describes Dr Thomas Barnardo, founder of one of the most well-known and influential Victorian welfare organizations for children, as "the father of Nobody's Children" (Murdoch 67), reflecting a discourse

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<sup>93</sup> The earliest instance recorded on the OED is 1853; it is within a text on juvenile delinquency (street Arab, *n.*).

compatible with Booth's, as it was intent on separating children from their communities.<sup>94</sup>

There is a strong visual element around the ragged orphan that comes from Victorian photographic records. Barnardo's organization used photography as a means to raise both money and awareness.<sup>95</sup> He published a series of "before and after" studies. These were, it emerged, "staged". In 1877, Barnardo went through an arbitration, accused by parents and relatives of manipulating the "before" images to make the condition of the children seem worse than it was. Mrs Holder, the mother of one of the poster children, objected to the image of her daughter without shoes or stockings not only because she looked "savage" but because she was depicted as an abandoned London waif (see fig. 14). Mrs Holder declared her girls had never been on the streets but had been sent to the institution to be trained as servants (Murdoch 12).<sup>96</sup> Historian Lydia Murdoch has interpreted the controversy as a testimony to "how late-Victorian child welfare workers manipulated the popular images of poor children in order to promote their cause, even when this meant ignoring or falsifying the children's family backgrounds" (14).

Barnardo's photographs provided a perfect visual match to the stereotypical description of "street urchins" in social and journalistic writings, thus strengthening the stereotype. Victorian Swedish photographer O. G. Rejlander, produced an especially popular series on street urchins in the 1860s (see fig. 15). As Stephanie Spencer points out in her article, "O.G. Rejlander's Photographs of Street Urchins" (1984), the similarities between the photos and several Punch cartoons are such that they indicate direct borrowing of composition and motif (20). Rejlander's images are the result of controlled studio recreations which form part of a traditional way of depicting the poor.<sup>97</sup> None of the images include the word "orphan" in the title. That the term "orphan" became generic can be attributed to the social literature of the time — texts

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<sup>94</sup> Barnardo's magazine *Day & Night*, which dealt with the children's progress and stories, included articles such as "Is Philanthropic Abduction Ever Justifiable?" (qtd. in Murdoch 23), which it was, according to the publication.

<sup>95</sup> As Seth Koven points out, in the 1870s the boundaries that defined photography were not clear. It was a science, an art, an objective record of reality and a subjective manipulation (118). Hence, Victorians would be unlikely to question the accuracy of what they saw in images.

<sup>96</sup> Images such as these, where little girls were seen in ragged clothes, were not only designed to inspire pity but also to foreshadow the fact that they were on their way to become prostitutes if no help was offered to them.

<sup>97</sup> Spencer explains that in many cases the boys were not actual street children but were attending Ragged Schools — free public education institutions that also provided clothing, food, and sometimes lodgings. They were given accessories, such as ragged clothes, to become street urchins.

such as Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and London Poor* — which described homeless children in the same terms. The jobs they fulfilled, and their appearance, aligned with Rejlander's photos, so that street urchins and orphans become superimposed in the popular imagination<sup>98</sup>.

The figure of the orphan was also used to discredit the environment in which these children grew up, implying they were only objects for profit to their parents. Social exploration texts described orphans' elders as gamblers, drinkers, or morally questionable characters. W.T. Stead's famous *The Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon* (1885) suggested that East Enders were capable of selling their own children. Articles in the *Pall Mall Gazette* such as "Can We Save the Children?" (1888), and "Is It Not Time?" discussed how East End youngsters could be saved, evoking Mearns' images of children "[b]orn in the fetid atmosphere of a crowded cellar, suckled on gin, and cradled in the gutter" (82). Murdoch demonstrates (from records in relation to the Poor Law and the records of charitable institutions) that the lonely orphan (oppressed by poor adults) was a simplification (2). Although many parents and relatives were glad to receive food, education, and a future for their children, they did not on the whole want to be parted from them, and had not necessarily abused them.

The negative conceptualisation of the poor adults reflected Victorian fears of contamination, social upheaval, and eugenics, the same fears that surrounded the figure of the prostitute. "Vilifying" the adults justified separating them from their children, if they were young enough to be "reformed". This was part of a political move that sought to undermine the poor and working classes, excluding them from the national discourse. The separation meant the children could be educated and reclaimed, going from Barnardo's street Arabs to the productive citizens — artisans or servants — Booth deemed necessary to carrying on the Empire. Charitable institutions and government projects conceptualized these children as subjects to be "colonized" and incorporated into the imperial project. This point is illustrated by the Goliath project, the Goliath being a ship for training poor law boys into the Royal Navy and mercantile operations. The process was eulogised for changing stunted urchins into erect and bright boys who were the promise of the future, adding their energy to the national life (Murdoch 120).

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<sup>98</sup> The OED defines an urchin as "[a] little fellow; a boy or youngster ... often applied with commiserative force to children poorly, raggedly, or untidily clothed" (urchin, *n*.5.a.) or a "mischievous or roguish youngster" (urchin, *n*.4.a.) with no reference to being an orphan mentioned.

In his study *Slumming: sexual and social politics in Victorian London* (2004), the historian Seth Koven explains that the debates and discourses around childhood poverty, among other issues, were often sparked by anxieties latent in Victorian society (4). “Social explorers” had an almost morbid bi-polar relationship with the poor and their progeny. They tended to romanticize and exoticize the poor in their accounts, reflecting both a “shamed sympathy” and an “attraction of repulsion” towards them (4). This is clear in Thomas Holmes’ *London’s Underworld* (1912), who confesses that the children, starved women, outcasts, and thieves are a “strange mixture ... [that] bewilders me, fascinates me, horrifies me, and yet sometimes it encourages me and almost inspires me” (26).

### **“Please, sir, I want some more”: Orphans in Victorian Literature**

The line between (allegedly) “factual” accounts and fictional renditions of street children in Victorian writing was indistinct. Koven points out that, at the time, representation and reality were already intertwined in a circle of mutual imitation (116). While authors, philanthropists, and novelists all used material from social explorers’ texts, the social explorers, in turn, were already using fictional conventions in their “true-life” accounts (98). As Lydia Murdoch notes, melodrama provided a pre-existing narrative structure for *all* representations of child poverty (14).

The works of Dickens feature the iconic Victorian orphan. But, among his novels, it is *Oliver Twist* (1838) that was most influential. Dickens chose his characters from those he believed to be “the most criminal and degraded in London’s population” (33): thieves, fences, prostitutes, and pickpockets. In his 1841 introduction he declared that the purpose of his novel was to show the “unattractive and repulsive *truth*” (36, *italics mine*). He wanted to depict these characters “in all their deformity, in all their wretchedness, in all the squalid misery of their lives; to show them *as they really are*” (34, *italics mine*). But Dickens wrote with an agenda, justifying his depictions as “a service to society” (34).

*Oliver Twist* establishes a pattern for specific types of orphans. First, there are the pickpockets that Fagin has initiated in thieving.<sup>99</sup> In their intimate relationship with

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<sup>99</sup> Nancy, the prostitute, can also be inferred as having once been an orphan who underwent the same process. Indeed, she recalls how Fagin “led her, step by step, deeper and deeper down into an abyss of crime and misery, whence was no escape” (*Oliver Twist* 397).

Sikes (the criminal) and Nancy (the prostitute), these children are associated with the worst elements of the city's underworld.<sup>100</sup> According to Heather Shore, the judicial system's "construction of the pickpocket allowed for a broad rhetoric of masculine, professionalised, hardened, and precocious behaviour" (55). This discourse is reflected in the first depiction of the pickpocket band: they live in a few dirty, dishevelled rooms in the East End, where Oliver first sees them sitting around a table, smoking and "drinking spirits with the air of middle-aged men" (Dickens 105). The scene clearly indicates these orphans can and will become criminals and drunkards, like the adults of their communities.

Two orphans in this group are individualized, exemplifying typical street-urchin features: John Dawkins, "The Artful Dodger", and his sidekick, the always laughing Charley Bates. They are clever but their actions tread a thin line between childish pranks and serious criminal behaviour. Dawkins is a sharp boy who embodies the "know-how" and street cleverness that are part of the orphan figure. This "roystering and swaggering" youth is "as dirty a juvenile as one would wish to see" (100). He has "little, sharp, ugly eyes", wears a tilted hat and a man's coat that is too big for him (100). The two boys apply "loose notions concerning the rights of property" by taking apples and onions from street stalls (113). The passage brings to mind Thomas Holmes's complaint about teenage "hopeless tribes of nomads" that monopolise the public space (103), flooding the streets on Sunday nights by the thousands, bumping and pushing, annoying "respectable people" (145).

There is another type of orphan, besides the mischievous criminal in training; the "good" orphan who will be "saved", the category Oliver belongs to. If the Dodger and Bates are used mostly for comic relief, Oliver's misadventures are almost purely instructional. His miseries are used to illustrate the harsh treatment and acute cruelty orphans can suffer at the hands of the very people who should help them. Thus, the reader is made to pity Oliver. The orphan figure is used to criticise the lack of human compassion, but also the bureaucracy and self-serving nature of government institutions. Typically born in a workhouse, where he is immediately made an orphan, Oliver is then sent to a "branch-workhouse" where Mrs Mann starves, neglects, and "accidentally" smothers her charges (48) while pocketing the parish money.

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<sup>100</sup> That they are orphans is never specified, but the lack of parental figures, and the way they make their living indicates so.

Like any “good” orphan, Oliver is never corrupted, even when he falls into the company of Fagin, Sikes, and the rest of the band. Despite Fagin’s efforts to present pickpocketing as a game, Oliver never steals. Regardless of the company he keeps, he is no Dodger or Bates, but a very well-spoken, polite, and, most importantly, innocent youngster. As with all “good” orphans that follow, Oliver’s gentle manners and pure disposition come from his origins in the gentry. This is something that is recognized by the characters who move in higher social spheres. Indeed, Mr Brownlow, Mrs Maylie, Rose, and even Mr Grimwig accept him because his appearance and manners (149) signal him as different from the likes of the Dodger.<sup>101</sup>

As representatives of different types of orphans, the Dodger, Bates, and Oliver face different destinies. The Dodger fulfils the Victorian prophecy regarding orphanhood and criminality. Making “full justice to his upbringing” (396), he is caught stealing. The scene that sees him in front of the judge is humorous as he maintains his street-urchin ways, letting his tongue loose with his usual wit and impertinence. Although the comic tone belittles the importance of the episode, the Dodger’s behaviour is ultimately wrong and punishable and he is sent to a penal institution in Australia.<sup>102</sup>

Then there is the “reformed” orphan. After Sikes murders Nancy, we are told that Charley Bates, “appalled by Sikes’s crime” decides to try and lead an honest life (477). The distinction between the fates of Bates and Oliver indicates a lack of social mobility. Oliver’s progression goes beyond “succeeding”: he is a lost heir and, as such, becomes part of the upper-middle class. If orphans prosper, they do so because of their superior birth, or because they discover the joys of honest work. So although the boys are raised in similar circles, Bates only gets to be “the merriest young grazier in all Northamptonshire” (477), while Oliver is incorruptible and becomes a gentleman.<sup>103</sup>

The orphan stereotype was widespread in Victorian fiction. Echoing Dickens, Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847) featured an equally mistreated orphan, who not only suffers at the hands of her own family but is sent to a charity-school that brings to

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<sup>101</sup> While those from the lower social strata do not acknowledge him as part of the gentry in the same way, the fact that he cannot be “corrupted” marks him as different from them too.

<sup>102</sup> This is never directly stated. When he is apprehended, he is only said to be “booked for a passage out” (*Oliver Twist* 390).

<sup>103</sup> It is interesting to notice that this new life is in the countryside, and so is Oliver’s. Previously, Oliver’s happiest moments are when he is living with Rose, in the peace and quietude, balmy air and green hills of the countryside (*Oliver Twist* 290). This feeds into the portrayal of the urban as a corrupting environment as opposed to the pure pastoral ideal.

mind the establishments in *Oliver Twist*. George Gissing's *Thyrza* (1887) contains many references to the "Children of the gutter" (37), described in the usual terms: as "ragged urchins" and "dishevelled girls" (38), dirty and barefooted (112). The *Sherlock Holmes* stories can be added to the list. Holmes refers ironically to "The Baker Street division of the detective police force" which is but "a dozen of the dirtiest and most ragged street Arabs" Watson has ever seen (Conan Doyle 42). In *A Child of the Jago* (1896) Arthur Morrison relates the particularly wretched existence of Dicky Perrot, an orphan who lives in the Jago rookery.

The stereotype also extended to popular literature, such as penny dreadfuls. These popular nineteenth-century publications fed on philanthropic literature, and especially on Dickens, playing an important part in cementing the orphan's place in popular Victorian culture. Titles such as *Life and Career of a London Errand Boy* (1865) by John Bennett, *Joe Sterling; or, A Ragged Fortune* by James Greenwood (1890) or the anonymous *The Poor Boys of London; or, Driven to Crime* (1866) have plots which were modeled on that of *Oliver Twist*. As John Springhall points out, penny dreadfuls afforded youngsters a way to escape the monotony of their lives at schools, workshops, and others. Rather than exploring the realities of working class lives, these works resorted to melodrama and stereotypical characters. The texts allowed the reader to participate vicariously "in the criminal yet exciting escapades of homeless orphans without having their own life-styles radically altered in the process" (224).

Penny dreadfuls featured the "good" innocent orphan who secretly belonged to the aristocracy. In Edward Ellis's *The Boy Detective; or, The Crimes of London: A Romance of Modern Times* (1865-66), Ernest Keen is such an orphan. The "boy detective" of the title, he is a "cunning young thief" (17) who has acquired the name due to his cleverness, but who is also really the son of a gentleman.<sup>104</sup> The reader is encouraged to sympathise with him as, dressed in rags, he limps weakly: "his bare feet swollen and mud-stained, the rain-sheets dashing in his pale, wan face ... his wild, black eyes aglare with hunger and misery" (2).

"Good" orphans were accompanied on the page by bands of playful orphans driven by circumstances to live under bridges, in dilapidated rooms, or in secret caves

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<sup>104</sup> It is the case with many penny dreadfuls that the change of authors and plot from one publication to the next meant the text contradicted itself many times. Ernest Keen has aristocratic roots, but his portrayal goes from young thief to a boy that has never stolen a thing in his life.

around London. In Ellis's story, there is a band of Dodger-like orphans that live together; referred to as a "tribe", they are "a group of ragged and mud-stained little urchins" (191) with amusing nicknames. In *The Wild Boys of London; or, The Children of the Night* (1866), the Wild Boys are a gang of equally colourfully-named orphans who speak in cockney slang and have mischievous dispositions. They get into trouble only over petty things (like placing a cat in the pishman's cart), but they are high spirited and loyal. They respect a moral code of their own and generally get into fights with criminals, grave-robbers, and murderers.

The narratives mixed the orphans' playful adventures with moralising passages regarding these "unknown, uncared for, and unpitied" children who are treated cruelly by those who should be kind to them (*Wild Boys* 2). Poverty can age these children, as it "stuns" their growth and "destroy[s] the beauty of [their] ... youth" (*Poor Boys* 2). At the same time, the orphans are also depicted as "other": they have "wild faces and ... bare feet" (*Wild Boys* 9) (see fig. 16). In one adventure, they dance around the gentlemen they play jokes on "like young Indians doing a war caper with a white captive in their midst" (19). The association with the East is present even if these children are "honest"; after all, the Wild Boys' lair is situated under the city, in the sewers — which, as discussed in Chapter One, are associated with that portion of the city.<sup>105</sup> Although it has a blazing fire, vaulted roofs, hanging lamps, and mats, it is part of the sewers (see fig. 17).

These adventures also featured another type of orphan band who exist in direct opposition to the good-spirited orphans. In the *Wild Boys*, the other gang is aptly named the Boy-Thieves. While they also live in a vaulted sewer chamber, their description matches that of Fagin's boys:

About 10 boys, ragged, dirty and ill-looking, were surrounding a table, on which were spirits and water, and beer and wine in glasses. The faces of the boys who surrounded this table were very far different from those of the honest Wild Boys of London. They were bloated, coarse, sensual, drunken. They were boys of fourteen, who looked thirty, and boys of ten who looked twice their age. (145)

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<sup>105</sup> Although, as pointed out earlier, the text contradicts itself on this point.



If the alcohol and aged and disturbing appearances are not enough, these boys strip the body of a dead woman, then tie a stone to sink her. Such immoral (rather than illegal) behavior marks them firmly as lost causes.

In summary, it is evident there is an established pattern when it comes to the orphan of Victorian fiction. The “good” orphan with a hidden lineage is a beacon of hope, innocent and pure despite the environment he is in. The “other” orphans are secondary to the story, a bunch of boisterous illiterate lads. Both types are one-dimensional creations that illustrate the hopeless plight of the children of the poor as well as the redeeming qualities of a good education and a decent family life. Most of these orphans lack any agency of their own; their destinies are fixed from the start. There are the saved lost heirs and occasionally the reformed youth who find honest work — and then there are the rest, condemned to simply repeat the vicious circle they were born into.

### **Victorian Orphans for the Twenty-First Century Reader**

The orphan has become a quintessential feature of the nineteenth century in twentieth and twenty-first century culture. In order to reconstruct the Victorian period, the stereotype is used in these modern young adult novels. As a part of London’s scenery, these waifs are akin to their ancestors: they are ragged savages who speak street slang. Invariably inhabiting the East End, their deeds encompass dishonesty and downright violence. They imply a modern view of Victorian ideology regarding the poor, the class system, and nationhood. When they are the protagonists, however, these orphans grow beyond the stereotype, developing more fully as characters. Their lack of parents makes them self-reliant, independent, and resourceful, infusing the Victorian figure with positive twenty-first century elements.

#### *From Mudlarks to Princesses: Orphans in Phillip Pullman’s Sally Lockhart Quartet*

Phillip Pullman’s *Sally Lockhart* quartet (1985–1994) includes “good” redeemable orphans as well as gangs of mischievous and at times violent waifs. The portrayal of the latter follows Victorian stereotypes, while the “good” orphans deviate from the nineteenth-century model, becoming more akin to the modern reader.

One of the orphan gangs we encounter are mudlarks, the children that Mayhew studied, defined here by Pullman as children who earn a living “by picking up lumps of coal and other bits and pieces from the mud at low tide” (*Ruby* 148). The dark aesthetic of the barefoot, dirty, ragged Victorian children applies to them. They live deep into the mazes of the East End, in a stereotypical orphan den, in the style of *Oliver Twist* and the penny dreadfuls. It is a cavernous, foul-smelling long room in which, by candle light, “[a] dozen or more children, clad in rags, lay asleep on piles of sacking while a wild-eyed girl a little older than Paddy held the candle. A foul, thick smell filled the air” (*Ruby* 176). The scene echoes Dr Barnardo’s account, published in *The Christian* in 1872, of his discovery of a group of orphans sleeping in a “dome-shaped roof” (Bagnell 92) — see fig. 18. It also brings to mind the fictional refuge in *The Wild Boys*.

These are illiterate and treacherous children that are closer to the Boy-Thieves of *Wild Boys*, a characterisation made obvious through Pullman’s representation of the mudlarks’ leader, Paddy, a “mate” of Jim’s (who is a “good” orphan). First, Paddy’s name distinguishes him as the offspring of Irish immigrants — and therefore “other”. Second, his appearance is worse than that of Jim: Paddy is a “dirty, foxy boy ... clad apparently in sacking” (*Ruby* 175). Third, what starts their friendship is Jim’s superior ability when it comes to insults; his vocabulary, we are told, being “far richer than anything ... [the mudlarks] could muster” (176). Most importantly, Paddy offers his help and guides Jim and Adelaide as they run away from Mrs Holland, only to betray them in the end by handing them back to her for money. “Gotta live” (178) he says as he pockets the coin she gives him. Realizing what has happened, Jim protectively puts his arms around Adelaide, and says only one word to Paddy: “Why?”. Jim then declares he will come back to find Paddy (178) and settle the score. Accordingly, Paddy is seen as Jim’s moral inferior. Together with the rest of these filthy East End children, he looks desperate, greedy, and disloyal. What is important is the impression conveyed by this portrayal. Their physiognomy, circumstances, and attitude leave the reader with the distinct impression that *these* children cannot be trusted, and the suspicion is that they will become vicious criminals, as dictated by standard Victorian discourse.

There is a second gang of “street urchins” in the series, which appears in both *Tiger* and *Princess*. However, this Lambeth gang is imitating the Wild Boys, not the Boy-Thieves. They are a mischievous but decent, vivacious bunch. Similarly to Conan Doyle’s Baker Street division, the “Irish Guards” (as Jim calls them) are a source of

information: the eyes and ears of London's streets; but, unlike Paddy's gang, they are at the service of the "good" characters. Their good nature makes them capable of acts of kindness. This is underlined when Liam, a tough boy and leader of the pack, takes a liking to Sally's baby, responding to his gang's criticisms over his capacity to take care of the little girl by saying: "'Begob, ye're a fine bunch of pessimistical bastards, ain't ye, though? Come here, princess.'" And Liam lifted Harriet on to his lap and sat there glaring at his companions" (*Tiger* 353).

Despite instances of tenderness, the "Irish Guards" are similar to the Wild Boys and Dickens's orphans in that they tread a thin line between playfulness, mischief, and criminality.<sup>106</sup> The depiction establishes the children's "otherness" — how like a tribe of savages they are, imitating the discourse of the nineteenth-century material. Indeed, they are "a brawling, foul-mouthed, filthy crew, but ... [Jim had] never seen better in a fight for cunning and tenacity; if rats bred with terriers, they'd produce offspring like this" (*Princess* 29). The link with animals also brings to mind Morrison's "Jago rats". Displaying the same wildness of the Wild Boys' rowdy post-fight celebrations, Jim finds the Irish Guards "crowing about a victory over a butcher's boy, and roasting some juicy-looking sausages over a smoky fire" (29). They have "war-cries" (33), move like "imps" (*Tiger* 363) and even bite policemen (362).

Pullman borrows here from Mearns's and Mayhew's images of orphans as savage, uncivilized-creatures. This evident in the way the gang takes pleasure in violence and in the 'little savages' (368) willingness to help out other characters if there is going to be a good fight (339).<sup>107</sup> Despite the playful mood, when battle ensues, these children are fully armed, sporting all sorts of weapons. Their leader has a silk muffler he uses as a garrotte (*Princess* 31), while the rest have "shivs", "jemmies", and "knuckle-dusters" (*Tiger* 346).<sup>108</sup> Thus prepared, the rescue mission they are carrying out turns into something else:

The battle of Telegraph Road was celebrated for years afterwards by the Irish gangs in Lambeth. Those who'd taken part heard their names becoming legends

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<sup>106</sup> Notice again the Irish origin.

<sup>107</sup> Indeed, it comes natural to them. They never question what they are doing or where it will lead them. Neither do those who "employ" them; this is particularly the case with the grown-up Jim, whose past as an orphan means he knows where these kids might end up.

<sup>108</sup> The OED suggests "shiv" as also "shive", a knife (shive, *n.1.*); while a "jemmy" is a crowbar used by burglars (jemmy, *n.6.*)

... There was nothing like it till the rise of the great Pat Hooligan himself, who gave his name to the species. (347)

The treatment of the gang is Victorian: they are a tribe of savages who are out for a good fight. By using the word and associating the gang with hooligans, Pullman is breaching the gap between past and present, as the term is also part of modern culture.<sup>109</sup> The *Tiger* extract clearly shows that the children the Victorians feared would become criminals have indeed evolved into a “species” of youth characterized by their extremely aggressive and destructive behaviour — the type of youngsters Thomas Holmes described as troubling “respectable people”. This is confirmed when the same weapons wielded by the “Irish Guards” are used in a fight among adults. The depiction of the fight has a different tone from the one the children participate in. This one is a “ferocious” encounter, with men kicking one another in the head, and using razors, making “grunting ... sickening crunching noises”, all “without a word spoken, going about this violence as if it were a difficult trade they had to concentrate on” (*Tiger* 408).<sup>110</sup> This introduces a contradiction in the narrative: while the exploits of the “Irish Guards” are celebrated, the same violence is portrayed as sickening in adults. The reader cannot help but make an unwilling connection between the “Irish Guards” and their destiny as potential hooligans and violent grown-ups. Paradoxically, the children’s gang only help “good” people — this is meant to justify their actions. Instead of condemning any type of violence, Pullman offers a dangerously romanticized view of it as a bloodless and fun adventure. After the battle, only one person has been hurt, but there is no blood; the rest of the gang does nothing but josh and crow over the fight, and laugh lots (351). The gang’s portrayal conveys a sense of nostalgia by alluding to a non-existent time when, apparently, there could be a “jolly good fight”, a bloodless affair without a sense of brutality. Pullman has teenagers having “harmless” fights while the adults are exclusively indulging in vicious encounters but refuses to make the logical connection between the former and the latter.

There are aspects in which Pullman’s orphan gangs deviate from the Victorian model. He chooses to deal with the poverty experienced by Paddy’s gang without the

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<sup>109</sup> Pullman’s books were written in the late eighties, early nineties; however the term hooligan is still in use. A Google search indicates “hooligan” and “hooliganism” as terms used in several articles related to the August 2011 London riots.

<sup>110</sup> This lack of articulated language is replaced by animal-like sounds. This reflects once more the Victorians’ ideology regarding the poor in the East as “uncivilized” and “bestial”.

sentimentality and moralising of penny dreadfuls. The narrator in the *Wild Boys* posits from the beginning that the adventures of the boys proves there is hope for those “born in the lowest depths of degradation” to improve themselves (*Wild Boys* 2).<sup>111</sup> Instead, Pullman attempts to make the plight of these homeless children something more real than the tattered clothes and grime — the “props” of Victorian adventure pages. These children trap rats to sell them in order to survive. The operation is witnessed by Jim when something stirs under a pile of animal bones. The “something” is a scarcely dressed five-year-old “who tottered ... with a squirming lashing rat in his hands” (*Ruby*, 177). The narrator makes no comments, leaving the reader to fill in the narrative gaps surrounding the lives of Paddy’s gang.

More important still is the inclusion of a girl as part of the “Irish Guards”. Bridie Sullivan is well-known as a beauty and fighter, participating in the gang’s fights, and brandishing her own knife. Afterwards, the boys discuss how, despite being hurt, Bridie can never be “done for”, especially because it was she who “walloped” Johnny Rodriguez, the “half-caste” (*Tiger* 352). Her presence and the fact that she participates in the battles endows the gang with a gender equality absent in Victorian penny dreadfuls: the latter never featured girls as part of the street urchins’ bands (they were instead innocent little girls, beloved sisters, or objects of affection in need of a rescuer).

Pullman’s “good” orphans are different from those constructed on the model of *Oliver Twist*. While Oliver was born for a better future, Pullman’s orphan-heroes are clearly the forgers of their own destiny. Their self-reliance and sense of agency makes them positive role models for modern readers, in a different way from the perfect and incorruptible Oliver. The protagonist of the series is Sally, who finds herself parentless at fifteen. Victorian orphans are able to change their circumstance only by chance and due to their own “purity” or aristocratic background. In Pullman’s novels, it is the education and financial support her father has provided that enables Sally to comfortably maintain herself and effectively be independent. Sally defies the Victorian model, but only to a certain degree. She might not be a secret heiress, but neither is she an East End ragged child. She is part of the middle class; a situation she maintains, ironically, because her starting position provides her with the resources and money to do so.

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<sup>111</sup> The narrator contradicts himself by then telling the reader that the wild boys are not all born in poverty (*Wild Boys* 2). The plot confirms this, as the boys that triumph are, once again, those whose ancestry supports their claim to a better social position.

In comparison, the orphan Adelaide is more interesting as an example of social mobility and therefore of Pullman's deviation from the Victorian tradition. A street child but a "good" orphan, she is able to break through to higher social spheres and change her destiny. The first part of Adelaide's life accords with the Victorian model, as she goes from orphan to prostitute.<sup>112</sup> She is a waif in the Dickensian tradition; a nine-year-old with "enormous dark eyes" (*Ruby* 17) "surrounded by dirt" (111), whose life elicits pity. Stereotypically, Adelaide lives in an East End lodging house, under the vigilance of two sinister adults from whose death threats she lives in a state of constant fear (41).

However, she embodies individual resilience, even in the face of her birth and current circumstances, and is more than just a pawn created to highlight social misery. Forced by the lodge owner to keep supplying opium to one of her lodgers, the addict Matthew Bedwell, it is with natural compassion that she tends to him "like a mother by the bed of her sick child" (42). Against Victorian beliefs, despite her environment and education (or lack thereof), she is not destined to grow up to be as brutal or cruel as her caretakers.

Her tenderness and compassion make her a "good" orphan, and indeed she is briefly "rescued" from her environment, although in a very different sense from the rescues advocated by Dr Barnardo and that Victorian social explorers expected. Like Oliver living with Mr Brownlow and later Mrs Maylie, Adelaide lives with the Garlands. During his stays, Oliver does not change, he is "still the same gentle ... affectionate creature that he had been" (*Oliver Twist* 293). In contrast, and even though her stay is brief, the experience of living with the Garlands changes Adelaide. This is because, far from being a nineteenth-century household, the Garlands live like a modern family. It is a loving environment that defies conventional rules with its bohemian lifestyle — "not washing the dishes" and "eating off a laboratory bench at odd hours" (*Ruby* 74). What makes the house especially unusual is that, servants or not, all men and women are equal (75). This exerts a lasting impact on Adelaide, and can be seen later in her pursuit of a better life.

Despite her origins, Adelaide is no Charley Bates, whose future may be described in one fateful sentence. After her stay with the Garlands, she disappears to

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<sup>112</sup> Although she turns into a prostitute, Pullman shows she is full of good qualities, trying to turn around the idea that a girl that was born and raised among such people would inevitably turn "bad". This has been discussed in Chapter Two.

re-emerge years later as a street-savvy, loving, strong woman. Her husband, a prince, trusts her “judgement and sensibility”, her “strength and perception of character” because “[her] experience of the world has given her a wisdom beyond her years” (*Princess* 43), which he knows has been acquired through prostitution. Her future, then, is not limited by her low-class origins. Considering her past choices to be poor, she feels ashamed about them (36). This is an internal judgement; there is no external and moralising admonition from the narrator or other characters. She is not “saved”, but rather grows, doing so not through education, as the Victorians would have deemed necessary, but through the love of a family (that is dysfunctional in Victorian terms).<sup>113</sup>

Another “good” orphan that Pullman uses to defy the Victorian orphan model is office boy Jim Taylor. When Jim stands next to Adelaide, the pair is stereotypical and reminiscent of a Barnardo photograph: “the frightened little girl in a cloak too big for her; and the boy without coat or hat” (*Ruby* 174). Even though the first description of Jim echoes those of the penny dreadfuls’ orphans, it does so without the melodrama:

... a small boy appeared, like a sudden solidification of all the grime in the Cheapside air. His jacket was torn in three places, his collar had come adrift from the shirt, and his hair looked as if it had been used for an experiment with the powers of electricity. (2)

Street-wise, he is the “likable mischievous” orphan. In addition, he is good-natured, as shown by the way he helps Sally from the beginning, expecting nothing but friendship in return. His actions towards Adelaide in the first and fourth books reflect the same sentiment. He is also knowledgeable; it is his particularly foul tongue that gains him the admiration of the orphan gangs in London. His idiom is used to indicate his lower social status — he addresses Fred Garland, the photo shop owner, as “the guvnor”. Despite his lack of noble origins, there are two things that set Jim apart from the doomed Victorian street Arab: he is a working youth and he can read.

Reading is also important because it serves a metafictional function, reminding the reader of the text’s fictionality. Indeed, Jim is an avid reader of penny dreadfuls, constantly quoting plots from the likes of *The Skeleton Crew* (125) and *Stirring Tales for British Lads* (129). In a later adventure, Jim, with a “wicked glitter in his eyes”,

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<sup>113</sup> Although marrying a prince might seem part of a “saving” narrative, Adelaide’s husband dies soon after their marriage, and therefore, she truly must make her own way.

looks like “a pirate captain” (*Tiger* 403) as he breaks into a house with a bunch of scarred criminals under his command. The scene not only depicts Jim reprising his “street ways”, but shows him embodying a penny dreadful boy hero. Explicit references to penny dreadfuls within the narrative imply and acknowledge those tales as its source, and posit Jim as a double stereotype. He *is* the Victorian orphan of such fiction, but also the avid working youth who would have read such tales as *Boys of England* or *The Wild Boys of London* during Victorian times.

Pullman’s portrayal reflects, to a certain extent, Victorian ideas in relation to origin: happier circumstances *are* tied to higher social status, improved language, and educated tastes. Jim is a working, literate youth, friendly and witty. These qualities mark him as a “good” orphan, not one likely to become a criminal or part of the “Irish Guards”. Like *Oliver Twist*, Jim is able to advance socially into a comfortable middle-class existence. By the second book, the distinction between him and Fred is gone, as they work side by side as detectives. This status change is denoted not only through his now grammatically correct speech, but also by the fact that in the first book he was keen on writing stories for penny dreadfuls; whereas by the fourth adventure he is said to have “higher literary ambitions” than cheap magazines (*Princess* 26). However, his character also subverts the Victorian orphan stereotype. Like Adelaide, he is different from Victorian orphans in his self-reliance: the lack of parents has pushed him into becoming an independent and resourceful youth.

#### *Ragged Orphans and Respectable Heirs: Paul Bajoria’s The Printer’s Devil*

While Pullman’s works are more influenced by penny dreadfuls, Paul Bajoria’s *The Printer’s Devil* (2004) is closer to *Oliver Twist*. The protagonists — Mog and Nick — are orphan lost heirs. Bajoria deviates from the Victorian model when it comes to the pair; however, nineteenth-century stereotypes are endorsed in the background, as the streets of London swell with nameless ragged street Arabs.

The adventure is narrated by Mog, who is a working orphan. Mog believes this is a circumstance that has saved him from a terrible future; warning the reader that without his job, he would have become a thief “like lots of the other kids who grew up around here” (8). That “here” refers to the East End, and the “*other* kids” take the shape of gangs that emerge from narrow alleys such as “Cut-throat Lane” (24).



There are several of these wandering orphan gangs in Bajoria's London, all of them reflecting Victorian stereotypes. When Mog, passing a narrow entrance, hears "a whistle like an owl hooting", he recognises it as "a footpad's signal to another, the secret language of the filthy youths and children who made their living by being alert when others were tired and careless" (25). The gang is similar to Dickens's gang in *Oliver Twist* and to the bands of "bad orphans" that populated penny dreadfuls. As in Victorian narratives, the East End is teeming with such children — and Mog keeps running into them:

I noticed a group of children, a bit younger than I was, watching me from a corner of the yard. They had a battered-looking dog with them, which started to yelp when it saw us ... The dog looked ill, with milky eyes and a mouth which hung open as though its jaw didn't work properly. (43)

Mog himself has a dog, Lash, of which he takes extremely good care. Just as Mog is framed as the opposite of these filthy children, their dog is the opposite of Lash. The children themselves are not described; their dog is representative of its owners. Mog's reluctance to let Lash go near the other dog conveys a fear of contamination that could be extended to the children too. The dog is revolting, but there are further elements that make this band of children an embodiment of Victorian fears. Mog asks them questions, but the children just watch him "dumbstruck" (43) or whisper to one another. The reason is that one has sneaked behind Mog with a brick. Mog sees the "boy's wild, satisfied little smile" (44) before he hits him in the head. The boy's wildness echoes the Victorian view that children like these were savages. The fact that he attacks Mog when his back is turned introduces the (again, Victorian) idea that treachery and cowardice are common currency here. Bajoria does not establish these attitudes to then challenge them, but rather simply adopts them without criticism as no later instance contradicts the children's characterisation.

A further episode only serves to confirm this Victorian view of street Arabs as children with tattered clothing and duplicitous natures. While discussing their plans on the street, Mog and his brother Nick get stones thrown at them; turning, they see "a couple of ragged boys haring off into a dim passageway" (195). Immediately the narrator explains that "[e]ven the most harmless of kids ... could for a couple of pennies give up information to someone with really malicious intent. These apparently

innocent children were the eyes and ears of the underworld” (195). The picture offered is similar to that of Victorian texts, and the link between these children, the East End, and criminality is specifically pointed out. The stereotypical pickpockets are also part of these gangs; Mog and Nick see “wily-looking” urchins in action at a hanging, “creeping round a circle of long-coated gentlemen” (293). These children are a product of the East End, tied to its underworld of criminals for whom they are informers, and among whom they will eventually be accepted. As in Pullman’s *Ruby*, there is a distinct impression that these children are not to be trusted, and that even coming near them can be toxic.

Their lack of movement seems to point to their lack of usefulness or productivity. Mog and his twin brother Nick move through the streets, at times frantically walking or running as they follow a lead. In contrast, these street Arabs are always lurking in corners, yards, and alleys. The image is reminiscent of Gustave Doré’s illustrations (see fig. 19), although Bajoria’s streets are less crowded. None of these orphans are individualized or given a story. They simply melt into the East End background, their presence only necessary to create an “authentic” Victorian London atmosphere.

These are no mischievous lovable children but orphans who convey a mixture of gloom and violence that the reader — like Mog and Nick — fears and shrinks from. Walking the docks in the dark, the siblings observe how “[a] dim lamp was raised on a small boat ... and a boy no older than us, with a palsied face, regarded us unsmiling from under a black cap” (265). Even when these street children are involved in lighter incidents, there is still a dark undertone. On a hot day, Mog joins some street boys who are playing around a water pump and a tub. All of the children get naked and prompt Mog to imitate them. He refuses with a sense of dread: “I was suddenly really scared that they were going to grab me and tear my clothes off for a prank. ‘No. Let me go,’ I said, pulling away. The first boy stared at me, hostile all of a sudden” (82). Later, the revelation that Mog is actually a girl lends a different meaning to the episode (that it could have revealed her secret); however, the threat of violence implied in the “grabbing” and “tearing” still remains.

Bajoria continues to endorse the Victorian image of the poor ragged and dangerous East End orphan through Mog’s perspective. The first-person narration offers a viewpoint that identifies Mog with elements from the Victorian tradition. Even though Mog has lived in an orphanage and works in the East End, she seems to

*naturally* identify with a different sphere, the same way that Oliver Twist, who has also had a deficient upbringing, talks and behaves like an educated little boy. One element that illustrates this point is smell. The poor and the street orphans are identified by their unpleasant smell, something that is present in both Victorian social and literary writings. The few times Mog smells bad — thanks to hiding in the rag-and-bone cart of “a toothless old gipsy” (123) or being peed upon by a horse — not only does she notice but so do the people who know her. Their remarks imply that she “naturally” differs from the other orphans. The disgust that Mog feels when trapped in a chimney, as “years of filth” fill her hair and trickle “in a gritty stream” down her neck (227), betrays the extent to which this is *not* part of her experience, foreshadowing the revelation that he is a gentleman. It is her voice that labels the other children as “filthy”. She herself is usually covered in ink, but this is a different kind of “dirt”, indicative of Mog’s superior status as a skilled worker and suggesting learning. It is also Mog’s voice that, as quoted earlier, discusses the other children’s “malicious” intents and perceives them as “seemingly” innocent children. Consequently, the voice seems to come from someone older than Mog. Be this as it may, it constantly emphasises the gap that exists between the siblings, Mog and Nick, and other orphans, conforming to the stereotype that most street Arabs are sly, unreliable creatures from the depths of the East End.

Perhaps unconsciously, Bajoria also follows the Victorian discourse that paints the poor as deficient parents. Mog’s brother, Nick, lives with his father and his father’s partner, Mrs Muggerage. This “family” life is far from ideal: Nick is treated like a dog, with both adults beating him. Mrs Muggerage’s portrayal, in particular, is grotesque and reminiscent of both *Oliver Twist*’s Mrs Mann, the matron of the branch workhouse, and the vicious Mrs Sowerberry. The name “Muggerage” implies violence (“rage”) and ugliness (“mug”), implications borne out by her physical aspect. She is a huge wobbling lady with arms like “hams” (91) and a “beefy face” (125), who expresses herself like an animal in “bawls” (91), “roars” (92), and “growls” (193). Her brutality transforms her into “an animal, or even a machine, perfectly adapted for violence” (194). In contrast with Nick, Mog never suffers such treatment from his employer, Mr Cramplock, but the printer can write and read, so he ranks higher on the social ladder than Nick’s family. It is only the poor and ignorant who seem to indulge in this type of abuse. This is further reinforced by the fact that Nick admits that Mr Spintwice (a well-read jeweller) is “about the only grown-up who’s ever really been kind to me” (137).

Even though the East End inhabitants (orphan gangs and adults alike) are portrayed in accordance with the Victorian tradition, Bajoria (like Pullman before him) modifies the Victorian stereotype when it comes to the “good” orphans Mog and Nick — the lost heirs.

Like *Oliver Twist*, Mog is first placed in an orphanage: a cold, dirty place of cracked walls and barred windows purposely high so the orphans cannot glimpse the outside world. But, in contrast to Oliver, Mog’s self-reliance is evident once she runs away. Mog is no penny dreadful orphan, nor is she an Oliver-type figure whose destiny is providentially changed by the doings of others. Once on the streets, Mog finds work instead of falling in with ill-mannered characters. She even has a place of her own, sleeping above the print shop of his employer, Mr Cramplock. Mog’s success is the result of her attitude, as she explains: “I was very well *used to looking after myself*. I never had a mother and father looking after me” (7, italics mine). However, since she works, she is off the streets, and is therefore absolutely different from, as seen above, the other “filthy” children.

Nick’s story is different from that of Mog, initially falling in line with Victorian stereotypes. Even though Nick is a “good” orphan, he is much more of a street Arab than Mog is. He is beaten by his “parents” regularly, swears like a sailor (108), and displays the street awareness of London’s orphans:

He knew the streets of London as if they were part of his body; and it wasn’t just their layout he knew, but their different characters, which were dangerous, and which were safe, who lived in them, whose favour to court and whom to avoid, how to get from one place to another in the quickest possible time, and how to disappear completely. (87)

Unexpectedly for a “good” orphan, Nick’s hard existence has forced him to become a habitual thief (86), something the “mischievous but likable” orphans of penny dreadfuls never are, even in their desperate conditions. However, in accordance with the fact that he will be saved, his criminal activities are mainly shown in a positive or light tone, as part of his resourcefulness. Stealing is only negative when associated with adults, like when Nick’s father forces him to sneak through the window of a house to steal some items for him (190), an episode that alludes directly to *Oliver Twist*. The poor adults are thus corrupting agents. Nick’s evolution from street orphan to heir

means that by the end of the adventure he has left his pickpocketing days behind. He claims that if he wanted “to nail stuff”, he would (293). Nevertheless, Mog observes he never does so again, a revelation immediately followed by Mog commenting that Nick now seems a lot older and laughs a lot more often (293).

Victorian texts would have signalled Nick’s possibilities of redemption through his innocence and purity. In Bajoria’s novel, there are other clues that signal to the reader that Nick is redeemable, and actually a trustworthy “good” orphan. Despite being an East Ender, Nick’s first appearance through a “grimy little window” is a rather comical affair, with his bird’s-nest hair (83) and no references to shabbiness or stench. Despite his thieving, Nick does not fit into the environment he has grown up in, much like Mog; his love for reading certainly sets him apart. Mog notices the transformation he undergoes: “Nick was immersed in the book again ... completely and instantly relaxed ... He seemed a different person altogether from the watchful, edgy, suspicious boy I’d met” (137).

Orphans they may be, but as “good” orphans, Mog and Nick are destined for a better life, as indicated by their cleanliness and literacy. Like *Oliver Twist*, Mog and Nick discover they come from a wealthy family; in their case their mother was turned out because she had married an Indian. While all these elements respect the Victorian moral values and the social hierarchy attached to the figure of the “good” orphan, it is important to notice the introduction of Indian heritage here. While no Victorian fiction would have “half-castes” in such a role, it is undoubtedly a mark of post-colonialism that Mog and Nick are half-Indian, half-English. The English branch of the family is a dying breed which makes the twins the last surviving members after their uncle dies. The family has a dark past, with crimes that include the sexual abuse of “servants and other natives” (*The God of Mischief* 285) while in India. It is thus ironic that the new blood the family needs to continue on comes, partly, from a country where they have abused their colonial powers. There are subtle hints here about the relationship between colonised and coloniser. The return of the colonised, in the shape of the twins, to the centre of the Empire is depicted as the renewal its dying aristocracy needs. The twins’ mixed heritage is never truly a source of problems within the fictional world, underlining the extent to which this is a modern reimagining of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the plot does not represent the coloniser coming directly to England to contaminate its people and destroy its race, as the Victorian would have feared. Nick and Mog are already an integral part of the English fabric. The twins’ promotion from

street Arabs to aristocrats implies it is necessary to accept that the former colonies are no longer peripheral to the Empire, but are a part of England's identity. This is a reflection the modern text makes on the past; accepting the colonised as part of the national project has to do with modern England and its multicultural population — a consequence of the Victorian Empire.

Bajoria introduces post-colonial elements, but these do not actually affect the way that the “other” orphans are depicted; neither does it affect the boys' own change of status. Nineteenth-century views are espoused here without challenge, through a fate that is morality and class-based. Following the Victorian pattern, the twins are the only orphans in the story who enjoy a beneficial reversal of fortune. Their change of social status is justified by their legitimate claim to a higher social circle, in an essentially classist move. Since, on their Indian side, they also come from the highest circles of Indian society, this only reinforces a Victorian idea of class-based social mobility. Order is restored once the hierarchy is respected and the boys access their “rightful” positions; the rest of the street orphans are just shadows left behind. This depiction invites the reader to share a conservative model of its society.

*Orphan Flocks and Reformed Pickpockets: Y. S. Lee's Orphans and Metafiction in The Agency*

Y. S. Lee's *The Agency* (2009) takes place in a foggy 1858 London. In accordance with Victorian tradition, and like the previously discussed authors, Lee also distinguishes between the “true” street Arab, condemned to a dark future, and the orphan who escapes the clutches of poverty to transform into a respectable citizen. Like Pullman and Bajoria, she infuses the portrayal of the main orphan character with modern elements. At the same time, subtle hints planted throughout the narrative invite the attentive reader to question the veracity of this Victorian world.

There are no “bad” orphans here, but there are at least three “background” waifs, minimally fleshed out, whose function is to add period colour. Alfred Quigley is a ten-year-old “scrawny little boy” (90) who shows the street ingenuity and resilience typical of literary orphans. He impresses the young engineer Mr Easton who decides that Alfred is now part of his team. There is a Victorian sense of “rescuing” — Barnardo's style — in the gesture, with the wealthy middle-class individual bestowing charity on a grateful subject. In an unusual twist of events absent from Victorian

literature, Quigley is murdered. The East Enders' reactions paint them in a particularly negative light. When the body is discovered, a group quickly gathers: "scavengers, mudlarks, and rag-and-bone men, eager to strip the corpse" (269). Easton realizes that for them, Alfred has become a "profitable" object, with the bunch ready to have "its" teeth the minute the police leave (272), a grim view the reader is invited to agree with. It is the "timid but comfortingly human Constable Huggings" (272), who stands for civilized society and order, and takes the body away to avoid such a grim outcome.

The portrayal buys into Victorian ideologies, showing the poor as savage and almost cannibalistic. That an outsider has to rescue Alfred from his own community says much about its people. They are engaged in a continuous circle of consumption: all the "professions" named — scavengers, mudlarks, rag-and-bone men — involve living off others without producing anything. There is a sharp contrast between this group and both the policeman and the upper middle-class Mr Easton, the only ones to humanize Alfred. The reader cannot help but accept that Easton's offer would have meant a better life for the orphan boy, with higher values than the ones his peers respect. The poor, then, are seen as unworthy of their own offspring, who would be safer being taken away. This idea, widely popular in Victorian times (as seen in the earlier section) is advocated here.

Cassandra Day, another example of Lee's East End orphans, is made up from usual stock Victorian imagery. A scullery maid in a rich household, Cassandra's eyes are old and weary; she is fourteen, but has the "spindly body of a ten-year-old" (160). The cuffs of her sleeves are grimy and tattered, and she smells of "mutton fat and dirty hair" (160). Her little "claw-like hands" (161) are an interesting echo of Blanchard's observations in *Pilgrimage*. Stereotypically, she lives in an atmosphere of abuse and violence. When touched, she flinches as if expecting a blow (310); which she gets sometimes as, within the house, the Cook is informally "entitled" to beat her (249). Even in this rich household, Cassandra still belongs to the East End: her living quarters represent a miniature version of the area. Her room is small, unventilated, and low-ceilinged; the walls are "slimy with mildew", there are mouse droppings on the floor, and "the musty tang of urine" permeates the air (250). Even if she does not live on the streets, she is a "street Arab", associated with the East End and the violence of its adults, who are represented here by the Cook.

Mary, the protagonist who is posing as a lady's companion, tries to help the girl. This is only after she uses Cassandra as an informant, something Easton also does with

Quigley, and similar to the way Sherlock Holmes uses “his” band of orphans. Still, Mary’s proposal, as with Easton’s, has the potential to “rescue” Cassandra. As a servant, she is invisible to her employers; Mary’s care and attention towards her indicate Mary is not a “lady”. Initially frightened, Cassandra attributes Mary’s kindness to the “white slave trade” (305). Indeed, dismissed without a letter of character, Cassandra seems condemned to follow the Victorian downward spiral from orphan to prostitute. That Mary manages to convince the girl to go to school is seen as a salvation, again conforming to the Victorian belief that East End children need to be removed from their communities and educated if they are to become proper, self-respecting citizens.

Lee’s third East End orphan is Peter Jenkins, whom Mary meets working at a construction site in *The Body at the Tower*. He embodies a typical penny dreadful orphan: he is a stunted thirteen-year-old, a “scrawny, freckly thing — an eight year-old with an old man’s eyes” (55). He speaks a cockney-like dialect and gets into fights. Like Cassandra and Alfred, Jenkins’s situation reveals him to be a child neglected and abused by his own community. At the construction site, he is called “whoreson” many a time, and gets belted by the cruel master bricklayer while the rest watch in silence. Mary observes how they are “*enjoying themselves, the hateful pigs*” (84). Her comment signals her position as socially superior and an outsider to these poor workers — who the reader is invited to view in the same way: as violent and cruel. The discourse circles back, once again, to a nineteenth-century middle-class view, espoused by social explorers: the vilification of the adults justifies taking their children to ensure they do not follow in the same steps.

Jenkins’s circumstances correspond to those described in Victorian social exposés. His abode is a typical East End postcard: a small, dark, windowless, earthen-floored cellar of a decrepit house, with no furniture, no hearth, and only a few rags as beds. Here, the orphan Jenkins has become a parent figure for an unnamed number of baby sisters. The image of this low-ceilinged room, nothing more than a hole in the earth, full of babies brings to mind associations with rats or vermin. This impression and its implications are reinforced by the image outside. There, among decrepit buildings and the smell of rot, a band of urchins await:

Outside this strip of house, a large flock of dirty children clustered near the gutter. They ought to have been playing boisterously, but this group seemed as



downtrodden as their surroundings. A few bickered among themselves, but otherwise they seemed too listless to do anything much except sit in the road and watch Mary's passage with glassy, tired eyes. (*Tower* 116–7)

The children are described as if they were animals — a “flock” — naming them not only as East Enders but children of the gutter, associated with the underworld. The image endorses Victorian attitudes by discrediting the East End adults — the construction workers — and depicting their offspring as abandoned creatures whose apathy makes them as much of a waste as what is in the gutter. Their lack of energy and drive also points to these children's uselessness: they are unsuitable to be Booth's “citizens and rulers of the Empire”. The same children also blink at Mary with “owlish drugged eyes — sedated with a blend of starvation and opium, no doubt” (123). Mary's assumption is heavy with prejudice against the poor, which reflects the Victorians' practice of accusing the poor of administering the drug to their children — a practice they condemned — while at the same time turning a blind eye to opium use among higher social circles (see Chapter Three).

In stories about orphans, the children are always numerous in the East End, while middle-class and aristocratic households only have one or two offspring. Historical evidence would contradict this distribution, but the portrayal is used to criticise the poor.<sup>114</sup> When Mary, passing herself off as a charity lady, visits a working man's widow in the East End, she discovers six newly orphaned children, with another on its way. This proclivity among the poor for large families is seen as a negative, inevitably resulting in the “flocks” of street children. It is obvious that they cannot be adequately cared for, economically or emotionally — hence Mary and Mr Easton's offers of “rescue”. Depictions of large families also paint the poor as promiscuous, which further supports the Victorians' desire to end the “breeding” of the lower orders. Lee seems to promote here the higher classes' need to exert control over the lower order for their own good.

This corrupt progeny is represented by Jenkins and his sisters living in their dark earthy cellar. The image brings to mind the underground-dwelling Morlocks of H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), who supposedly evolved from the working classes.

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<sup>114</sup> Indeed, evidence contradicts assertions that the landed elite was doomed to a single heir while the poor had many offspring (J. S. Lewis 103). The perception of the poor classes as extremely fertile as opposed to the higher, more “civilized”, social circles was part a Victorian discourse regarding sexuality, morality, and, ultimately, control.

Cassandra also lives in an underground room and both her and Jenkins work for West End people. Thus the dynamics that place the working East End at the bottom while the rich West remains on top is represented here. So are Wells's fears that the equation might be violently reversed, as Lee has already shown that misery can push East Enders to "consume", as it were, their own (Quigley).

As in Pullman's and Bajoria's respective novels, there is an *Oliver Twist* figure who prospers in spite of poverty: Mary Quinn, the protagonist. While at first glance, Mary's character seems to defy Victorian conventions, the under-text continues to promote a Victorian discourse that views the poor classes as passive and in need of their social superiors to manage their own children if they are to have a better life.

There are many aspects of Mary that follow Victorian conventions. She is a typical East End orphan: tough, street-wise, and disillusioned — and, at the beginning of the first adventure, about to be hanged for housebreaking. Her "precarious, unhappy childhood" has left her ignorant even of her own age (*Tower* 26). Just like Cassandra and Jenkins, and according to penny dreadfuls and social exposés, the East End and its poverty have stolen her childhood, youth, and innocence. Her mother engaged in the typical downward spiral from seamstress to prostitution and death.

Just like in Victorian social writings, it is by being bestowed charity from a higher social class that Mary breaks from her grim fate. Given that she later offers the same chance to Cassandra, it is ironic that she first views charity as a sort of sham, observing how well-meaning ladies are "forever trying to coax her into a tearful confession of her life's sufferings. She'd not fallen for that sort of gammon in years" (*Agency* 13). When she is offered a place in Miss Scrimshaw's Academy for Girls, her first reaction is that it must be a dead-end because her life experience has taught her there is no hope (14). Just like Alfred, Cassandra, and Jenkins, the novel's portrayal of Mary's situation endorses the Victorian idea that, without external help, the children of the poor are condemned to a life of dirt, crime, and desperation, turning up dead, vanishing, or growing into violent adults.

This point becomes even more prominent later in the series, when Mary, now an educated spy, has to use her past experience to act like a street orphan. Comparing her younger self with her enactment of an orphan boy (she calls herself "Mark Quinn"), she reflects that the most gruelling part of playing him is "the sense that Mark would never get ahead, never gain rest, never be at ease" (*Tower* 139). Through Mary, the situation of working orphans such as Mark is explained to the reader: there is no possibility of

getting ahead, no saving money, and illness or accident are disastrous for the person concerned as well as for their extended family. Mark is condemned to lead an existence as lonely and joyless as Mary's was (139). Once, Mary "hadn't felt her life worth saving. But Anne and Felicity had" (139). Although it seems unfair, this is what makes the difference. It is because she is saved by an external source that Mary changes her life. Unlike Adelaide or Jim in Pullman's novels, she only becomes independent once she has received an education. In this manner, her story emphasises how, within these communities, the help these children need is not going to come from within, but from higher ranks of society.

Accordingly, the East End is represented as an unfit space for these children. Here Lee introduces an element absent in Victorian writing: besides not being a nurturing environment, the East End becomes a sexually dangerous space, particularly for its young. This is clear in that, much like for Cassandra, non-violent contact has become almost alien to Mary. Her skirts have been groped by men in the streets, and she has been "knocked about", reeled against by drunks, and bumped into but she has never been touched with affection (*Agency* 15). In the past, she has had to pass "as a boy to avoid rape" (*Tower* 44). Her disguise as a boy for her undercover mission also affords the opportunity for commentary on attitudes towards sexuality, especially same-sex relations. One of the characters reminds Mary that the brick master Keenan is "utterly ruthless", but then adds "[a]nd if he sees through your disguise ..." (284), which hints at some sort of sexual violence Keenan could engage in if he knew Mary was a girl. Keenan, realizing Easton is "awful fond" of Mark, contemptuously tells him "[y]ou don't look the back-door sort, but I suppose I don't know about all that Greek stuff" (322). Such explicit references deviate from nineteenth-century writings, which never discuss sexuality in such an overt way, revealing how much these are *neo*-Victorian texts. However, this "modern" element is still used within a Victorian discourse, to cast the poor not only as capable of sexual violence, but also as backwards and intolerant.

It is through education and training that Mary is able to change her social situation. However, her new position isolates her from her past and equips her with a middle-class mentality. Instead of becoming more proactive to help others like her, she exhibits the same repulsion Victorian social writers felt. Forced to relive the experiences of her previous life as Mark, she is nauseated by it. She talks of the food sold on the street markets with disgust — "third-rate scraps", "*slimy* vegetables, *wormy*

fruit, and *rank* meat” (*Tower* 116, italics mine) — seeming to forget she once fought over “a carelessly discarded bun or trimming” (266). She is also very aware of cleanliness. When she notices “[h]er fingers [are] slightly greasy” she assumes it because she touched Cassandra (*Agency*, 254), after which she washes her hands. When, as Mark, she is overpowered by the environment, “the stench; the utter desperation all about her” (*Tower* 122), what calms her down is that she no longer belongs here. She tells herself: “[a] long walk, her own bedroom, a return to her *cosseted* life as Mary Quinn. It was still there. She still *existed*. She could go back” (123, italics mine). Her solution is to simply shut away the East End, and think of her new life, albeit one that implies over-protection and seclusion. It is never suggested that Mary might actively help those who were once like her. She does help Cassandra, but she first needs her as her informant, and it is circumstances that throw the girl into her life.<sup>115</sup> In this, she conforms (again) to the stereotypical behaviour of the “good” orphans, who are never inspired into social action once they have gained access to their new lives.

Although her background and attitude follow Victorian norms, Mary defies convention in other ways. Unlike *Oliver Twist*, she is truly left on the streets to fend for herself. She becomes a pickpocket and then gets into house breaking. That she is a *female* pickpocket is a deviation from Victorian literature where boys are thieves and girls are prostitutes.<sup>116</sup> This is part of Lee’s effort to subvert strict Victorian gender roles (see Chapter Five). As Mr Easton says, her stealing does not result from “weaknesses” in her character but is “a question of pure survival” (*Tunnel* 367). This redeems Mary and positions her as a “good” orphan. While there is an attempt at destabilising Victorian stereotypes, Easton’s acceptance of Mary is related to Victorian values, her actions evaluated in terms of moral behaviour. Victorian social mobility is challenged here, as Mary, despite her origins, can “better” herself. She can do so because she has been “civilized”, having received an education that has given her a profession and raised her out of her own class.

Another modification to the Victorian model is that Mary’s past, like that of Pullman’s Adelaide, does not prevent her from gaining access to a higher class. Once Mary is “saved” from the streets, she does not become “an honest little maid-of-all-

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<sup>115</sup> In this way, Mary does not seek to help others, but is rather more interested in advancing her career as a spy within the Agency.

<sup>116</sup> Indeed, in social exploration texts, “corrupted” girls are only ever prostitutes or “criminal molls” (Shore 10).

work” (*Agency* 13) — something the reader is invited to despise as much as Mary, but which corresponds to what institutions such as Dr Barnardo’s historically offered. The education and training she receives allows her to go from pickpocket to educated girl, then from employed spy to independent woman. The latter stage is sealed by an encounter with Queen Victoria, who rewards Mary’s actions with money to free her “from some of the petty concerns of life as a remarkably independent woman” (*Tunnel* 351).

There is another aspect in Lee’s books which invites the reader to challenge nineteenth-century attitudes. Lee’s treatment of orphans falls into stereotypes and allows Victorian attitudes to go by unchecked. However, through a number of metafictional instances, the reader is reminded of the setting’s fictionality, despite its Victorian pretences. The first book in the series opens with a court scene in which the prosecutor in Mary’s case gives a speech voicing Victorian concerns. He wonders “[h]ow much more depraved is one so young, who has already trod so far and so fast through the thorny thickets of evil ...?”, adding that Mary’s pitch-black hair “is a token of her pitch-black soul. Such evil should be nipped in the bud” (*Agency* 8). Listening, Mary admits that “by that cliché, he meant to hang her” (8).<sup>117</sup> The fact that Mary acknowledges this to be a “cliché” alludes to the formulaic nature of such “Victorian” reasoning. At the same time, having Mary remark on it indicates it is a stereotype, but one that must be featured if this is to be a “Victorian” novel, justifying its inclusion in the contemporary text as almost parodic. In the second book, when she visits Jenkins in the dark decaying house referred to earlier, she observes that “[i]n sensation novels, this was the part where the intrepid hero got clubbed over the head only to awake several hours later, bound hand and foot, in the villain’s lair. Mary turned her head abruptly — but of course there was nobody” (*Tower* 118). This is playing on well-known Victorian tropes; although she is not trapped, the atmosphere built up by the wooden hatch, the rotting ladder, and the dark cellar corresponds to stereotypical images akin to sensational narratives. At another point, she observes that the romance between an accountant and a gentleman’s daughter, which is part of the plot, “was an old story: an absolute cliché” (*Agency* 221). Even when Queen Victoria gives her the envelope with her reward, which symbolises her absolute independence, Mary stands “wondering

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<sup>117</sup> Although not a courtroom, this is reminiscent of the workhouse board in *Oliver Twist*: for once Oliver has asked for more food, one of the gentleman considers his actions wicked enough to be a sure sign he will be hanged (Dickens 58).

what preposterous three-volume novel she'd fallen into" (*Tunnel* 351–2). Such instances purposefully weaken the "authenticity" of the Victorian world presented. The images and plot devices that are underlined in this manner are seen as melodramatic and call attention to the fictionality of the world offered. Lee might not directly challenge Victorian stereotypes, but she leaves clues that certainly invite readers to draw their own conclusions.

The point is perhaps driven further when Octavius Jones is introduced. Jones is a sensationalist journalist who writes for a popular illustrated newspaper, "The Eye on London", with the tag of "News for the People" (*Tower* 16) — in the guise of a historical newspaper such as *The Illustrated London News*. The publication is associated with a large readership, while the terms used to describe it — "lurid colours" (16), "scandal sheet", "cheap ink", "gutter press" (17) — are negative. Mary's cover story for her disguise as Mark is that she is doing research for a book about the poor and how they "really" live. Mr Easton is impressed, thinking the idea radical and original, comparing her efforts to Henry Mayhew's (161). The same story does not impress Jones, whose position as a tabloid journalist places him closer to the depicted people: "Of all the idealistic, unrealistic, ninnyish things to attempt. A book, indeed! And I suppose it's intended as one of those *well-meaning, authentic reports on the lower orders and their struggles for survival*, et cetera et cetera ... Don't you know that won't sell?" (277, italics mine). The remark is ironic, criticising social exploration narratives and questioning their veracity and feasibility. Jones's newspaper sells because he is catering to the masses and selling what they want: thrills. This seems to be pointing to the text the reader is following. In order to be entertaining (to "sell"), the text itself cannot be an authentic, accurate "Victorian" narrative. The more sensationalist and popular aspects of Victorian culture are needed to lend the story excitement, to justify the blurb's declaration that this is a "riveting Victorian detective" story.

## Conclusion

It is difficult to find a young adult neo-Victorian text in which orphans do *not* play a part. The hero of Brian Keaney's *Nathaniel Wolfe* is "poor, unschooled, shabbily dressed" and not always clean as he might be (*Haunting* 60–1). Abandoned by a drunk, bullying father, Nathaniel is able to leave his East End life behind after he discovers, like Oliver, his wealthy origins. Keaney also includes orphan pickpockets and "ragged-

looking boys and girls” (63) in his Victorian London. In Mary Hooper’s *Fallen Grace* (2010), Lily and Grace Parkes are two destitute orphans surviving in the East End by selling vegetables — a situation they emerge from as rich heiresses. In Michael Ford’s *The Poisoned House* (2010), fifteen-year-old Abi Tamper, a servant at Lord Greave’s house, goes from being a beaten and abused orphan to discovering she is the bastard child of the house owner, making her yet another rich heiress.

The Victorian orphan stereotype can be traced through each of these modern tales. In both Victorian and modern narratives, there are two types of parentless children: the lucky protagonists (the “good” orphans) and the “others”. When the orphan is one of the main characters, they are special from the beginning; they are literate or they rapidly become so, as is the case with Pullman’s Adelaide. They are capable of reasoning logically, and their speech quickly loses its street nature as they become more akin to the middle and upper classes with whom they ultimately identify. In contrast, the “others”, the street ragamuffins, are those who are not allowed to “make it”; their sole function seems to be to infuse these Londons with the right “Victorian” atmosphere. Although they are given proper names instead of mere nicknames (as in the penny dreadfuls), these children are ultimately destined to fade into the background, with the likelihood that they will re-emerge (if they live) as adult drunkards or East End criminals.

Despite efforts to humanize the orphans’ plights and expose the true misery of such circumstances, these authors still create “good” orphans and outcast groups. The prospects of the latter are never discussed in depth, although their portrayal endorses the Victorians’ suspicion that they are a threat to the social structure. In Pullman, they become a mass of Irish children, an implication which carries with it the Victorian belief that it is poor immigrants who neglect their children the most. They are described as “other”, the savage outsiders living in the midst of London with clans and tribes of their own, represented according to a language that springs directly from Victorian discourses. These orphans are mainly content with a life of fighting and pilfering, and, although neither the mudlarks’ nor the Irish Guards’ future is alluded to, their destiny is limited to a certain role: hardened criminals or adult shadows that fill the streets at night. The figures Sally sees in the East End are stumbling drunk, swathed in rags, cursing, and vomiting, “shapes huddled in the darkness, in the doorways, behind gravestones” (*Tiger* 191). Bajoria’s street Arabs are also destined to remain in the shadows, whispering in their grimy outfits, hanging around in dirty corners, vilified as

traitors and informants. Lee tries to draw attention to the narrative devices in play within her stories, but her treatment still falls into stereotypes, allowing Victorian attitudes to go by unchecked.

Such portrayals reflect Victorian ideologies, imitating a discourse that saw these orphan children as part of a separate species, the by-product of the loose morals of the poor and immigrants, tribes of savages that could put British identity at risk; the same discourse that believed in “deserving” and “undeserving” poor and that sought to control the children of the poor and determine their futures.

To some extent, the modern representation of these street orphans is an unthinking carry-over from Victorian sources. At the same time, these ragged children, apathetic and disloyal, are the foil to the “good” orphans, self-reliant and truthful. This contrast advocates middle-class values (Victorian *and* modern): the self-made, industrious, and emancipated individual achieves safety and comfort; the others are condemned to a nightmarish existence. The quasi-Victorian division of London into two geographical locations, each representative of a different class, has a nostalgic dimension. Contemporary London, with its more-than-three-hundred spoken languages and diverse diasporas, is so much more complicated than the fictionalised Victorian Londons. The portrayal of the lovable playful street Arab also reflects a nostalgic, and naive, view of orphanhood as an adventure — something that would be rather more difficult to convey within a contemporary setting.

It is true that the “good” orphans, like Dickens’s *Oliver Twist*, get to occupy better social positions. Jim, Adelaide, Mog, Nick, and Mary ultimately leave the East End behind. However, it is through these central characters that contemporary authors distinguish their writing from the Victorian tradition. These “modern” Victorian orphans are neither passive nor pitiable. The lack of parents forces them to use their wit, intelligence, and resourcefulness in order to survive and improve their own future. They are not innocent or morally pure children, waiting for their ancestry to be revealed in order to move on; neither are they “rescued” or “reformed” in the Victorian sense. Pullman aspires to make orphanhood much more than a background element for his characters to outgrow. In fact, Adelaide’s and Jim’s experiences on the streets, far from being shameful, enrich their knowledge of the world and allow them to advance. In Bajoria’s series, Mog’s and Nick’s street instincts are what help them solve the mystery they are investigating. Their actions also open the door to a new life. To a lesser degree, it is the skills that Y. S. Lee’s Mary has acquired as an orphan that help her in



her new career as a spy. Far from being passive recipients of charity, these children are independent and assertive individuals who learn to survive in their environment, whether it is by learning a vast repertoire of insults, by mastering the art of stealing hot pies, or by acquiring an encyclopaedic knowledge of the streets and the people of the city.



Fig.14. Florence Holder as a newspaper seller and as a servant (1874) (Murdoch 13).

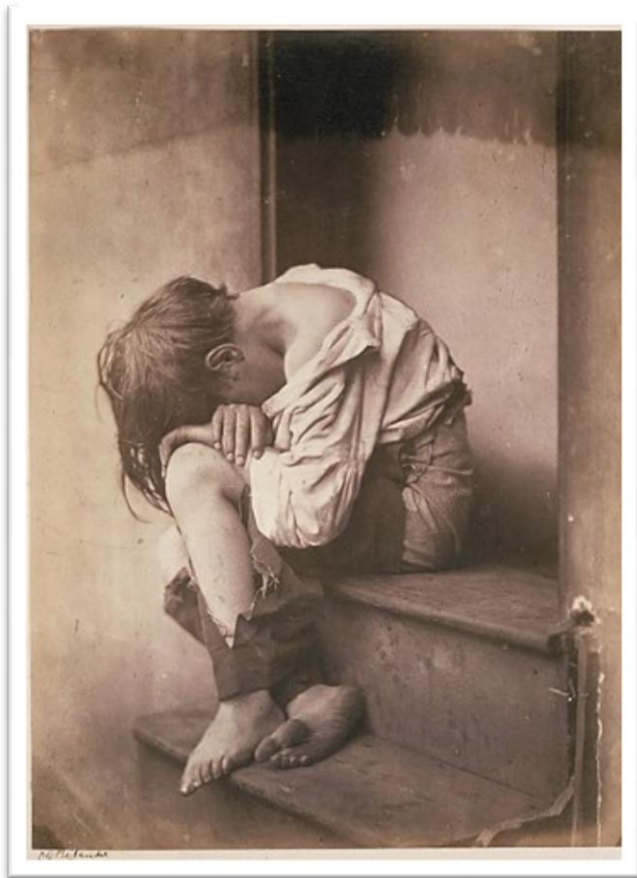


Fig. 15. Rejlander's *Poor Joe, or Night in Town* (c. 1860) (Prodger 131)

THE  
**POOR BOYS OF LONDON**  
OR, DRIVEN TO CRIME.

No. 1.]

A LIFE STORY FOR THE PEOPLE.

[ONE PENNY.]



"Don't, please," the little outcast pleaded, feebly, "I'm so tired, I can hardly stand."

Fig. 16. Orphan boys outside the casual ward (*Poor Boys 1*)



THE DISCOVERY IN THE SEWER.—(See next Number.)

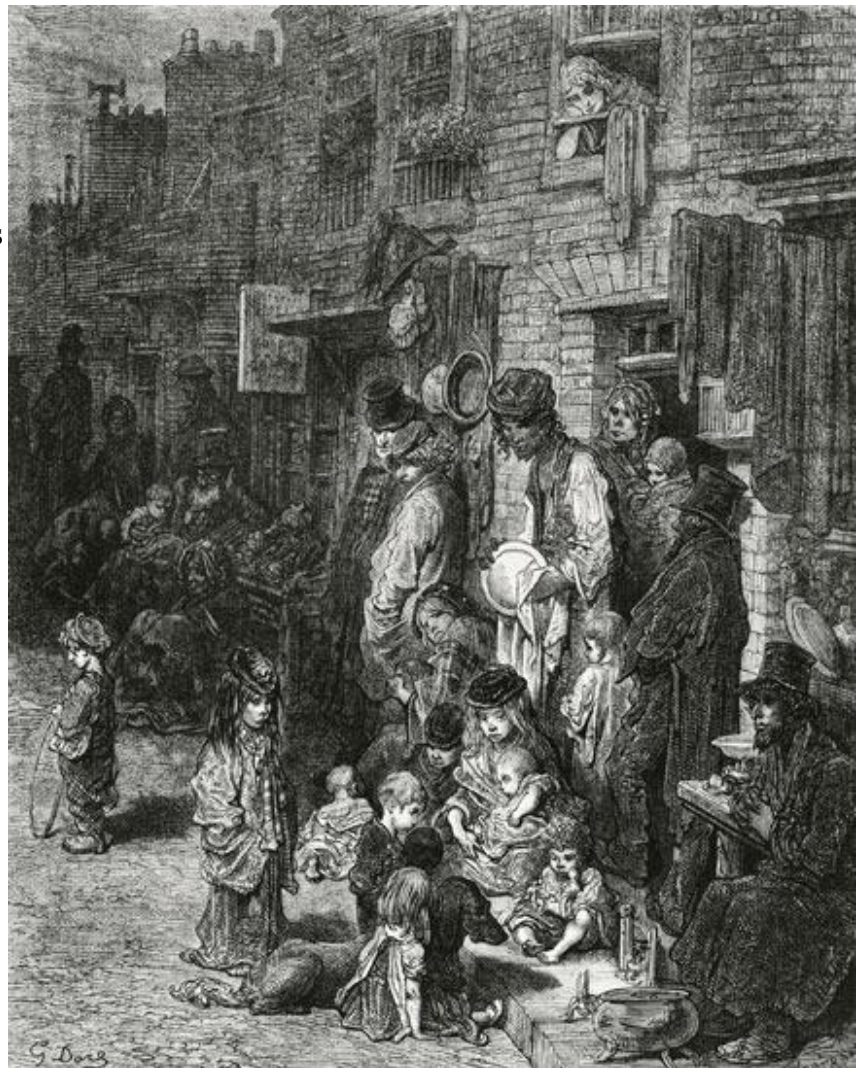
Fig. 17. The Wild Boys in the sewers (*Wild Boys* 17).





Fig. 18. The orphan Jim Jarvis shows Barnardo where other orphans sleep (Barnardo's Children 9).

Fig. 19. One of Doré's illustrations of the streets of London (Jerrold 145).



## CHAPTER FIVE

### “MODERN” DETECTIVES ON THE TRAIL OF “VICTORIAN” CRIMINALS

The presence of detectives and criminals in these young adult narratives classifies them as detective stories. While the criminal world is Victorian — its characters modelled on Dickens’s Sikes rather than Sherlock Holmes’s enemies — a modern element is introduced in the shape of the female detective figure. Challenging Victorian fiction, most protagonists are girls that solve mysteries and crimes, defeating the Victorian criminals. Within this context, the Victorian era functions as a backwards, misogynistic world to underline these girls’ “contemporary” behaviour. In this manner, the criminals are left untouched while the detective is updated to endorse current ideologies.

#### “Victorian” Criminals Anew

The criminals of these narratives come directly from Victorian fiction. Conan Doyle’s stories contain a number of delinquents: professional blackmailers, petty thieves, remorseless killers, accidental criminals and jealous lovers. Motivated by greed or revenge, all these criminals are treated superficially, even in the case of Holmes’s nemesis, Professor Moriarty. This is an aspect emulated by these contemporary young adult fictions. Criminal characters are mostly flat and unidimensional, their background stories and motivations touched upon only lightly — or in some cases completely ignored. In addition, these later-day criminals move away from the detective genre tradition in that they belong to the lower social classes, fitting more often with the villains of Dickens and R.L. Stevenson than with those of nineteenth-century detective fiction.

#### *Re-imagining Victorian Criminals: Women Scoundrels*

Just as Victorian detectives are mostly male, so are the criminals they face. In Conan Doyle’s stories, there are female criminals, but they are relatively few and their crimes are usually not legally punishable (and hardly ever violent). This is the case even in *The Musgrave Ritual*, where the maid, Rachel Howells, is implicated in the death of her

former lover — murder is not confirmed.<sup>118</sup> The rest of the “criminal” women in *Sherlock Holmes* are mostly responsible for blackmailing, inadvertent adultery or crimes of passion and greed, and hardly ever face legal consequences for their actions.<sup>119</sup> With the exception of Howells, these women generally belong to middle-class and bourgeois circles, like Isadora Klein in *The Adventure of the Three Gables*: a celebrated beauty: “tall, queenly” with “a perfect figure” (1031). The description corresponds to what Elizabeth Carolyn Miller calls the “New Woman Criminal” (5). These glamorous and alluring fictional figures had little resemblance to the masculine physical type of female criminal Victorian criminologists insisted on (12). The only character ever to triumph over Holmes, Irene Adler in *A Scandal in Bohemia*, is one of these glamorous creatures. Despite her triumph, Irene is never in the same league as the “Napoleon of crime” (471). Professor Moriarty is positioned as a worthy opponent because he is — according to Holmes himself — his “intellectual equal” (471). This is a title Irene Adler never gains: despite outdoing Holmes, Adler’s triumph is dismissed as a “woman’s wit” (175).

Our contemporary criminals follow these literary conventions. Illegal activities and wrongful doings are generally left to men. What women criminals there are depart from the “New Woman” model of Isadora Klein and Irene Adler. Poor East Enders, they are physically unattractive and more likely to commit violent acts than their Victorian fictional counterparts. As such they reflect Victorian ideas regarding the criminal classes (those of social exploration texts) rather than the Victorian literary models of detective fiction.

Philip Pullman’s Mrs Holland is, as mentioned in previous chapters, the villain of the first *Sally Lockhart* book. She is a wizened, old, sinister lady who smells of boiled cabbage and old cat with sunken cheeks, pinched lips, and glittering eyes. She is a cruel character with Gothic undertones, compared to one of the wrinkled and hideous witches from *Macbeth*. She also owns a dingy lodging house in Hangman’s Wharf, and is always out for profit, however it might be gained. She is after the jewel of the title, and her hate for Sally Lockhart — its other claimant — resembles that of Monks for *Oliver Twist*. Monks’s looks, his “unquenchable and deadly hatred” (Dickens, *Oliver*

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<sup>118</sup> Howells, who is the only woman suspected of actual murder in any Sherlock Holmes story, is a maid; a position that places her in a lower social circle and therefore allows for the possibility of murder.

<sup>119</sup> One of the few women to be condemned is Kitty Winter in *The Adventure of the Illustrious Client*. Kitty throws vitriol at a former lover, but this is justified (the man is a fiend), and therefore Kitty gets a reduced sentence.

*Twist* 458), and “bitterest and most unrelenting animosity” (459) anticipate Holland’s hatred of “the little bitch” (Pullman, *Ruby* 108) whom she vows to have and tear open (153). Bajoria’s Mrs Muggerage is also a grotesque criminal figure. A stepmother to Nick, she is masculine, hideous, abusive, and willing to murder. American writer Nancy Springer has similar characters in her *Enola Holmes* series. Flora Harris has a maimed face (her nose eaten by rats) and a murderous glitter in her eyes (*Bouquets* 120). She has killed her sister’s husband and attempts revenge on Dr Watson for placing her in an asylum as a consequence. In another *Enola Holmes* story, Mrs Culhane, an old lady who runs a used-clothing shop in the East End, is physically repellent, a “common, toothless crone” (*Marquess* 136) with chin bristles (*Gypsy* 87). Her crime is to strip Duquessa Blanchefleur del Campo of her fineries and leave her helpless in the streets where she is likely to die.

An exception, however, can be found in Y.S. Lee’s *The Agency*, complementing its feminist approach. Like that of the rest of the women criminals in these neo-Victorian fictions, Mrs Thorold’s physical appearance is far from attractive; she has “quite pronounced” pockmarks (37), a scarring that signals her moral corruption. In addition, she is not particularly feminine: spittle flies from her mouth and she physically manhandles men. But the difference is that Mrs Thorold belongs to a wealthy upper-middle-class family. Her criminal scheme is similar to that of Pullman’s Ah Ling, as she runs a pirate crew which loots and sinks ships. Lee thus takes her subversion of gender roles (and intentionally, I think) to an almost comical extreme. A criminal woman is an exception *within* this Victorian world. James Easton illustrates this when he realizes “with a sense of shock” (292) that a *woman* is holding a gun at him. The Agency Mary works for claims to play female stereotypes to their advantage. As mentioned before, its agents are better positioned because, as women, they are “believed to be foolish, silly, weak” (26) and are therefore ignored. However, it seems that concentrating on emancipation can also blind women to the capacities of their own sex. Mary, the Agency, and Mrs Thorold all fail to recognize each other as opponents, a failure that carries a sense of irony. Indeed, Mrs Thorold is first perceived as an invalid whose main occupation is seeing an array of physicians (121). Similarly, Mrs Thorold dismisses Mary because she does not believe a “young lady ... [is] capable of giving her trouble” (328). It is only at the very end that Mary discovers that the passivity is a sham, as Mrs Thorold is the criminal she is after. This elicits her admiration, as she calls Mrs Thorold “a woman of talent” (156). This is in accordance



with the feminism in the series. Thorold has done what Mary has been taught at the Agency: she has used Victorian expectations to her advantage. Mary realises she should have not underestimated a woman (323).

### *Re-presenting Male Victorian Criminals: Upholding Tradition*

Despite these criminal women, most of the villains in these adventures are men. This is a throwback to nineteenth-century detective fiction, where these male criminals were (to quote Marie-Christine Leps) effaced “as mere pre-texts” for the exposure of the detective’s scientific methods of deduction and analysis (3). In Conan Doyle’s stories, criminals are indeed drawn quickly, through short physical descriptions and a few adjectives which depict their mental faculties or moral stance. Jephro Rucastle is “a prodigiously stout man” (318) with multiple chins. George Burnwell is “a ruined gambler, an absolute desperate villain, a man without heart or conscience” (313).

There is also a question of the criminals’ class. In detective fiction, the majority belong to the middle class. Some are part of the upper classes, like John Clay, a young thief and murderer of royal blood educated at Eton and Oxford. Others are businessmen or even property owners. There are a few criminal servants, but they are generally depicted in a positive manner, like Archie, a shop assistant and young thief, who is a “bright-looking, clean-shaven young fellow” (184). Similarly, Wilkie Collins’s criminals are upper-class men like Sir Percival Glyde and the Italian Count Fosco in *The Woman in White* (1860). In *The Moonstone* (1868), there is a group of Indians that are after the jewel of the title, but again, it is the upper-class Godfrey Ablewhite who is truly responsible for the theft. As Clive Emsley remarks, these fictional (and real) white-collar offenders were not truly considered criminals, but rather “‘rotten apples’ within their social class” as the criminal element was “located elsewhere” (58) — among the poor.

Even though the criminal class was not part of the detective genre, it was far from absent in Victorian fiction. Dickens had touched upon the criminals that inhabited the Saint Giles Rookery in his non-fictional “On Duty with Inspector Field”, but he also addressed the topic in his fiction, giving a fuller depiction in *Oliver Twist*. There is the “old shrivelled Jew”, Fagin, a fence and thief-trainer whose “villainous-looking and repulsive face” reflects his inner character (105). That he is the epitome of evil is clear, as his heart anchors “every evil thought and blackest purpose” (417). Then there is Bill

Sikes, a house burglar and a brute, as his physical appearance denotes: “stoutly-built ... with large swelling calves ... a broad heavy countenance” (136) and huge hands (418). Sikes’s crime — beating Nancy to death — is so appalling that even his criminal associates turn their back on him. Sikes anticipates in many ways the criminal in R. L. Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886), more than forty years later. Mr Hyde is an ugly simian individual with tremendous strength and hairy hands that tramples on a girl and kills a man with an “ape-like fury” until the breaking of the bones is audible (656). Although other characters have difficulty remembering him physically, he is perceived as displeasing and somehow deformed (see pg. 35). These criminals are atavistically described, echoing Victorian discourses which are touched upon in Chapter One. Their portrayals reflect the social explorers’ writings that regarded the “working” and “dangerous” classes as a separate race of primitive beings who threatened to stop the nation’s advance. By the end of the century, concepts of social Darwinism, eugenics, and anthropological criminology were applied to the criminal classes. Indeed, Stevenson’s portrayals in particular seem to rely on such ideas for the construction of Mr Hyde.

Colonial anxieties also permeate the portrayal of criminals. In Conan Doyle’s stories, many crimes are ascribed to British subjects who have spent too long abroad.<sup>120</sup> Particularly negative depictions are mostly saved for foreign criminals or Englishmen whose contact with the colonies has “infected” them. Dr Roylott is a man whose face is “seared with a thousand wrinkles, burned tallow with the sun and marked with every evil passion” (264). He is also a murderer who uses an Indian snake to do his bidding. Colonel Lysander Stark is a German counterfeiter whose peculiarity is his extreme thinness, to the point of emaciation. He has not only murdered in the past but his new victim escapes him at the cost of his thumb. There are simian criminals and dark moustached thieves from Italy, Latin American dictators, and frightful “negroes”. Collins’s Indians in *The Moonstone* are different, as they reflect colonial guilt. They are after the jewel of the title because it is sacred, a jewel stolen by a Briton. In accordance with this, the Indians are not portrayed negatively: they are heathens (82), but also high-caste Brahmins (107) who are polite. Their presence, however, betrays a sense of invasion: the “quiet English house [has been] suddenly invaded by a devilish Indian Diamond” (67).

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<sup>120</sup> Dr Sterndale in *The Adventure of the Devil’s Foot* declares that, having lived too long among savages, he himself has become the law (967).

As in Victorian fiction, it is men who occupy the role of criminals in most of these contemporary young adult fictions. These “new” criminals can be categorized into different groups according to their origins: East Enders, “fake” gentlemen, and foreigners. Although some characteristics overlap, each group responds to different characters and aspects of Victorian fiction.

The individuals who belong to the “dangerous classes” are East End criminals, based on Fagin, Sikes, and Mr Hyde. Their dangerous nature is embodied through easily recognizable features: these are shabbily dressed, poorly educated, physically impressive men, and usually dark-haired and coarse. They embody the born-criminal type that late Victorians so feared. In Pullman’s *Ruby*, Mrs Holland’s employee and accomplice, Mr Berry, is “a thief, a thug and a murderer” (150). The text constantly highlights his physicality as the essence of his characters. He is a “huge man, six and a half feet tall and broad in proportion” (103), and his massive presence dwarfs everything around him: he breaks umbrellas, kicks in doors, and even picks up and flings pieces of furniture. In this aspect, he is a descendant of Stevenson’s Mr Hyde or Dickens’s Sikes, both coarse East Enders. Mr Berry echoes Hyde’s doings. He does not trample on a girl but grabs one and holds her around the neck with one hand, choking her until her eyes start to roll, all the while “growling like a bear, his lips were drawn back from his broken teeth, his red eyes glowed ... [as] he lifted her higher” (180). According to Dickens, the faces of criminals are “expressive of almost every vice in almost every grade” (*Oliver Twist* 237), and Mr Berry’s is indeed “all shapeless malevolence” (*Ruby* 179).

In Brian Keaney’s story, Nathaniel’s observations of London by night confirm the Victorian correlation between the poor and the criminals. On a foggy night, the “underside of the city” yields “an unseen army of pickpockets, street-robbers, mug-hunters, cut-throats and common vagabonds [who] waited in the shadows, ready to pounce on their unsuspecting victims” (*Bodysnatchers* 39).<sup>121</sup> Criminals are associated with the night and darkness, and are almost monstrous creatures, physically built for violence, again echoing Mr Hyde. Hyde’s lust for evil is also mirrored in the portrayal of Maggot Harris, a thief excited by cruelty (see pg. 40). Stereotypically, he is tall, dark-haired, and scarred. In addition, Keaney describes a nameless body-snatcher as follows:

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<sup>121</sup> This image is also used by Paul Bajoria in *The City of Spirits* (2007), as “cutpurses and cut-throats” step out of the fog, taking money or lives “before melting back into oblivion, unseen by anyone” (4).

The man's face was gaunt and ugly, the skin pitted and scarred. One of his ears was terribly mutilated, as if it had been torn off by a wild animal. He seemed like the inhabitant of some other, more terrible world, a place without joy or pity, where a human being was no more than a walking carcass, to be cut down and sold to the highest bidder. (17)

When Nathaniel's friend Sophie innocently gets in a hansom cab with this character, she admits to not liking his looks: "That ear of his was horrible. But it wasn't right to hold things like that against people" (121). However, physical markers *are* endorsed as reliable clues that reveal people's inner characters.<sup>122</sup> Sophie is a sheltered upper-class girl and Nathaniel is surprised she would be so gullible (117). This implies Sophie has failed to make the connection between the man's appearance — "an ugly-looking brute" (141) — and what it means: he is an East Ender and *therefore* a criminal.

Y.S. Lee's *The Body at the Tower* features criminals who are construction workers turned thieves and extortionists. Keenan, a foreman, is one such character. He is "tall, [and] powerfully built" (40), a "dark chap" (46) with a "brutal, ruddy face" (82). He is a brute who, similarly to Mr Hyde, beats a kid with a "sadistic sneer" (82). His animalistic portrayal is completed through his language, as he is, at times, almost beyond language; instead screaming, snarling, or scowling. Indeed, a fight with a co-worker is a "vicious-sounding scrap, male voices *barking* and *snarling*, like *savage animals*" (182, italics mine). In addition, Keenan's activities are naturalised as part of his social condition; he has "a certain low, *criminal* cunning not uncommon to ... [his] class" (312, italics mine). Ironically, the only criminal whose actions are explained is the middle-class site engineer, Mr Harkness, who enters into the construction workers' scheme because of financial difficulties. However, and in accordance to Victorian fiction, this white-collar individual is not truly a criminal; when he kills one of the workers it is by accident. The reader is encouraged to sympathise with Harkness's circumstances. The worker blackmailing him insinuates his wife will have to pay Harkness's debts in sexual favours if he fails to come up with the money. Harkness

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<sup>122</sup> Keaney's text includes a few comments, in general coming from Nathaniel, that attempt to counteract the East End-criminal association: "If there was one thing that growing up in the East End of London had taught him, it was that you got good and bad people of all kinds, colours and creeds" (*Bodysnatchers* 65). However, the texts have a marked tendency to depict the opposite, with all that is bad and horrible always coming from the East, so this overt effort is undermined by the narrative itself.

then pushes him, because “[n]o gentleman would suffer such an insult” (315) and the fall kills the man. Harkness keeps his status as a gentleman till the end.

Udale also introduces aspects of social Darwinism, eugenics, and anthropological criminology: popular theories regarding crime towards the end of the nineteenth-century. This is done by including the historical figure Professor Cesare Lombroso as a character. Lombroso (1835–1909) was an Italian physician whose work focussed on criminology, although his findings regarding the physiognomy of criminals were not greeted with universal approval.<sup>123</sup> This makes his insertion as a character into the world of Montmorency interesting. At first he is presented by Udale as laughable. He sketches “a *grotesque caricature* of a ‘born criminal’, listing ... [its] features” (*Assassins* 53, italics mine). He fails to recognise Montmorency as a criminal and his opinions on the criminal character are undermined:

There’s poverty of course, but maybe the character traits that make a criminal also make a bad worker. And even if these communists and anarchists feel a real sense of social injustice, I’m convinced that the ones who bomb and riot are possessed by an inborn evil, and must be dealt with. (54)

The attitude implied by the narrative changes. When Frank, Fox-Selwyn’s nephew, is in Italy making friends with other youths, Lombroso warns Fox-Selwyn that Frank is associating with a bad lot of “natural born criminals” that show “all the signs”, including long arms and (more believably) tattoos (*Assassins* 80). Despite the earlier dismissal of Lombroso’s criminal-physiognomy theory, his warnings prove correct. Frank’s friends are anarchists and he ends up involved in their criminal activities. Furthermore, Udale places Lombroso at the historical International Anti-Anarchist Conference of 1898 in Rome, although he was not there. Fox-Selwyn sees the man in action at the conference and declares him “very eminent in his field” (134). Lombroso’s belief that people who bomb and riot are born criminals is linked here to the Italian anarchists Frank gets mixed up with, including Gaetano Bresci, another fictionalised historical figure. However, the historical Lombroso wrote that Bresci’s anarchist attempt was “neither the result of degenerate personality nor that of uncontrollable passion but, lamentably, the sad outgrowth of Italian politics” (Levy 32).

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<sup>123</sup> Lombroso is better known for his book *L’Uomo Delinquente* (1876).

The political origins of these criminal actions are thus dismissed by Updale. Despite initially belittling his science, Lombroso is redeemed (even enhanced) and so is his theory — a Victorian theory that saw criminals as “other”, atavistic and almost degenerate versions of humanity.

The “fake gentleman” is another type of criminal associated with the East End. As opposed to Conan Doyle’s white-collar criminals, these are men who, despite their upper-class position, are not “real” gentlemen. They have gained their social status through work or marriage. Keaney’s Mr Chesterfield in *The Haunting of Nathaniel Wolfe* is the master of a respectable household, yet, as he keeps company with the East End criminal Maggot Harris, characters wonder “[w]hat any *gentleman* would be doing talking” to him (65, italics mine). As it turns out, Mr Chesterfield has gained his elevated position through marriage. A murderer, he has poisoned his wife and has similar intentions towards his stepdaughter. Once the plot is discovered, Chesterfield attempts to escape and heads into the East End Rookeries without hesitation. According to Dickens and the social explorers, this environment was a breeding ground for criminals, an idea taken up by Keaney: “[m]any a criminal ... evaded capture by disappearing into this warren of tiny alleyways” (196). The place, strewn with refuse in every corner, is one of the “very lowest rungs” (196) of London’s society (see Chapter One). That Chesterfield resorts to hiding here exposes him as a fraud, a fake gentlemen who, as Nathaniel realises, *belongs* because he is a former “Rookeries Boy” (197).

Nathaniel faces yet another criminal of this type. In *Bodysnatchers*, the criminal is Mr Hemlock, a businessman who turns out to be involved in fraud, kidnapping, bodysnatching, and even murder. Despite his refined appearance — he is “a tall man with a high forehead and an aquiline nose” — he has a “predatory air” and “small beady eyes” (99) and has a “weak and flabby” (100) handshake. One of the characters describes him as “a villain posing as a gentleman” (100), which seems fitting, as Hemlock criticises his partner, Mr Mordecai, for being too “gentlemanly” (185). Mordecai, in contrast, talks about Hemlock as a “kind of a monster” (187). Since Hemlock, like Chesterfield, is not a true gentleman, when he seeks refuge, it is in a “grim-looking industrial building” (186) in the East End.

In Mary Hooper’s *Fallen Grace*, it is the Unwins who are the criminals. The cousins are wealthy and belong to an exclusive gentlemen’s club in London. However, their membership has cost them dearly, because they owe their position to “trade” rather than “society”(58); thus, they are “fake” gentlemen. This is evident physically and in

their activities. George Unwin wears a “loud” tweed jacket and a yellow cravat (58); a well-known funeral director, he has all sorts of businesses going, “toadying to the rich, feeding the poor and taking as much as he could from both”(110–11). Sylvester Unwin, while dressed “more formally”, has a “heavy face, bulbous nose and arrogant expression [which] pointed to him having an altogether different character” (59). He owns a mourning-clothing business and does many charitable deeds, entertaining serious chances of becoming London’s next mayor. His despicability is signalled by the fact that Sylvester’s “charitable actions” include raping the destitute girls he purports to help.

These contemporary texts yield this type of Victorian East End criminal often, reinforcing pre-conceived notions of the relationship between poverty, class, and criminality. There is usually no engagement whatsoever with these characters’ origins. The East End simply breeds criminals, and it is common to see “very unpleasant characters ... Thugs and ‘ooligans’” (Keaney, *Haunting* 144) there. Not even a change in their social circumstances can actually amend the nature of these individuals.

There is a third type of criminal, besides the East Enders and the “fake” gentlemen — the foreign criminals, modelled on the ones Sherlock Holmes faces. Eleanor Updale’s criminals are mostly foreign — usually Italian or Irish, part of terrorist cells or anarchists attempting to undermine Europe’s monarchies. They seek (according to a typical blurb) to “spread terror and death” across the continent. They have scars or “dark” features, like Victorian East End criminals. Mr O’Connell, an Irish worker-turned-bomber in *Montmorency on the Rocks*, is “suntanned and healthy” and has a high forehead which “even [seemed] a little distinguished and intelligent” (249),<sup>124</sup> but other physical characteristics, like his dark hair, mark him as a criminal type. His hairy hands (220–269–271) are reminiscent of Mr Hyde’s. When O’Connell chases Vi, he is “ferocious ... an expression of pure hate and savage violence burning his eyes” (231). In actual fact, there are inconsistencies in his description: when he is pursuing Vi, O’Connell not only tries to violently grab her but threatens her brutally too: “I’ll find you, and I’ll kill you! You b\*\*\*\*!” (232). Updale’s later attempt to explain O’Connell’s plight seems an afterthought: O’Connell has a very sick niece, and the need for money for her operation is what got him involved with the Fenians. He just needed to talk to Vi. But these two sides are incompatible. The reader knows

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<sup>124</sup> The observation already implies that this would be unexpected, and an exception in one such as him.

O'Connell threatened to kill Vi, and thus the image that remains is that of a “burly Irishman” (261), a brute whose eyes flare with hate (271), who is very violent and whose apparent intelligence amounts to nothing, as he is duped by Montmorency and Fox-Selwyn into confessing when they have no proof against him. Updale’s portrayal echoes some of the anxieties that dominated Conan Doyle’s foreign criminals. The Irish are seen as “other”, threatening the integrity of the nation. Most importantly, the Fenians and their motivations — to push the British out of Ireland (72) — are only mentioned in passing. What is made clear is that they are willing to kill innocent British citizens and thus constitute a threat.

Philip Pullman’s series has two of these foreign villains, but these deviate from the Victorian tradition. In *The Shadow in the North*, Axel Bellmann is a Norwegian genius who, despite being evil, is logical and attractive. This challenges Conan Doyle’s foreign criminals, as Bellmann is closer to Professor Moriarty, who is a genius of “good birth and excellent education” (470), but also British. Despite purposefully sinking a ship, murdering men (including Sally’s lover), and building a highly destructive weapon, Bellmann explains everything in logical terms. He believes all these actions are for the greater good, and that horrible weapons must exist as deterrents to ensure peace in the world (254). Sally finds herself not only almost believing him but being attracted to him. Instead of being dark and scarred, Bellmann is a tall blond individual with grey-blue eyes (61). Sally sees him as a calm and powerful man, with an “undertow of rippling humour” (258). This makes it harder for the reader, and for Sally, to “identify” him as a criminal — the character is richer than his Victorian predecessors and his motivations are articulated in an almost convincing manner, encouraging the reader to consider why Bellmann is a criminal.

However, Sally’s arch-nemesis is not Bellmann, but another wealthy foreigner. Appearing under three names, the character is first linked to the exotic East as Ah Ling, the leader of a secret Chinese society, a type of villainous character often found in Victorian penny dreadfuls. He is later revealed to be Hendrik van Eeden, a man of Dutch and Chinese descent, whose society runs an opium-distribution operation. In the third book he returns as the head of a powerful business empire that deals in prostitution, immigration scams, and other illegal operations. In this he is like Conan Doyle’s Moriarty — the “Napoleon of crime” and “organizer of half that is evil and of nearly all that is undetected in this great city” (471). However, Pullman departs yet again from Victorian stereotypes by revealing that Ah Ling/Van Eeden, now the



Tzaddik, is in fact paralysed, forced to rely on a monkey and his valet to carry out everyday tasks. Thus, his confrontation with Sally has nothing of the dramatic cliff-edge wrestling between Holmes and Moriarty in *The Final Problem* (1893). Instead, it is a quiet conversation which introduces the idea that the Tzaddik's rise to power is Sally's responsibility. The city's misery has been generated by the business speculations of Sally and others, and their indifference to the sufferings of the poor — issues which resonate in a modern context. While Pullman's foreign criminals are not as fully characterised as the protagonists, they articulate actual problems — the British Empire's involvement with opium in China, prostitution, deterrence — rather than merely being embodiments of vaguely defined “evil”. Their presence forces not only Sally but also the reader to examine their role in society.

Although the criminals have what could be described as disadvantaged backgrounds, these novels do not encourage us to excuse their criminality as socially caused.<sup>125</sup> They seem physiologically destined to be criminals — in keeping with Lombroso's idea of *born* criminals. They are like the Victorian criminals of Dickens and the penny dreadfuls: coarse and “other”. This vilification of masses present in the young adult narratives resonates, to a certain degree, with contemporary anxieties. London has witnessed sporadic violent uprisings in the recent years — the 1990 poll tax riots, the 2009 G20 riots, the student demonstrations in 2010, and most recently the 2011 Hackney disturbances. Regarding the latter, there is a general consensus among the media that the rioters are “young men from poor areas” (Lewis and Harkin). Expectations regarding the Victorian criminal can be used, unconsciously, to channel new anxieties regarding contemporary perception of criminal activities.

One major difference between these young adult narratives and their Victorian counterparts is that the former's criminals also range from fake aristocratic families to foreign crooks — Italian, Irish Fenian, and half-Chinese men. We may contrast them with Conan Doyle's criminals, who arise from within Holmes's circle. This is also a reflection of contemporary anxieties; these “new” criminals provide period colour, but endorse rather rigid social structures. Social mobility is, as discussed in Chapter Four, mostly guaranteed by their beauty, education, and birthright, qualities that are denied to most East End criminals, who are trapped within a system that regards and proposes their inferiority as natural: part of the degenerate and the irredeemable.

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<sup>125</sup> This is despite the lengthy descriptions of the squalid East End and its inhabitants' poor circumstances.

## *Punishing the Criminal*

To reinstate order, criminals must be discovered and dealt with. In the Sherlock Holmes stories, closure is achieved once criminals have made their full confession. Holmes sometimes lets them go, if their crimes can be morally justified; other times, Scotland Yard takes over. This is in line with genre convention as the focus in the detective stories is on the mental process of the detective and, sometimes, the thrill of the chase. The criminal's punishment does not play an important role and therefore the detective (and the reader) is hardly ever confronted with the execution of justice. As Brian Diemert notes, the fact that the punishment occurs outside the narrative represents:

... a moral aporia that paradoxically preserves the rigidity of the classical detective story's moral structure. The force of law, of the good, is seen to triumph over the force of disorder, of evil, but the moral ambiguity inherent in the expiration of evil by a process that involves the repetition of the initial crime is suppressed in the interest of preserving the sense of the criminal as the "other", despite his or her kinship with the detective and with other members of the society (107).

While our young adult texts borrow elements from detective fiction, this is an aspect in which they differ from the model. Here, the reader is invited to witness the criminals' downfall. Although most are not murderers, they suffer gruesome punishment and even death. In many of the stories the coarser they are, the more horrid their end is. As Diemert notes (albeit of the authentic Victorian texts), it is not the detective who executes the villain, and this is true of the modern texts as well. The criminals' deaths acquire the shape of "divine" justice, as they meet their ends by "accident" while trying to escape justice. This makes the plots of these young adult fictions much more moralistic than Conan Doyle's detective tales (and closer to Dickens).<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> In *Oliver Twist*, order is restored through death; trying to escape, Sikes thinks he sees Nancy's eyes and losing his balance, accidentally hangs himself. Fagin hangs as well, but his punishment is handed out by a judge, rather than being a poetic accident, and the scene takes place off-stage.

In *The Haunting of Nathaniel Wolfe*, Maggot Harris is clubbed in the head and thrown into the sewers, where the rats eat what is left of him (Keaney 147), an act that is said to be “poetic justice” (155).<sup>127</sup> His accomplice, Mr Chesterfield, meets a similar end while trying to escape, trapped in the sewers as a storm strikes. He holds his breath until his lungs are ready to explode; he then opens his mouth and lets “the tide of filth and scum come pouring in” (205). Since the sewers are posed as a hellish underworld in Keaney’s narrative, it is fitting that Chesterfield’s deeds (the cruel poisoning his wife and his attempts to do the same to his step-daughter) are punished here.

*Montmorency’s Revenge* presents a similar case. Montmorency is pursuing the Italian agitator Antonio Moretti, an anarchist who murdered Montmorency’s partner. Moretti not only shot Fox-Selwyn in the back, but sent Montmorency the preserved corpse. Moretti’s death matches the intense desire of revenge that runs throughout the adventure. Inside a burning building, Moretti, his glasses crushed, is blinded by the fire and starts to asphyxiate, “spluttering and wheezing” (Updale 279). Finally, believing it to be water, Moretti drinks hair dye, which causes him tremendous pain; he emits a “strange, gargled howl of agony as the harsh chemicals ... scoured away his final breath” (279-80).

Similarly, in *Fallen Grace*, Grace vows “dispassionately” (Hooper 66) to kill the man who raped both her and her sister. When the chance comes, she faces Sylvester Unwin: “Filled with rage, yet clear-headed and fully aware of what she was doing, she pointed at her enemy and cried, ‘Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord!’ Sylvester Unwin screamed in terror, clutched his heart and fell to the floor, dead” (253). Unwin dies of a heart attack, but there is a clear sense that his crime begets revenge, and his punishment is fully deserved. This idea is reinforced when Grace avoids conviction for this, her own (technically speaking) crime. Afterwards, she concentrates on what it feels like to be rich rather than showing any remorse or dedicating a spare thought for Unwin’s death.

Paul Bajoria’s *The Devil’s Printer* initially presents an exception to the graphic punishment of criminals. Mog and Nick go to the hanging of Coburn (294), the criminal, a notorious rogue and murderer, in their story. However, the negative view of public executions is evident in how the scene resembles a circus, with jugglers and

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<sup>127</sup> Harris is described as a brute but all he is seen doing is mugging people and acquiring poison for Chesterfield, so he can kill his wife. Harris is never directly seen killing anyone, and there is no implication he ever has.

people selling candy. Ultimately, the siblings conclude that the hanging will not undo the crime (295) and leave without watching. Nevertheless, in their second adventure, *The God of Mischief*, they are directly involved in the dismissal of the redoubtable Mrs Muggerage. After a chase, she plummets through the ceiling of an abattoir into “a huge bin of blood, discarded organs and intestines” (274). Once the siblings reach safety, Mog, to Nick’s surprise, questions their decision not to help Muggerage. When Mog wonders what will happen to the woman, Nick simply states: “Well she could never swim ... and I don’t suppose she floats” (274). Nick’s matter-of-fact answer reflects how little the death weighs in his mind, and indeed the topic is never discussed again.

The criminals’ deaths are generally witnessed by the detective-like figures. It seems to reward their pursuit but, at the same time, these deaths offer a sense of absolute closure in the narrative, coupled with safety for the characters. However, these are particularly gruesome endings. They wander away from the classic detective story, and in general their violent and ghastly emphasis is absent in their Victorian roots. This focus can be linked to a desire to accommodate a popular perception of the period that links the “Jack the Ripper” murders with the entirety of the nineteenth-century. The only author who works with the criminals’ death from a different angle is Philip Pullman. Sally Lockhart not only witnesses the deaths of all the main villains of the stories, but she is sometimes involved in their occurrence. However, they are sobering occasions, which lack the dramatic cliff-edge wrestling of Holmes and Moriarty as well as the theatricality of Grace’s vengeance and the sensationalism of Chesterfield’s end. Sally throws the jewel Mrs Holland so coveted and sees her plunging into the waters after it, drowning, even though Sally tries to catch her. Mr Bellmann dies in a blast that Sally sets off, but she believes it will kill her too. Finally, she witnesses the death of her worst enemy, the Tzaddik. This is particularly poignant, as the scene is preceded by Sally’s acceptance of her responsibility in the creation and endorsement of criminals such as the Tzaddik. This is not only generally, but specifically as well since it is Sally who, having shot the Tzaddik, reduces him to an invalid, instigating his desire for revenge. In contrast to Nick’s or Grace’s attitude, Sally apologises: “I never intended this, Ah Ling. You didn’t deserve this. But I did it” (*Tiger* 373). Trapped in a basement that is getting flooded, she desperately tries to save the Tzaddik, but fails. There is no satisfaction, nor an idea of justice being served, even though the event wraps up the narrative. Once Sally realizes that Ah Ling is dead, she closes his eyes and “gently” tries to lower him into the water (393).

## Modern “Victorian” Detectives

### *Re-dressing Victorian Gender Politics: Girls as Protagonists*

In Victorian fiction, as in life, the detective role belonged for the most part to men: Dickens’s Inspector Bucket, Wilkie Collins’s Sergeant Cuff, Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes, et cetera.<sup>128</sup> Victorians clearly viewed the detective’s abilities as “masculine” — their higher intellectual capacity, physical strength and extensive knowledge. In *Sherlock’s Men: Masculinity, Conan Doyle, and Cultural History* (1997), Joseph A. Kestner notes that Conan Doyle associated Holmes with “qualities gendered masculine in Victorian culture: science, reason, system and principle” (28). Kestner views Holmes as an epitome of manliness, something the primarily male readership of *The Strand* (the magazine in which the stories were originally published) responded to. In addition, “detecting” required a freedom of movement which belonged almost exclusively to men until the end of the century.<sup>129</sup>

In general, Victorian fictional and non-fictional writings reflected the Victorians’ view of the two genders as occupying separate spheres, notoriously locating “women in the home and men in the marketplace” (Burstyn 19). Women were fragile, their natural profession that of mother and wife; although towards the 1900s, feminism was on the rise, as the “New Woman” sought economic independence and equal civil and social rights to men. However, the Victorian perception precluded women from becoming detectives in Victorian life or literature. Detective stories cast women in a different role from that of the investigator. They were usually the clients, as in Holmes — women cheated on by husbands or lovers, or wrongfully accused. The stories depicted them mainly within domestic spaces: house rooms, gardens, and classrooms. Following the appearance of Conan Doyle’s stories, narratives featuring women detectives became a fashionable but short-lived trend between 1894 and 1910 (Rzepka 149–150) — most of these languished after their initial publication and have since been

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<sup>128</sup> Penny dreadfuls also featured the male detective, as is the case with *The Boy Detective; or, the Crimes of London* (1866).

<sup>129</sup> Circulating the city’s streets or the public sphere freely usually meant being accosted, as an unaccompanied woman within this sphere could be taken for a prostitute. This is shown in Rose meeting with Nancy on the London Bridge in *Oliver Twist*. Nancy is alone, while Rose is there with Mr Brownlow. This reflects Victorian customs which dictated upper-and middle-class women needed escorts if they ventured into public, which denied them freedom within public life (Burstyn 19).

forgotten.<sup>130</sup> Wilkie Collins's Marian Halcombe is an exception, as it is her incomparable tenacity, fearlessness, and powers of observation that help to solve the mystery of *The Woman in White* (1860).

As has been repeatedly discussed, our modern young adult stories tend to achieve an (albeit superficial) Victorian authenticity. When it comes to gender, however, these detective stories overwhelmingly choose to defy Victorian norms, as young women can be and are main characters. Some are professional investigators, like Enola Holmes and Mary Quinn, while others, like Sally Lockhart, are driven to detecting by their circumstances. Their portrayals and the ease with which they pursue their investigations are incompatible with the social conventions of the Victorian era and its literature. This underlines the novels' *neo*-Victorian nature, as the authors re-imagine Victorian London as a place where women can play a role denied to them in Victorian times.

Victorian society is depicted as particularly misogynistic and oppressive; emphasizing these girls' successes despite adversity. Thus, an overt tension exists between the "rules" of the *text* as opposed to the "rules" of the *setting*. Sally Lockhart constantly finds that her independent ways frustrate those around her; she is accused of being a prostitute because she receives men alone in her office (Pullman, *Shadow* 194), and the fact that she has an office is reason enough for the police not to take her complaints seriously (194). In *Nathaniel Wolfe*, when Miss Pemberton attempts to disclose to Mr Mordecai the criminal activities of his associate, he dismisses the entire thing as "the febrile imaginings of a hysterical female" and suggests that she go home to do needlework (Keaney, *Bodysnatchers* 147). In response to such instances, these girls fight for their rights with determination, embodying contemporary ideals and attitudes.

The portrayal of the Victorian era as especially backwards in terms of gender equality is emphasised through a contrast between the "modern" girls and those who are presented as "stereotypical" Victorian girls — beautiful and useless creatures who seemingly resent their fate as mothers and wives, but are too weak to resist. In Pullman's *The Shadow in the North*, Jimmy Taylor falls in love with one of these girls: Lady Mary Wytham is "beautiful" and "lovely", a shy and graceful girl who sits "still

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<sup>130</sup> This can be seen as part of the "New Woman" movement, which created a demand for stories "featuring women and girls in challenging situations" towards the end of the century (Craig and Cadogan 23).

and silent” with downcast eyes and folded hands (54). Everything in her character indicates fragility (she is like a young animal or a gazelle [104]) and passivity; as she acknowledges, she prefers to watch rather than to act (207). Due to her beauty, she is a valuable commodity. Her father’s dire economic situation forces him to “sell” her in marriage in exchange for government contacts. Mary is never privy to the transaction. She will enter marriage as a object designated to a specific role, as her future husband explains: “As *my fiancée*, as *my wife*, as the hostess of *my house*, you will not use any public occasion to express discontent, whatever you might feel privately” (105, italics mine).

Sophie, a young upper-class girl in Keaney’s *Nathaniel Wolfe and the Bodysnatchers*, is depicted similarly. She is happier listening to Nathaniel and Lily’s adventures than participating in them: “She wanted very much to be brave, but growing up as a young lady meant she had led a sheltered life, and she found it hard to break free of the restrictions this imposed on her” (36). Asked directly to get involved, Sophie is “surprised and pleased” (97), but compares herself with Lily, her maid and Nathaniel’s friend:

People did not often ask her [Sophie] for help. She was more likely to be the one asking for assistance. She and Lily were more or less the same age, but Sophie often felt like a child by comparison. Lily was ready to tackle whatever came her way, whereas Sophie had spent so much of her time sitting around looking ladylike. I’m like a piece of expensive porcelain, too delicate for anything but display, she thought to herself. (97)

Miss Pemberton, who is Sophie’s governess, helps Nathaniel by first stealing a file from an office, but is ashamed afterwards, because she had behaved in what she views as “unladylike fashion” (105). These Victorian women have accepted and internalised an idea of women as little more than ornaments, a concept that brings them no happiness.

In Lee’s *The Agency*, Mary Quinn also comes across one of these stereotypical Victorian girls, Angelica Thorold. In accordance with the strong feminist discourse that runs through this author’s work, Angelica is able to break the mould — but not without consequences. She is “a golden-haired girl, pretty but overdressed” (36), whose daily occupations are divided between conversation and music (45), dictating notes or dozing

in armchairs (121–22) while her parents discuss wealthy suitors for her. She is exaggeratedly delicate, shrieking when Mary spills some tea which hardly stains her dress — while Mary, who burns her hand, remains quiet (69). Angelica is “pretty, spoilt and destined for marriage” (228). But she turns this Victorian fate around: to spite her parents, she marries a poor clerk, a scandalous connection for one of her class. Having been “raised for marriage”, she believes being a musician (her one passion) *and* a wife are incompatible (257). Her new husband shows all the stereotypical marks of a misogynist, talking to her as if she were “a sick animal or an irrational child” (285). However, pursuing her independence, she breaks with her parents and annuls her marriage: “I’m going to remain a spinster, and study music in Vienna, and disregard anyone who attempts to stop me” (286).

### *Girls Will Be Boys: Between Being a Detective and Being a Woman*

Angelica’s declaration implies that, for women, the professional and the domestic spheres are incompatible. This assumption is present in most of these stories; it would seem that if these girls are to be successful investigators, their femininity must be repressed to a certain degree. Thus the authors seem to apply a degree of realism to the past, while subtly embracing the present by depicting the difficulties of reconciling these roles. Discussing women detectives in adult fiction, Kathleen Gregory Klein notes a similar tendency (1). Although Klein is discussing the professional rather than the amateur detective, a similar process takes place in these modern texts.

In Pullman’s series, Sally provides a clear example of a girl whose femininity does not reflect Victorian values, but who faces the difficulties of being a professional financial adviser, a casual detective, and a woman. Indeed Sally, having been raised by her father, is clearly atypical. She has no knowledge of “English Literature, French, History, Art and Music”, but has a solid understanding of military tactics and book-keeping, “a close acquaintance with the affairs of the Stock Market, and a working knowledge of Hindustani” (*Ruby* 10–11). She can ride and has a pistol her father taught her to shoot. Within a truly Victorian society, her future would be bleak because she does not fulfil gender expectations. As her aunt indicates, she has no “accomplishments” (13) or “prospects” (12). For the purposes of advancement as a woman in Victorian society, she is deficient — unable to even become a governess (13). However, her education is meant to single her out as a contemporary girl in a



Victorian world. The narrator rarely refers to the present, but in one instance he explains that Sally's "upbringing had given her an independence of mind that made her more like a girl of *today* than one of her own time — which was why ... she was not daunted by the prospect of being alone" (63, italics mine). Even though she is not described in unflattering "spinster" terms, her "manly" upbringing has positioned her awkwardly within society:

... she still didn't feel quite at ease when they stopped talking about business. Things that other young women could do easily — make small talk, dance gracefully, flirt with a stranger at dinner while unerringly picking up the right knife and fork — were difficult and embarrassing still, and hampered by the memory of humiliating failures. (*Shadow* 67)

Her peculiar status is reinforced by the fact that the female "role models" she encounters had to forsake or repress their femininity in order to pursue more rewarding activities. Miss Elizabeth Robbins, for example, is an unattractive spinster: "forty or so, with a stern almost cruel expression, and solidly built. She was wearing a severe dress, and had scraped her hair back into a bun with no attempt at softening her appearance" (*Tiger* 195). She has a fearsome "bark" (206) and is far from squeamish, literally wading in dirt and facing up to the authorities to demand better conditions for the poor in the East End, and intimidating men in the process. Dr Turner, who works with Robbins in the East End, is depicted in similar terms which underline her practical skills and strength. A "brisk, red-faced woman" (198), she is compared to African explorers as "the sort of hearty Englishwoman who in other circumstances would have ridden to hounds or explored the upper reaches of the Zambezi" (199).<sup>131</sup> There is not much sympathy, or empathy, for truly "Victorian" women; the ones who choose to be mothers and wives are portrayed as archaic without any attempts at contextualising their lives or explaining their choices.

This idea, that being a feminine woman and a professional is an unachievable task, is underlined as the series advances. As Sally grows older, she is faced with the task of balancing her professional life, her love life, and motherhood; roles which are,

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<sup>131</sup> The idea of "other circumstances" here can be interpreted as another reference to the present, because of course in Victorian times it would have been equally difficult for Turner to do such things. Even when Sally first comes across her, she thinks she is a nurse, for women doctors were a rare sight at the time.

in the end, difficult to integrate, a notion that seems out of place considering she stands in for a young twentieth-century working woman. Being autonomous, speaking your mind, *and* being a female in Victorian society are seen as irreconcilable, a concept reinforced throughout the adventures. These anachronistic female characters are placed in a genuinely Victorian context which forces choices upon them that the authors imply are still faced by women nowadays.

Indeed, Sally can only pursue her consultancy job and conduct investigations by remaining single. Fred Garland, her love interest, never faces such problems. He runs a detective agency but this does not discourage him from pursuing her romantically. For Sally, it is a different proposition; she associates a relationship with a loss of her independence. When Fred asks her to move into the photo shop for safety, she refuses, arguing that she can take care of herself, mentioning her pistol and stating she does not need “protecting” and “coddling” because she is “*not like that*” (*Shadow* 147, italics original). The reader is invited to agree with her rejection of the role of “bloody princess in a fairytale” (146). However, her stubbornness in refusing Fred’s help, offered “as one equal to another, out of concern and respect” (148) is portrayed as negative. He accuses her of being at her worst “nothing but a smooth, self-righteous, patronizing bitch” (147), a judgement perceived by her and the reader to be true. This is overtly because Sally’s fears regarding her economic independence are unfounded (10).<sup>132</sup> Once she realizes she is in love with Fred, her attitude is stereotypically female. The relationship forces her to play a part in the Victorian world: she becomes “helpless”, “frightened”, and in need of Fred (198). This does not fit with Sally’s general demeanour. It does not last long: their romantic relationship is brief, ended by his death. This is convenient in that for her to remain a strong independent woman, her relationship with him cannot be a permanent one.

In *The Tiger in the Well*, there are clues that point to growing tensions between career and womanhood, here associated with motherhood. Sally reprises her role as a detective, facing her arch-enemy, the Tzaddik, mainly using her own resources. But by this point, she has become mother to a little girl, Harriet. Although this does not stop her from playing her part as detective and protagonist, she starts to question the life she is leading in order to be independent:

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<sup>132</sup> Early on in the book, Sally’s worries regarding what would happen to her property were she to marry are shown to be unjustified. A Married Women’s Property Act has been passed (1870), which means she can legally keep her property. But since Fred knows nothing about the law, she keeps arguing the same point “because ... she was uncertain of her feelings” (*Shadow* 10).

At home it was always Sarah-Jane who played with Harriet, and Sally who looked in, smiling at the pretty sight, and went away again ... All Sally did was to watch briefly and then go back to something more important, such as reading a financial journal or advising someone how to make money. (215-6)

Sally, as a single parent, is cast in the traditional role of the father, uninvolved in the upbringing of children and always off to work. Slowly but surely, her “detective and independent woman” persona starts to collapse as feminine qualities, associated with motherhood and marriage are emphasised. The end of the adventure finds her attracted to Dan Goldberg; by the fourth adventure, she has been pushed off stage, as she hardly features in the novel.

This change is related to her marital status. It is as if succumbing to marriage has taken away her capacity to be the narrative’s detective. At first, in *The Tin Princess*, the young tutor Becky Winter is fascinated by what she has heard of Mrs Goldberg (Sally) — as both a financial consultant and a “gun-toting female desperado” (18). When Becky meets her, she is disappointed because “this daring adventuress who fired pistols and married socialists and had a child out of wedlock, was hardly the sort of person to *knit*, surely” (19). Sally is knitting because Jim bet that she could not. Her knitting still diminishes her, especially since this is her first appearance in the series as a married woman. In this passage she is referred to as “Sally” only five times — mostly when Jim is telling Becky about past adventures — but more than twenty times as “Mrs Goldberg”. It is difficult to see her as the Sally of the first three adventures. Although she is still young, slim, and pretty (18), her attitudes are much more feminine and maternal; she claps her hands in delight (20) and shakes her head in wonderment (23), something that hardly befits the determined investigator of previous adventures. She also seems to have become dependent on her husband: when Becky says she is from Razkavia, Mrs Goldberg reacts like a stereotypically ignorant wife: “Where is Razkavia? Dan would know. He’s probably been arrested there more than once” (20). Discussing plans for Jim and Becky to go to Razkavia, Sally admits that she would “love” to see how their adventure turns out, with a “real longing in her voice” (25) that betrays a desire to return to her former self. However, Mrs Goldberg has to go to America with her husband, a trip she justifies in terms of her husband’s needs. Her own desire to look at the New York stock-market (25) is merely an afterthought. Despite her

initial disillusion, Becky likes the odd, teasing, and friendly (21) Sally; in the same way, the reader is supposed to see Sally's change as "positive", but her transition from detective to wife is rather unsatisfactory.

What the series as a whole suggests, therefore, is that womanly fulfilment is incompatible with the roles of detective and business consultant. Sally is a great model of independence, spirit, and sagacity, but such abilities come at a cost. Since Sally stands for a "modern" girl, the lack of a satisfying compromise between a professional and a private life, between "detective" and "woman", between "career" and "marriage" should not be read purely (or even at all) as an assessment of Victorian gender politics, but rather reflects contemporary gender issues, ultimately suggesting the difficulty of reconciling these roles. The dilemma Sally faces is almost exclusively modern; towards the end of the century, Victorian women were battling just to enter the workforce, not really dealing with the problems of balancing professional and domestic tasks.

In Bajoria's *The Printer's Devil* (2004), Mog experiences a similar dilemma. Mog, who introduces "himself" as "a printer's boy" (2) and wanders the streets of London with his dog, is in fact a girl. There are a few clues early on to this fact; on the whole, however, Mog behaves like a boy and is treated as such.<sup>133</sup> It is only when Mog is threatened with a bath that she reveals her sex and name (Imogen). But Mog, who "half-believes" herself a boy (215), contemplates the alternative with considerable anxiety:

I often thought about this. For one thing, I wouldn't be working ... because girls couldn't be printers' devils, and they couldn't really be apprentices of any sort come to that. It was only because I looked so much like a boy ... that I'd been able to ... make my own way in the world at all. For years now I'd been doing all the things girls weren't meant to do, like run and whistle and swear — at first because it helped me to keep up the pretence, but after a while just because that was *me*, and it came naturally.

Being like a girl would be all but impossible, after all this time, probably. (213–4)

Mog feels relieved once she reveals her gender, being among people whom she might "be able to feel comfortable *behaving* like a girl" (215). She does not really go

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<sup>133</sup> When asleep, Mog looks like a girl (46); for a boy he has eyes "a woman would die for" (11), and he is "[p]elt like a wench" (45).

through any transformation. There are only a few details that could be ascribed to her newfound “freedom” to be a girl, and these are mainly stereotypical, undercutting her originally fierce character. Before the confession, she is a daring character, always pushing forward despite danger. After the revelation, she hesitates for the first time to do something daring — to climb down into an abandoned house — even though her brother Nick has climbed down already (225). Before her change, when a horse pees on her, she treats the episode in a matter-of-fact way: “a jet of something wet began to spray across my back. I scrambled out and, as I stood up, I banged my head on a beam and doubled up again in pain. What a mess, I thought” (186). After her revelation, she is much more aware of her body than before: “I could feel years of filth filling my hair and trickling in a gritty stream down my neck” (227). She also screams more (225), panics (226, 228), and cries for the first time (235). Thus, Bajoria portrays “being a girl” as being more overtly sensitive and displaying emotions publicly. Accepting her gender implies an act of, to use Judith Butler’s words, gender performativity, as Mog indeed *plays* the gender role (not only externally but internally).

In *The God of Mischief* (2005), Mog is the detective, and therefore she continues to impersonate a male. Living in the country with a distant cousin, “Miss Imogen” (26), Mog still dresses like a boy and admits she is not a “very girly girl”:

Now, of course, I didn’t have to pretend; but even though I was letting my hair grow a bit, it was no surprise that people who didn’t really know us [Mog and Nick] took us for brothers. And, because it was usually too complicated to explain, we still allowed people to believe it. (72-3)

This is the only reference to Mog’s gender in the second book, implying the revelation of the previous book has not brought any relief, as she is still repressing a side of her personality.

In Y.S. Lee’s *The Agency*, there is an echo of the dichotomy expressed in Pullman’s books: if one is to be a detective and an independent woman, one cannot be “feminine”. Mary Quinn becomes a spy because the Agency sees in her “exceptional abilities” — cleverness, fierceness and ambition (13). When Mary exhibits these qualities, she is said to be behaving like a man. From James Easton (casual partner and love interest) we learn that Mary fights like a man, which she does when *dressed* like a boy — instead of screaming or fainting as most (Victorian) girls would do (118). Mary

can step onto carriages unassisted (130), and at times her manners resemble those of a sailor, including her speech (131). Unlike Victorian ladies, who James says “never eat ... drink, sleep or have other gross, vulgar human functions” (233), Mary’s stomach growls. Stereotypically, she is said to behave femininely when she experiences emotional outbursts (similarly to Mog’s portrayal as a girl) and worries about propriety (*Agency* 109; *Tower* 232, 241) and sexuality (*Tower* 284).

Mary apparent transformation from girl to boy in *The Body at the Tower* perpetuates gender stereotypes. The disguise allows for a freedom forbidden to Victorian girls. She can swing her arms, run, and scratch herself “with impunity”, and enjoy the lightness of cropped hair and comfortable clothes (9).<sup>134</sup> She can also stroll the streets freely without attracting attention (199), lean and lounge in public, and exhibit “manners severely discouraged in young ladies” (195). Drinking in a public house is also one of the new benefits.

In contrast femininity and womanhood are portrayed disapprovingly. This view is predominately voiced through the Agency — a clear twenty-first-century import — and its bosses: Miss Anne Treleaven and Mrs Felicity Frame. Married women, mothers, and women who belong to “traditional” feminine professions (nurses and teachers) are portrayed negatively. The Agency offers girls “an independent life” through education, training “women to do more than teach children and serve meals” (*Agency* 25). Whereas training to be a spy includes observation skills and self-defence (27), being a governess is passive, involving “letter-writing, reading aloud, good French and a genteel taste in literature” (38). Mary quickly absorbs these views. At times she sounds mocking, inviting the reader to agree that being a spy is better than being “a good *little* governess, or a nice *little* nurse, or a quiet *little* clerk” (*Tower* 26, italics mine).

This philosophy also embraces a bitter understanding of marriage as leading to a restrictive and conventional life. Becoming a wife is seen as depending on men (*Agency* 21), and matrimony is thus “an uncertain gamble” (25). Marriages are “complicated beasts”, joining couples who would “kill and dismember their ‘better halves’” (329). Although marriage and children are for *some* women, “there are others that long for more” (257), a statement that diminishes the roles of wife and mother.

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<sup>134</sup> When asked if she is sorry to have cut her long hair, a symbol of femininity, Mary’s matter-of-fact answer is that it had to be done; furthermore, she does not spare much thought on how long it will take to grow back (*Tower* 234).

Lee's Victorian London is a particularly oppressive world. The way the Agency's strong feminist philosophy is voiced makes this evident. It exploits "the stereotype of the meek female ... [the] foolish, silly, weak women" to their advantage (26). Its agents are maids, governesses, and lady companions, considered "humble, powerless characters" because "few people would suspect a subservient woman of being intelligent and observant" (*Tower* 10), making them effective spies.

Despite the progressive "New Woman" feminist approach, the Agency ultimately fails. The second adventure hints at a problem: while Frame believes recruiting male agents is needed "to grow as an organisation" (*Tower* 155), Treleaven argues that the idea is "inimical" to the Agency's goals (155). By the end of the third adventure, the disagreement ends their partnership: "Everything's changing, Mary: London. Politics. Society. The empire. Everything except the Agency. I don't think that's right and I'm damned worried about being left behind" (*Tunnel* 320). Given the fact that feminism was in its infancy in the 1860s, when the book is set, the appeal to "treat men as allies" (321–22) seems to be responding to contemporary sensibilities rather than discussing Victorian tactics.

The Agency's collapse undermines the powerful feminist message of the previous books. These two women, who have so far been role models of independent, professional women, are drastically diminished in Mary's (and the reader's) view. Mary sees them arguing: "sparring, sniping at each other like petty girls, rather than conversing as intelligent adults" (*Tunnel* 320). The most feminist partner, Treleaven — who wants to keep the Agency — is also the less attractive: "thin, plain and quietly serious"; while Frame — who wants to admit men — is the opposite: "tall and curvy", a "striking beauty with a rich laugh" (*Agency* 17).

The topic of marriage is also revisited in the last book. When Mary has an interview with Queen Victoria, the monarch's pronouncement on marriage challenges the views Frame and Treleaven have passed on to Mary. Given their Agency's failure and the Queen's depiction as a courageous leader, the latter's advice is read positively. When Mary says she has no intentions of giving up her work, the Queen declares that such work is "unsuitable for a married woman" (*Tunnel* 352). Mary then declares she will never marry, at which point the Queen declares that "[m]arriage and motherhood are among the highest expressions of a woman's abilities", adding that "[m]arriage is a blessed state" (353).

Lee's use of Queen Victoria as an exemplary character here deserves attention, especially considering the strong "revisionism" her portrayal exhibits. Perhaps the greatest symbolic figure of the nineteenth century, Queen Victoria's widowhood (1861) had, in reality, alienated her from her subjects. As Loeb has shown, late-Victorian marketing and advertising made an effort to reclaim her image, implying that despite her humanity, Victoria was part of a "immaterial body, limitless, changeless and ethereal" (82). The transformation was, as Loeb argues, evident at the Queen's Diamond Jubilee.

Lee adopts this bifurcated picture, but (unlike Loeb) represents the Queen's two sides as admirably compatible — and suggestive of what twenty-first-century feminism believes women can achieve. In *Tunnel*, Lee introduces the Queen with all her titles, but she is also playing with her children (10). This contrast — between her roles as monarch and mother — is underlined: she is a "[m]onarch, head of state, empress of the globe — and mother to a weak ... heir" (132). However, this is also contested, as Mary tells the reader that "[t]he Queen moved between her roles with ease" (11). Throughout, the idea of a professional woman, here in the highest capacity in the land, is favourably balanced with that of mother.

The Queen appears as the supreme authority, deserving of respect not because of her title but because she behaves accordingly.<sup>135</sup> The Queen's authority, her "absolute command" (177) is admired; so is her "cold", "precise", and "quiet" voice (84), which reflects her authority and determination. She is interested in "truth" (87), justice, national security, and — above all — her subjects. Informed that the sewers under the palace are full of explosives that could be lighted at any minute, she acts decidedly: "Not for Queen Victoria panic and its attendant chaos" (289). The Queen is not only logical and in control of the situation, but she is also a powerful and selfless monarch who puts her people first. She evacuates the palace, and only agrees to leave it after it is empty, placing herself in a military position when her decision is questioned: "what sort of general would flee before the enemy, leaving his troops to scabble their way to safety as best they could" (290).

Victoria may be a "short-legged bulk" but she is agile and smooth in her movements (35). That a somehow matriarchal body does not, in any way, diminish her

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<sup>135</sup> In her eagerness to invest the royal figure with all her glory, Lee commits a historical blunder, discussing the Queen as the "Empress of India" (*Tunnel* 290) in 1860, when the title was only given in 1876.



capacity to be a physically active heroine mirrors the idea that, while her physicality might seem bound, her “monarchic spirit” has no limits. When she confronts the Earl of Wintermarch (who has been plotting to kill her) she belittles him, asserting this idea by quoting Queen Elizabeth: “I have but the body of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and of a king of England, too” (310). Despite the words, she has just physically proven her body is not as feeble. She climbs down to the sewers under the palace where the explosives are and refuses protection even when a gun is pointed at her. The reader is encouraged to admire her: Mary observes that the Queen has “behaved less like a doughty monarch and mother of nine, and more like a member of the Agency!” (313). The Agency — thought it is dissolved — has always championed strong, independent and fearless women. Lee modifies the image of the Queen to offer her readers a modern heroine. She offers a role model who, despite her daring heroics, emphasises the importance of “womanhood”.

The Queen nevertheless gives Mary the means to be fully independent, a new status that makes her “freer” and more “powerful” but also “lonelier” (356). In the end, the questions regarding professional accomplishment, independence, and marriage are resolved by having Mary propose a partnership to James Easton, who in turn proposes they marry at some point in the future. Unlike Pullman’s Sally, Mary seems to keep her power within the narrative, but it is arguably kept because she does not get married. The novel suggests that, although independent is possible, a woman is incomplete if she does not eventually fulfil the role of wife (and presumably mother). The solution to Mary’s loneliness, and to the failure of the Agency’s enterprise, appears to be joining forces with the opposite sex, tempering the strong feminist message that started the series.

Regardless of the period depicted in these contemporary books, the “New Woman” of the late nineteenth-century is never truly evoked. There are either stereotypically passive women, or highly “contemporary” girls, an arbitrary dichotomy that favours clear-cut distinctions by underselling an important period in the feminist movement. Within the Victorian context, then, it would seem that women are free (as defined by these modern authors) only when they suppress their femininity. The implicit message is not altogether feminist. In fact, it is almost counterintuitive to choose the Victorian period, an era when women led highly restricted lives, in which to introduce empowered “modern” girls to underline the differences and changes society has gone through — and then to have these girls behave like boys so they can function

within society. There is a profound sense that there are certain inalienable truths: boys will always enjoy more freedom and have more fun than girls who are ultimately destined to fulfil the “boring” and “conventional” roles of mothers and wives. A dichotomy emerges: a “girly-girl”, as Mog would put it, is passive, shy, beautiful, and generally dull; whereas a “detective-type” girl is masculine, active, and intelligent. But being the latter means renouncing a personal life and embracing spinsterhood. There is certainly a positive attempt to destabilise such stereotypical gender behaviours. However, the effort is complicated and weakened. Although gender performativity can be subversive, its possibilities are undercut by having the girls *be* boys in order to show their abilities — once they stop “playing” the role, they simply reverse to “normal behaviour”. In other words, while these modern authors openly challenge Victorian attitudes to gender, there are limitations to their feminism.

#### *Adapting Victorian Conventions for Modern Readers: Female Detectives and Male Assistants*

Girls are the main characters of most of these “Victorian” adventures, but they are not alone, often acting with a male counterpart. These partnerships echo those of Victorian detective fiction.

Victorian detectives are, generally, superior to their assistants — socially and/or intellectually. The first detective novel of British literature, Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone* (1868), provides an example. Franklin Blake assumes the role of the detective to find out who has stolen an Indian jewel, the moonstone, from Miss Rachel Verinder’s bedroom. As a gentleman, he can not only question people, but also make them write detailed accounts of their recollections. However, it is only with Ezra Jennings’s help that Blake is able to solve the mystery. Jennings acts as Blake’s partner, but is his social inferior. This inferiority is emphasised by making the doctor’s assistant “other”: he is a man of mixed parentage, with “gipsy” traits (371), and is generally disliked. His intelligence might be crucial to solving the crime — he discovers how the jewel was taken — but he is a subordinate to Blake, the hero who ends up marrying Miss Rachel. The other pairing in the novel is more conventional. The Verinders’ steward, Gabriel Betteredge, acts as a foil to both Blake and, most importantly, Sergeant Cuff. Cuff anticipates Sherlock Holmes in his intelligence and renown, and the Holmes and Watson partnership can be compared to this earlier pairing

of Cuff and Betteredge. Like Watson, Betteredge is socially inferior to Cuff, and he also narrates and explains much of Cuff's procedures. Betteredge lacks his partner's intelligence, although he is very interested in the process. The partnership Conan Doyle imagines between the detective Sherlock Holmes and his faithful friend and chronicler, Dr Watson, also follows this dynamic. Watson's narration from a "common man" perspective allows the reader to identify with him, thus becoming equally enthralled by Holmes's superior abilities. As Julian Symons notes in *Bloody Murder*, this allows "the brilliant intelligence of the detective ... to shine more brightly through the comparative obtuseness of his friend" (46).

While pairs reminiscent of these two examples reappear in most of these young adult texts, their nature and function are adapted in several significant ways. The "Watson" characters — the "sidekicks" — are not there to chronicle the detective's adventures, nor to underline their partner's intelligence. The clever/inept binary is therefore absent. The introduction of a female element into the equation complicates matters, and creates its own binary. There is still a sense of unbalance; and the gender distinction (modern) harmonises with the class distinction inherited from the Victorian detective fiction — present in *The Moonstone* and in the Holmes stories. It is the men who are upper-class, regardless of whether their female partners play main investigators or sidekicks.

The relationship between Nathaniel Wolfe and Lily Campion in Brian Keaney's *Nathaniel Wolfe* exhibits this class distinction. They meet by chance, become friends, and work together; but while they are equals in terms of their intelligence, at the beginning Lily's social situation places her slightly above Nathaniel. Both are East End orphans who have had a rough life. Nevertheless, Lily has proper employment in a respectable household — and proper manners. When Nathaniel, having collapsed from hunger, devours his food like a "wild animal" (*Haunting* 80), it is Lily who notices and asks him to eat slower (80). Although she has a social advantage, it is Nathaniel who — partly with her help — becomes the "gentleman detective". He can read because his mother taught him (86).<sup>136</sup> Inevitably, he discovers his aristocratic background and ascends to a life of ease and comfort. His grandfather, William Monkton, is a magistrate, popularly known as "The Monk", a name at which "most criminals shuddered" (177), establishing a family connection between the old and new

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<sup>136</sup> Moreover, he can correctly identify an elegant and curved script as "copperplate" (*Haunting* 86), a knowledge of lettering that points to his gentry ancestry.

generation. By contrast, Lily keeps working. Her employers' status declines as they lose their fortune, while Nathaniel's status advances. Even though she becomes a companion, Lily still thinks and feels like a servant (*Bodysnatchers* 167), a fact he notices. Despite his complaints about his new boring life — “kitted like a gentleman ... rubbing shoulders with the wealthiest people in the country” (8-9) — it is a welcome change. He has no qualms about jumping into a cab with his grandfather: “on his way home, leaving behind the bustling streets of London with ... all their menace and all their shadowy secrets” (198). Nathaniel has become a country gentleman, and “the slums of East London” (8) are no longer associated with personal misery; instead, they are synonymous with the excitement and adventure he faces as a detective. Keaney thus affirms aristocratic superiority, as the reader is to rejoice in Nathaniel's new circumstances, and not worry about Lily, whom he has no difficulty leaving behind. She is condemned to stay in London and can only participate in the adventures if she is called on by him, and so forever remains a servant of one kind or another.

Mary Hooper's *Fallen Grace* (2010) also underlines this class dynamic. Grace Parkes and her sister Lily are orphans who have been poor since infancy, after their father never returned from a venture in the US and their mother died. The girls are forced to sell watercress to avoid the workhouse. There are, however, signs of their former refinement. Their speech is not cockney, Grace can read, and their clothing, though mended and worn, is of good quality (33). Grace stands to inherit a considerable fortune that would place the sisters in a higher position than that of their parents. When a family proves intent on stealing their fortune, Grace's “associate”, the young legal clerk James Solent, appears. Despite Grace's position as the main protagonist, Solent's social position means he has knowledge and a certain amount of influence, and he effectively becomes the central detective figure. He gives the orders and plans strategies, sidelining Grace as a spectator to her own adventure — she anxiously asks him, “Is there anything that *I* can do?” (220, italics original). Her most active role is hiding in a cupboard in order to steal important documents. Solent solves the inheritance's problems and finds Grace's sister, Lily, explaining to her how he did so (277) in a similar fashion to Holmes addressing Watson. Aside from having a female protagonist, then, the novel accords with Victorian detective conventions.

In Y. S. Lee's *Agency* series, Mary shares her investigations with the engineer and “casual detective” James Easton. On one level, the relationship between them is like that between Grace and Solent. Easton is socially superior: a sophisticated youth

who has a successful engineering firm. His life is one of private carriages, servants, and general ease. Mary is, as explained in Chapter Four, an orphan rescued from the gallows. Her formal education at Miss Scrimshaw's Academy for Girls has not changed her rough behaviour, which is ascribed to her lower social class. Even though she can drink with working men, when she is at Easton's house, she feels intimidated because of his social superiority. She curls into herself (*Tower* 232) and becomes aware of her manners — her over-loud expressions are out of place in a house where even the servants tread noiselessly (234). Despite all this, Easton is *not* the superior partner in their association. From the beginning, theirs is a collaborative partnership, a proposal advanced by him on the grounds of practicality: together, they can cover more ground. They shake hands to seal their “gentleman's pact” as equal partners, with Mary advising Easton not to second-guess or protect her (*Agency* 133). That gender does not play a role in their partnership is evident in how they both save each other: she pulls him out of a burning building and, in turn, he lifts her up from dangling dangerously off Big Ben's belfry. Although at times he attempts to impose his authority, she retains a position of power. On a number of occasions, Easton accuses Mary of behaving recklessly (277), but she refuses to take heed and her actions always bring positive results.

The Victorian “odd couple” aspect of the relationship between detective and assistant is generally preserved in these upper/lower-class duos. They are distinguished, however, by the female component — introducing romance, despite the emancipation of the women concerned.

## **Conclusion**

Our authors resort to the most primitive of the Victorian criminal models available to them — abandoning the middle-class criminals of Conan Doyle in favour of brutes like Sikes, Fagin, and Hyde. This characterization borrows elements from Victorian criminology. Inner corruption is implied by physical ugliness. Like their Victorian counterparts, they are East Enders or foreigners. In perpetuating the “criminal type”, our twentieth-and twenty-first-century authors are striving for a kind of period authenticity. At the same time they may be voicing present-day anxieties arising from present-day socio-economic divisions and social disorder.

Since these are remorseless criminals who generally offer no viable justification for their criminal acts, their deaths are justified, bringing order and peace to their victims and to society. The expiation of wrongdoings through death is something the reader is invited to understand as justice. Closure is paramount. But can this account for the often graphic conclusions which add a fresh layer to these “new” Victorian stories? It may be that twentieth-and twenty-first century authors are catering to an audience that has become desensitised. Michael Cart has accounted for young adult horror fiction in this way — and his suggestion also seems applicable to the material I have surveyed here. Readers, Cart suggests, “[j]aded, numbed and dehumanized ... seem to need ever more visceral doses of violence to jump-start their numbed emotions and sensibilities” (140).

While the Victorian criminal is mainly left untouched, the detective figure is adapted. Indeed, the authors have modified the Victorian detective story to accommodate the twentieth-century figure of the woman. The dangers and frustrations of the Victoria era as a male-oriented world work to underline the emancipation of modern women. Even so, conservatism is evident in the general insistence on the difficulties women face in reconciling the professional with the domestic.

## CHAPTER SIX VICTORIAN VALUES REDUX

In the Victorian period, penny dreadfuls and the boys' adventures of Henty, Stevenson, and Ballantyne actively promoted a particular view of Britishness, helping to cement its values in its young readers' minds, preparing them for the task of running the empire. Critics have identified a combination of imperialism, Christianity, capitalism, commercialism, chivalry, and patriotism, a tightly woven set of values identified with the Victorian national ethos that permeated the literature of the time. As we shall see, the contemporary "Victorian" texts discussed in this chapter are similar in that they, too, promote a distinct sense of nationhood. They adapt nineteenth-century values to deal with contemporary concerns absent in Victorian literature. What follows will focus on these contemporary works' agendas, namely Pullman's defence of socialism in the 80s and Updale's support of patriotism in 2000. This focused discussion exposes clearly how authors working within the same genre, using similar material, tropes and motifs, can employ them to very different ends.

### **The Narrator's Voice: A Subtle Guide**

Before discussing these authors' views, I would like to take a slight detour to draw attention to the stories' narrators. Pullman's and Updale's narrators voice and endorse views mostly associated with modern middle-class and upper-class sensibilities; intimating values that are often implicitly understood as those of the potential readers. The importance of noticing the narrator's influential but often subtle voice — which reveals a mixture of nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first concerns — will become apparent in the later discussion of the authors.

Pullman's third-person omniscient narrator in the *Lockhart* series occasionally provides guidance about what to think of characters we have yet to encounter firsthand. For example, describing different characters, the narrator's assertiveness and doubt are telling:

Firstly, a gentleman in a cold house read a newspaper.

Secondly, an old — what shall we call her? Till we know her better, let us give her the benefit of the doubt, and call her lady — an old lady entertained a lawyer to tea. (*Ruby* 15)

Such juxtaposition indicates the “gentleman” reading the newspaper is a kind person, whereas the narrator’s hesitation on how to better name the old woman already casts doubts over her character — she turns out to be the evil Mrs Holland.<sup>137</sup> Thus this is a reliable narrator.

This narrator aligns himself with the reader, addressing us in a warm, confidential manner, revealing information the characters do not know about themselves. His position at an ontological level outside the story world reinforces his authority and connection to the modern reader. The narrator is in the present, which is indicated by his mentioning of how things were “in those days” (26). When he explains that Sally’s “independence of mind” makes her like a “girl of *today*” (63, italics mine), he is referring to the time in which the book is written — rather than when it is set — and this is an indirect compliment to the reader.

The narrator’s intrusions mostly lack markers, helping his voice become transparent and, pass by unquestioned. The descriptions of the East End have been discussed in Chapter One, but without considering the role played specifically by the narrator. In the following passage, Pullman’s narrator introduces the reader to the East End:

Beyond the Tower of London, between St Katherine’s Docks and Shadwell New Basin, lies the area known as Wapping: a district of docks and warehouses, of *crumbling* tenements and *rat-haunted* alleys ... Of all the grim corners of Wapping, none was *grimmer* than Hangman’s Wharf ... Lodgings, in the East End, is a word that covers a multitude of horrors. At its worst, it means a room streaming with damp and poisonous with stench, with a rope stretched across the middle. Those far gone in drink or poverty can pay a penny for the privilege of slumping against the rope, to keep themselves off the floor while they sleep. At its best, it means a decent, cleanly place where they change the linen as often as they remember ... There, a bed for the night *would cost you* threepence ... You

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<sup>137</sup> The gentleman is Major Marchbanks, who despite his horrendous behaviour in India — selling baby Sally for the ruby of the title — is a good man, weak but repentant enough.



were never alone at Holland's Lodgings. If the fleas disdained your flesh, the bedbugs had no snobbery; they'd take a bite out of anyone. (16–17, italics mine)

This is an authoritative representation of the scene. The narrator deals with facts when discussing both geographical location and lodgement details. This approach is emphasised through the narrator's use of the second person. However, it is the conditional "would" that ties the reference to the reader, who is the "you" addressed, so that we get a sense of the narrator speaking across the scene to us. Since there is no character actually in a position to make these observations, it is the narrator's speech that is opinionated. He assumes that the value attributed to cleanliness and privacy is shared by the reader, and even assumes a twentieth-century viewpoint. This creates a specific position that continues to posit the East End as the underworld, with all that such discourse entails.

In a similar fashion to Pullman's, Eleanor Updale's third-person narrator in the *Montmorency* series passes on specific views and values. While he does not address the reader so overtly, there are instances, subtle interventions, where we can extrapolate the voice as his rather than the characters'. Discussing Dr Farcett's operations on Montmorency, the narrator comments: "So it was that the relationship between the doctor and the pitiful heap of bloodstained clothing had developed into a project. The creature didn't die" (*Montmorency* 3). The narrator is recounting this episode, from a superior ontological level than the characters in the story, as he is removed from the action. As explained, the reader is encouraged to sympathise with Montmorency from the start, and to understand that in spite of being a criminal he is not a bad man; that he is flawed but good. The narrator's description reinforces this purpose, expressing a pity for the bloodstained rag of man that the reader is meant to mirror — especially since the passage comes immediately after Dr Farcett's own cold reflections, as he sees Montmorency as a subject to illustrate his theories (3).

The narrator can also be "heard" in descriptions, just like Pullman's narrator when he discusses the East End. In the following passage, Montmorency is about to get a room in a lodging house:

A barefoot girl in her early teens was sitting on the doorstep. She was wearing a tattered petticoat, and her long hair hung down in a nest of tangles around her

shoulders. She looked tired as she rubbed a filthy shoe with an even filthier rag.  
(49)

The description carries a tone of voice that could hardly belong to Montmorency who, just released from prison, is wearing a “damp shirt” (45) and a night-watchman’s “filthy” boots — deemed so by the worker’s wife, not Montmorency (46). The emphasis on the lack of cleanliness has to do with a characterization of the poor and a class differentiation that is carried out by the narrator. These subtle “colourations” of the action can be found in many passages.

A more striking example is given when, after thwarting a terrorist threat, Montmorency and Fox-Selwyn wrap up the case. The narrator takes a moment to deviate from the plot and inform the reader of the unknown consequences the spies’ actions have had on other people’s lives:

But Montmorency had been wrong to say that there would be no losers ... The directors of the Gas Company, still doing their duty to “national security” by maintaining the fiction about the blast, looked for someone to blame. The poor man who had (faultlessly) welded that section of pipe was dismissed from his job. He was dead by his own hand within a year. (*Rocks* 302)

The narrator’s information is unknown to the characters but his tone indicates a criticism of such ignorance as well as a disapproval of the Gas Company’s actions. This aside is specifically directed to the reader, subtly imparting a moral lesson regarding actions and their consequences.

Such examples illustrate how the narrators of these texts advance specific ideas and values, mostly associated with a middle- to upper-class understanding of the world. Victorian concerns and contemporary preoccupations are amalgamated and this colouring affects what is depicted as “good” and “bad” when it comes to politics

### **Politics at Play: Pullman’s Defence of Socialism**

In a 1992 article on the *Sally Lockhart* adventures (1985-1994), Pullman declares that what he wanted to talk about, especially in *The Tiger in the Well*, was socialism:

It's had a bad press in the past few years; it's been depicted as the dreary source of every kind of repression, misery, and failure. I wanted to show that it has a better history than that, that there was a time when it was the best response of the best people to the conditions around them. I wanted to celebrate a little. (107–108)

Pullman appears to have been targeting the values promoted by Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister of Britain from 1979 to 1990. Thatcher's political appropriation of "Victorian values" is famous. She associated them with her grandmother's hard work, self-reliance, and national pride (Joyce 3); but also used the Victorians to discuss self-discipline in the context of social welfare (Evans 144). This was a simplification of such values, used to support a specific ideology, rather than reflecting the Victorians' "actual" values. Pullman engages in the same process as Thatcher, by taking the Victorian era and infusing it with his own ideological beliefs, exaggerations and distortions, in hopes of changing, as he says himself, a present-day perception.

In the same article, Pullman confesses that he chose the Victorian context as "a time when the seeds of the present day were germinating" (107).<sup>138</sup> This further underlines the existing links between the Victorians and contemporary Britain which Pullman obviously believes are still relevant. His implication is that socialism had its roots in the Victorian era, probably alluding to the likes of Sidney and Beatrice Webb and the Fabian Society. His view of socialism as a response from the "best people" is a retrospective judgement: he is attempting to respond to the problems of the 80s and early 90s, as the movement was demonised by Thatcherism. These declarations provide us with Pullman's clear agenda, although the novels only realize his stated intentions to a certain degree, as socialism remains a rather vague concept in the texts.

There are not many activists in the stories. The two women who work at the Spitalfields' Mission are charity workers rather than socialists while other socialists (like the men Fred visits) are not given much narrative space. The first time trade unions are discussed is when a Mrs Seddon talks about her brother as "a trade unionist. A socialist. A good man, *mind*" (*Shadow* 154, italics mine), implying that this is an unusual combination. Later on we see the said socialist, the unemployed Sidney Paton, mainly through Fred's eyes. Despite his obvious poverty, the way Fred views Paton's

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<sup>138</sup> Present day for Pullman is actually Thatcher's Britain.

place already predisposes the reader to be sympathetic. The house stands for homeliness (warm light and a cat by the hearth), cleanliness (things are scrubbed and gleam), and education. This last value is most important, with Paton talking of reading Dickens, Thackeray, and Walter Scott in his now ample spare time.<sup>139</sup>

Nevertheless, Fred's good impression of Paton is not founded on his socialist principles. In fact, there is a sense of mockery in the descriptions of the workers' Literary and Philosophical Institute. When Paton shows Fred around, it reads almost like an overly proud child showing his progress to an uninterested adult. Paton takes Fred "into a plain-fronted house that bore a painted sign *proclaiming* it to be The Workingmen's Literary and Philosophical Institute" (163, italics mine). The long name is contrasted with the humble establishment, a pattern that continues to be emphasized as Paton — obviously proud — explains: "'We've got a fine library here, Mr Garland,' he said. 'We have a debate on the second Tuesdays of every month, and courses of lectures when we can raise a subscription for them'" (164). When Fred goes into the library, it feels anti-climatic — it is a small room with a few chairs (164). He understands that the men are proud — and should be — but when one of them starts to tell him the history of the institute, Fred becomes aware of how thirsty he is and there is irony in how he describes his departure: "After declining an invitation to see over the rest of the building and inspect the accounts of the Cooperative Society (a pleasure he said he'd reserve for his next visit) he said goodbye" (168). The reference to "pleasure" is ironic and adds to the belittlement of the society.

A later side note in the narrative gives the impression of the futility of the organisation, despite its library and courses. After the closing of the works, the workers attempt to open it as a cooperative bicycle manufactory but their efforts fail and it is only in the hands of a big firm that makes railway engines — a iconic symbol of British industry and progress — that it finally prospers (276).

This characterisation of socialism carries on to the next book. The first time a meeting of the "League of Democratic Socialist Associations" is described, it is a chaotic scene with people arguing in four different languages over which should be used for their new journal. Fearing a stalemate, the members finally turn to the end of the room to ask what Daniel Goldberg thinks. The stories' socialist *par excellence*, he sits "furiously scribbling" (*Tiger* 26) and smoking a cigar; and answers with one simple

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<sup>139</sup> As discussed regarding Jim's reading habits in Chapter Four, there is a clear link in the narratives between literature and moral stance. Educated people who read literature are never the villains.

word is that he can continue writing without paying attention to the controversy he has generated. It is only when he is asked to explain that he raises his “harsh and powerful” (24) voice to give his reasons logically and concisely. The entire room is transfixed, and this dramatic introduction signals his power. However, Goldberg’s mastery throws the organisation’s limitations into relief. The futility of the debate, and the implied uselessness of the meeting itself, is reinforced as we are told that “the Democratic Socialists settled back to enjoy the business of debating what they all knew would be the result” (26). Fred’s and Goldberg’s episodes diminish socialism, despite Pullman’s wishes. There is a sense of “good intentions”, but, the men conducting these sessions and heading these societies are seen as ineffectual and more inclined to pursue theory than concrete actions.

While the movement is projected in an unflattering light, much of the discussion about socialism is centred on Goldberg and his actions, and he is a good man whose credentials are reinforced in multiple ways. he is respected on the continent (in Amsterdam) — being “recognized”, “hailed”, “surrounded”, and “applauded” by old people, academics, workers, trade unionists, and young girls (96). Though a man of consequence, he has also saved orphan boy Bill from prison and arranged for him to learn to read. More importantly, the novel’s heroine, Sally, has admired him for his writing before meeting him in person:

... she found an article by Daniel Goldberg. She was surprised, because she’d thought that the *Jewish Chronicle* wasn’t especially sympathetic to socialism, and because she’d had the impression that Goldberg was some kind of agitator or demagogue. But this article was calm and closely reasoned ... He wrote well. His tone was light and persuasive and clear, and she found herself grudgingly admitting the force of his case. (70)

Goldberg’s writing is used to show what a perceptive and powerful individual he is, it reaffirms the importance that education and the written word have within the texts. Although the reader is invited to admire Goldberg, he is more admirable for his intelligence and rhetorical abilities than for his politics, which are vaguely defined.

That said, Pullman makes an effort to explain what socialism is *not*. From the beginning, it is clear that socialists abominate anarchists (*Tiger* 23). Bill, who occupies a similar position to the reader, is used as a focalizer; he is young, politically

inexperienced, and anxious to be taken seriously. While Goldberg is leading a talk, Bill finds a group of young men, whose characters are labelled by their “grim” and “fanatical” looks (97) and by their copious drinking. They invite Bill over and introduce him to the “political meaning of violence”, to how it can be “pure and noble” (99). In their company he learns a new word, “terrorism”, which is mixed up with nationalism, freedom, communism, anarchism, and dynamite (99). Once outside, Goldberg’s reaction to Bill’s talk with Cohn is unequivocal. He grabs Bill and pins him against a wall, telling him that those sort of men are “poison”, “hangers-on” and “parasites” (100). He berates Bill, but also trusts his reasoning:

They’ve got nothing to do with us, nothing to do with progress, nothing to do with socialism ... Use your voice. Use your mind. Use words. Tell people. Argue. Organize. That’s what works. That’s what progress means. That’s where sense and courage and decency lie ... Use your wits. Use your eyes. Compare. Listen. *Think*. Who are the good people? Who are the bad? Use your *mind*! (100)

While frightened, Bill is greatly empowered by Goldberg. He is encouraging critical thought, and although he borders on the simplistic — “good” or “bad” people — his speech is intended to shake apathy.

Returning to Bill’s encounter with Cohn and company, it is evident that they are trying to convince Bill of the righteousness of their cause by discussing freedom and nationalism before introducing more violent concepts. The idea here of nationalism and young people getting dragged into the cause to then carry out terrorist acts in the name of freedom echoes the troubles experienced by the UK regarding Northern Ireland and the IRA. The latter’s attacks had relented from the scale they reached during the 70s, but were still a concern when Pullman was writing — for example, in 1984 an assassination attempt on Prime Minister Thatcher resulted in the death of several officials. Pullman is obviously distancing his fictional socialists from anarchism or terrorism.

Cohn and the terrorists resort to alcohol to enlist the young, and therefore impressionable, Bill. Goldberg does not need to, as he possesses the magnetic and oratory they lack, which seem to be, at times, the only difference. The very next scene finds Bill listening to Goldberg at a hall. Even though he cannot understand German, Bill is so “held in thrall to the voice and the man’s personality”, by his “passion and

humour and courage and vision” (101), that he joins others in cheering for what the narrator — for it can hardly be Bill’s language here — describes as the “hope” and the “intellectual force” (101) of Goldberg’s speech. Despite the lecture he has received, Bill never applies such questioning to Goldberg’s actions. This scenario is repeated when Goldberg faces a mob of workers about to trash a Jewish neighbourhood. The workers have been listening to organised “alien immigration” talks that blame the Jews for the lack of work, and further accuse them of corrupting the purity of the English “stock” (307). This manner of thinking has been purposely promoted and spread in pubs, with the reinforcement of alcohol for the listeners. Goldberg is able to turn this discourse around, and avert the gathering storm by convincingly telling the workers the same story from another perspective. But, though Goldberg’s gift is admirable, there are dangers to his rhetorical powers. He persuades Bill to mug somebody and get into a brawl. The former is justified because Tubb is a rent-collector who has previously made unsavoury comments regarding Jews (47).<sup>140</sup> Bill never questions these actions. They are justified and it is part of the nostalgic “good old fun” that Pullman indulges in the series (see Chapter Four). These are criminal actions nonetheless.

Since we trust Goldberg and understand his brand of politics to be “good”, Pullman’s larger celebration of socialism is therefore contained. There seems to be a contest between different discourses — anarchism, anti-Semitism, socialism — which triumph merely according to the effectiveness of those who preach them, with the listeners being nothing more than a pliable mass at the mercy of such men’s oratorical powers.

If we consider the emphasis on the poor and their abject living conditions in *Tiger*, it seems significant that there is more blame than constructive solutions. This is well-illustrated by the aforementioned scene where Mr Goldberg stops a mob from attacking Jews in a London neighbourhood. These are unemployed, and therefore desperate, workers but, as he faces the crowd, Goldberg views them not as comrades, but as a threat — “[b]ig men with hard fists and muscles” and “hard narrow faces” (382). They might be physically powerful but they are easily manipulated. In order to avoid the imminent disaster, Goldberg tells them a fable because he knows that people

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<sup>140</sup> Even when Tubb begs Bill and his friend to let him go because he is just a poor man trying to make a living (*Tiger* 51), Bill hits and kicks him. Although Goldberg is never shown directly asking Bill to do the job, Bill goes back to see him afterwards. He gets a cut, and so does Goldberg “for expenses” (56), while the rest is given to the Jewish Shelter. This gesture — a sort of Robin Hood justice — seems to be there to balance out the violent incident.

want to have their own experiences voiced (385). Of course, his supposition implies that they cannot do so for themselves. In his fable, Goldberg invents characters such as “Fartbelly the foreman” (384), and by mocking him, he not only elicits laughter from the crowd but aligns himself with them. Once they are on his side, he proceeds to tell them who is to blame for their situation: the masters they never see “except when they sweep past in their carriages and splash you with mud” (387). The use of the word “masters”, the way he addresses his audience directly — “you know”, “our friend”, “ask yourself” — and his imagery emphasise the class gap. At the same time, it targets the disdain the higher social circles have for those below. Ultimately, Goldberg accuses the rich of “sacrificing” the workers’ children and refusing to pass laws to improve their conditions. The list includes landlords, factory owners, members of Parliament, judges, “Lord This and the Earl of That and the Duke of Something Else — they’re the ones who go in for the human sacrifice. They’re the real murderers” (388). Addressed to an already excited crowd, his speech is as inflammatory as the ones given by Mr Arnold Fox which led the workers to attempt an attack on the Jews in the first place. Goldberg is immediately arrested by the police, but this act unites the Jews and Gentiles in sympathy for him. The way he manipulates the crowd with his fables and turns them towards a new enemy is worrying. He does not incite violence in this instance, but his speech suggests a violence he is supposed to be opposed to. Goldberg and his movement dwell on both sides of the law, implying a certain moral compromise.<sup>141</sup>

### **Politics at Play: Updale’s Defence of National Security**

Updale’s world is similar to Pullman’s, and yet different. They share contempt for anarchists and violence, but Updale’s anarchists include socialists. While Pullman focuses on the middle class, Updale concentrates on the upper classes who, the reader is told, are defending the nation from harm. Both seem to be supporting different Victorian factions, each of which accord with their contemporary circumstances and interests — Pullman’s desire to defend socialism in the 80s, Updale’s emphasis on the importance of patriotism and national security in 2000. While initially, Updale’s fiction, with its façade of historicity, corresponds to Victorian fears, it also projects the

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<sup>141</sup> Examples of this are not only the previously mentioned mugging and brawl he organizes, but also his dealings with Kid Mendel, who being a killer and a bank robber, is basically a mobster (*Tiger* 55).



post-September 11 nightmare of international terrorism and the fear of converging transnational terrorist groups.

One of the most reliable characters in the *Montmorency* series is Lord George Fox-Selwyn, who is one of the “Lord These” that Goldberg blames in his speech. In Updale’s world, he fights the workers and students who are political agitators and potential terrorists. The series is concerned with those who threaten the nation — discussed by Fox-Selwyn as “exiles” and “rebels” (*Montmorency* 186) — but neither he nor the narrator ever question their existence.<sup>142</sup> Nor is the question raised about whether there are genuine reasons behind these dissidents’ protests and hopes for a republic. Furthermore, Fox-Selwyn says there could be “trouble in every country where the rebels have managed to get organized and armed” (188). The rebels are thus equated with violence and the overthrow of the status quo — European monarchies — and are therefore seen as dangerous and negative. Over the four books, the “rebels” are labelled more and more as “criminals”, and the terms “bombers”, “anarchists”, and “terrorists” become interchangeable; all are represented by factory workers or students.

Updale’s depiction corresponds to the one popularized by Victorian papers, which conflated “[v]iolence, evil intentions, and conspiracy” as the characteristics of anarchists, “society’s enemy in every respect” (Shpayer-Makov 501). Identified similarly with socialists and Fenians, they were all referred to with the same imagery and rhetoric reserved for “other “deviant” groups” (492). The Victorian media’s characterization of anarchism as “a conspiracy intent on unleashing revolutionary violence upon the world with its unscrupulous criminal members” (487) offered only a partial and distorted picture on both counts. This label was particularly appealing at the end of the century as Britain’s internal challenges continued to place more and more pressure on its society’s stability. Facing a dwindling Empire, the horror of urban poverty, the decline of religion, the questioning of bourgeois values and women’s place in society, the stereotype fitted with Victorian anxieties:

The anarchist was associated with revolutionism and violence, and as such stood in opposition to the self-image of British society as an orderly and law-abiding community with a deep respect for legitimate authority and an instinctive dislike

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<sup>142</sup> Both “exile” and “rebel” carry political connotations as a faction opposes the regime in power. The words are used here negatively because the assumption is that the reader is aligned with the powers that be.

of violence ... the anarchist seemed to threaten all that bourgeois-liberal culture held in reverence. (492)

It is to this Victorian depiction of the anarchists that Updale resorts to, especially in the second and third books in the series, published in 2005 and 2006. In the text, the bombers and the criminals are foreigners (see discussion of criminals in Chapter Five). Increasingly, the threats of these foreign forces to the safety of the UK become the central point in all the plots. When it comes to finding the people responsible for a bombing, the Home Secretary suspects “Indians, Africans, Communists, Nihilists and assorted nutcases” (*Rocks* 72). George voices similar ideas, wondering if the Irish or the anarchists (99) are responsible, thus amalgamating both into the same movement. The Fenians are defined by the Home Secretary as “[n]ationalists who wanted their British rulers out of Ireland” (72). While his “rulers” might elicit sympathy, George’s belief that the Fenians are behind the bombings turns out to be justified, and the Fenians remain the “bad guys”. This is accentuated by how they recruit others to plant their bombs, preying on the poorest Irish in need of money. The physiognomy of O’Connell, the man responsible for the bombing (see pg. 153), corresponds to what Shpayer-Makov discusses as the Irish stereotype that consolidated in Britain after mid-nineteenth century: “terrorist ape-men”, “uncivilizable”, and unable to govern themselves (491).<sup>143</sup>

These threats change by the third instalment: no longer purely fictional, they start referring to actual historical events. Updale gives a sense of some sort of “truth”, weaved together from actual facts with fictional accounts. Both the historical assassinations of Elizabeth, Empress of Austria-Hungary (1898), and King Umberto I of Italy (1900) feature as important parts of the plots, together with the International Anti-Anarchist Conference in Rome (1898). However, Updale endorses popular Victorian beliefs, representing anarchist groups in Florence, London, and Paterson (USA) as part of a vast network of anarchists who are behind the “real” assassinations and the fictional frustrated bomb attempts. This is important because Updale favours Victorian anxieties — over historical facts — and uses them to voice her own worries regarding similar organizations in contemporary times. As Richard Jensen (among

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<sup>143</sup> O’Connell gets involved with the Fenians for the sake of his sick niece. This background story could be seen as Updale revealing these “rebels” and “terrorists” to be simply men. However, despite an attempt to humanize their plights, the overall impression, reinforced by the latter books, is that Updale is inviting the reader to believe the anti-anarchist propaganda.

others) explains, the notion that these isolated events were part of a large conspiracy was disseminated by the Victorian press. To quote Jensen:

... the assassinations and explosions of the [18]90s were almost invariably the doing of individuals on the fringes of anarchism, acting on their own rather than as part of groups or widespread conspiracies. Nevertheless, the press labelled these deeds 'anarchist' and linked them with miscellaneous libertarian groups throughout the Western world. (324)

According to Shpayer-Makov, this depiction was designed to distract readers from the social evils that these events were manifestations of (500). Gaetano Bresci, the historical figure who killed King Umberto, features in Updale's texts as he sets off from Paterson to Italy. The description is very subdued, and accurately mentions his participation in the writing of the anarchist paper *La Questione Sociale*. The plot also involves fictional Italian anarchist Malpensa, who is pictured as the "leader" of the anarchist network.<sup>144</sup> He charges Bresci with a mission that is never discussed. Later on, Bresci kills King Umberto. This helps reinforce the historically invalid conspiracy thesis. In Updale's text, the organization is responsible for the King's death, rather than Bresci as an individual acting on his own.<sup>145</sup> Even more interesting is that Malpensa is a fictional rendition of the real Enrrico Malatesta, an extremely popular anarchist.<sup>146</sup> Malatesta was in New Jersey at the same time as Bresci but no link was ever established. However, Updale takes up the conjecture and presents the whole as an undeniable worldwide conspiracy.<sup>147</sup> Two fictional attempts are merged with a real one.

The idea of the foreign "other" infiltrating the nation is again aligned with ideas of contagion (see Chapter Three). These threats are justification enough to use

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<sup>144</sup> Malpensa is described as a man of "swarthy face", "greasy hair" (*Rocks* 83) and a limp he gained in the (real) Bava Beccaris massacre — a riot in Milan where an Italian General forcibly repressed a group of demonstrators protesting the increased price of bread. This description of Malpensa plays with all the typical criminal stereotypes; an impression reinforced by his name — "Mal" means evil in Italian while "pensa" means think, suggesting "evil thoughts".

<sup>145</sup> This is the historical consensus, as Bresci's actions were part of what history books have labelled the "propaganda of the deed" — political, often violent acts serve as propaganda for the ideas behind such actions.

<sup>146</sup> The last names are very similar, both associated with something bad ("Mal").

<sup>147</sup> Malpensa is seen as organizing a three-fold attack: an attempt on Queen Margherita's life, a bomb at the London Hippodrome (inaugurated on the 15<sup>th</sup> January 1900) on the same night, and later on — it would seem — the regicide of the Italian monarch.

whatever means necessary in the name of national security, an approach that resonates, again, with modern concerns. The nation is presented as incorruptible: “Here in Britain we do things properly. We have the rule of the law” (*Revenge* 40). But, if the actions needed to protect the country are illegal, justice will simply turn a blind eye; as evident in the Police Inspector’s response to Montmorency’s explanation of how they will catch the anarchists: “I’m afraid I can’t hear you ... I can only thank you for your assistance in helping us counter the enemies of the queen and the empire” (55). Despite the contrast, the tone is not ironic — if Montmorency is caught breaking the law, Inspector Howard will not protect him (55). Updale presents both courses of action as equally valid and necessary.

### **Becoming “Other”: Changing Places**

In both Pullman’s and Updale’s novels, circumstances force young characters to abandon their comforts and experience the world from a different position, a strategy that advances the authors’ agendas.

Although Goldberg is posited as “the socialist” in Pullman’s text, it is Sally’s experience that exposes the horrors of workers’ exploitation to the readers. She starts off as a financial consultant, somebody who buys and sells shares and keeps a close eye on the market. The sweatshops that generate the profits and losses to be made are unknown to her. It is worthwhile to compare her reflection on reading Goldberg’s words to her own speech when confronting the Tzaddik. In the first case, she acknowledges knowing little about sweatshops and that she has a very vague idea of which industries are affected, but, despite thinking it is a horrible practice, “there was bound to be more to it than simply the malice and greed of the owners, as Goldberg was implying” (*Tiger* 71). Her experience in East End’s “crowded anonymity” (152), where she is forced to flee with her daughter, changes her perspective (see pg. 28)

Sally has come a long way from her initial thinking by the time that, near the end of the story, she calls the Tzaddik — who runs such operations — as well as the shareholders, speculators, capitalists, (and even herself), “greedy”. She accepts that by turning a blind eye to what has been going on, she has contributed to the city’s misery and become as responsible for it as the others are. The Tzaddik seems to represent the ultimate capitalist, as he exists secluded from the outside world, running a tremendous empire made of multiple shoddy businesses from the comfort of his home. Shot and

wounded by Sally, he is unable to perform the most basic tasks, and even relies on others to wipe his chin. His consumerism and uselessness is conveyed by his massive frame — he is “blubber”. Sally likens him to a greedy “little fat boy cramming sweets into his mouth, for ever and ever ...” (371). By becoming conscious of how workers live, Sally has come to understand how organizations such as the Tzaddik’s create and perpetuate poverty. This is the political consciousness which Pullman promotes. It is evident that the emphasis is on anti-capitalism and morals — forsaking materialism in favour of what is ethical — rather than on arguments in favour of socialism.

Significantly, Pullman achieves much more momentum through Sally’s anti-capitalist rally. While her anti-capitalist stance might not, on its own, diminish socialism, Pullman’s portrayal of socialists so far has been unflattering. We find from Goldberg’s actions that socialists have no qualms against dwelling on the wrong side of the law, or against telling “lies” and “stories”.

Just as Sally experiences the “other” side of life, moving from West to East London, Updale also tries to convey an understanding of the anarchists through Frank’s dealings with them. But, since they are the enemy to be vanquished, her attempt is doomed from the start, the initial premise is confirmed that what these people are interested in is violence.

As we have seen, Pullman chooses Bill as a focalizer, allowing the reader to view the world from a position akin to their own. Similarly, Updale creates an adolescent character, Frank — Fox-Selwyn’s nephew — to fulfil the same role. On the loose in Florence, Frank befriends a student at a museum, opening a door to the world of the anarchists. Soon, however, Frank realizes that Guido and his university friends are interested in much more than wine, playing cards, and staying late at cafés. A new dimension opens up in Frank’s life as he listens to them “talk animatedly about workers’ rights and fair shares for all” (*Assassins* 42), “about the evils of an economic system which forced some men to wait on others” (43). Such words almost echo Pullman’s. The passion and certainty of the discourse soon convinces Frank (although he is always happy to return to the comfort of his own apartments afterwards (43)). When the students learn of Empress Elizabeth’s murder, they celebrate in the belief that political change is coming. The whole experience, “the throbbing energy of the atmosphere” (95), grips Frank, and he ends up preparing firebombs to throw at the police. Without yet knowing Frank is involved, the youngsters become “dangerous criminals” (101). However, this is a judgement that Frank is ultimately exempt from.

In his case, the entire episode is justified by the fact that he let himself be carried away: “His friend’s vision hadn’t seemed dangerous or unjust amidst the camaraderie of the cafe, and was too powerful to resist in the museum” (106). After confessing his participation, the sobbing boy is told by George and Montmorency that he “deserves his freedom” (107) and they will find a way to get him out of trouble.

We might well ask why Frank is less guilty than the other youths, especially considering the consequences of their actions: a dead policeman. One could argue that Updale has included such an episode to force the reader to question Frank’s innocence. However, the issue of Frank’s responsibility is treated too briefly and dismissed too easily to truly be considered this way. He reflects on this matter only once, and in a manner that not only absolves him from responsibility but also concludes the matter on a positive note. About two of the deaths he has on his conscience, he thinks “he had been out of control: so caught up in the adolescent enthusiasms that he couldn’t foresee the consequences of his actions” (428). The reflection reads like a justification that reinforces the defence George and Montmorency insist upon.

The third death is Guido’s. This time the wording makes the reader see Frank more as an unwilling hero than a man to blame: “Guido was killed when Frank was doing good, saving countless people from bloody terror” (428). Frank is thus excused, but the Italians are held responsible, as George believes Frank “could not be blamed for his naivety in the face of sophisticated political activists” (141). Ironically, before they become “sophisticated activists”, they are just a bunch of students who sometimes talk seriously about politics (42), but whose conversations often turn from politics to girls and then to sport (44).<sup>148</sup> However, Professor Cesare Lombroso’s warnings regarding the young men provide the reader with a measure of foreshadowing. He states that Frank is associating with a bad lot of “natural born criminals” showing “all the signs” (80). Although his physiognomy is dismissed, his words prove to be correct.<sup>149</sup> The Victorian belief that the “other” is different — almost an “involutionary” or “backwards” version of civilized humanity — is confirmed. The implication is that Frank is not culpable simply because he is not one of “them”.

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<sup>148</sup> The sudden change of these young Italians to “sophisticated” criminals seems radical, and just a way of excusing Frank’s action.

<sup>149</sup> Professor Lombroso’s theories are said to be flawed (*Assassins* 55) but are vindicated in the end (see Chapter Five).

Powerful rhetoric is a characteristic shared by Pullman's Goldberg — the “good” socialist — and Updale's Malpensa — the “bad” anarchist.<sup>150</sup> Indeed, Frank falls prey to Malpensa's oratory, just as Bill is seduced by Goldberg's. Malpensa's rhetoric is “intoxicating” (199), which carries the implication of contagion and corruption. The basis for Malpensa's speech is similar to Goldberg's. He avows the rights of the workers, condemning the “crushing profiteering of the rich, sucking the energy from the souls of the masses” (199).<sup>151</sup> Frank responds naturally to the appeal, but increasingly the plot focuses on the atrocities and future disruptions “these anarchists” plan.<sup>152</sup> Malpensa tells Frank that they “cannot let the forces of oppression win. The aristocracy must die. The people must triumph” (84). While undercover in the US, Frank has to work in a factory where he also writes articles in the workers' newspaper regarding their poor working conditions. He becomes “less of an observer and more of a participant” (300). But his interest is always blamed on the surrounding “seductive enthusiasm for political change” (302), on Malpensa's speeches, or on an “adolescent enthusiasm” (428).

The actual injustices that are the point of departure for Malpensa and his followers are mainly ignored. If Frank is able to “wake up” to the realities outside his lifestyle — like Sally — it is only in the briefest and most inconsequential way. In three instances Frank stops and observes his world from the perspective gained by socialising with the “anarchists” (the workers). He notices one of the Sams at Montmorency and Fox-Selwyn's Bargles club, a man too old to be burdened by the task the duo and others impose on him.<sup>153</sup> This embarrasses Frank. At home, he wonders if it is right that the elderly woman who cooks for them was “slaving in the kitchen while he was lounging around upstairs? Perhaps Malpensa had a point” (212).<sup>154</sup> Finally, while working undercover in an Italian ice-cream factory and witnessing the harshness of the workers' lives, Frank feels that “something should be done” (180). But the wording of his concerns, impersonal as it is, implies he does not see these things as *his* responsibility. Montmorency admonishes him at the time, warning him to be careful

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<sup>150</sup> The labels (anarchists and socialists) seem to merely reflect the authors' different political leanings, as the characters respond to the same politics.

<sup>151</sup> Updale's anarchism seems to conflate socialism — all union worker actions are the doings of the anarchists — with communism.

<sup>152</sup> The demonstrative pronoun “these” is used pejoratively in numerous occasions when Fox-Selwyn, Lombroso and others discuss anarchists.

<sup>153</sup> At Bargles, all the servants all called Sam, regardless of their actual names, for practical purposes. Curiously Frank does not notice or criticise this practice.

<sup>154</sup> It is interesting that lots of servants remain nameless — Cook, “Sams”, etc.

with his friends and watch he does not “get sucked in to their cause” (180). Again, the pronoun “their” clearly points to the divide. This distancing remains a constant throughout the books. While Goldberg and Sally bring the reader closer to the plight of the lowest orders of society, Updale isolates them. None of her characters ever understand that the anarchists are the manifestation of an internal problem. The focus is completely on the idea of external threats. Accordingly, the plot points are overtly joined to display the anarchists’ international network set on destruction, while the sources of such discontent are never connected.<sup>155</sup> The anarchists are thrown together with students, workers, communists, terrorists, and nutcases — all unchanging “political agitators”. Despite his stint as a worker and his remorse for the deaths he has caused, Frank never takes responsibility for his actions and thoughts. Neither is he truly pushed to do so by the adults around him, none of whom ever reflect or accept that their actions and lifestyle are also contributing to the problem. Frank’s recognition of inequality ends without further action on his behalf; the matter is absolutely forgotten and superseded by Fox-Selwyn and the rest setting out to put things “right”, as the anarchists increasingly become terrorists and despicable murderers. Updale seems to have introduced Frank’s observation of social injustices as a token gesture, since it does not produce any changes. In pursuit of her political agenda, what the aristocracy is doing wrong, or what could be improved upon is not what is important here. The focus is on what must be done to keep the nation safe from disrupting forces.

### **Philip Pullman’s Imperialism and Britishness**

As we have seen, both authors reflect issues true to the Victorian era. But they nevertheless reflect their own contemporary concerns: Pullman sketches out an attack on capitalism, while Updale voices anxiety over national security. Their stories echo the imperial tone of Victorian literature, sometimes critically but sometimes positively. In the latter case, they offer a sense of patriotism and nationhood, a model of what Britishness stands for that is regarded as valid and valuable.

We have previously discussed how Pullman’s first adventure features the British Empire’s dealings with opium in China, which it openly condemns (see pg. 86).

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<sup>155</sup> Indeed, as Fox-Selwyn explains, they know everything about the anarchists’ intentions, which is to “bring down all organized civilized states” (*Assassins* 260). The language resonates with a sense of colonialism, but since, in the end, the Queen would have been a target, this view is justified.



However, there are other areas where a closer reading reveals subtler imperial tropes that, while not emphasised, are present. There is, for example, the fact that the poor tend to be treated from the superior perspective of someone of means.

In *Tiger*, Sally discovers one of these rich people. While in the East End, the Spitalfields Social Mission is the one place Sally finds that, though lacking decoration, is clean (194). This differentiates it from the surroundings dark and filth of Whitechapel. Inside, the rooms might be spartan, but there are desks and papers, reports and political journals. This link to the written word is, once again, seen as a clear marker that these are educated people, something that has been posited throughout the books as a common trait of “good” people. The mission has been founded by Miss Robbins — a determined woman who is also the President of the East London Socialist Women League — as part of her efforts to make a difference in the conditions of the poor in the East End. She uses her education to push forward issues that tenants in poor areas cannot manage themselves. Dr Turner’s first explanation of the Mission dismisses any link to religion, which would have been the norm during Victorian times.<sup>156</sup> The idea of secularism and the practical approach the Mission has adopted do not affect the imperial discourse underpinning it. The wealthy Miss Robbins has set it up “to spread progressive ideas through the East End — you know, socialism, secularism, what have you. Soon found out that that wasn’t what they needed just yet” (206). So she turns it into a shelter for women, because it becomes obvious that first of all the “bodies” of the poor need to be taken care of.

The inhabitants of the East End are thus treated passively, as things to be handled rather than people who can actively change their own lives. This sentiment is reinforced by the way Dr Turner arrives at the Mission. Once planning on being a missionary in Africa (206), she substitutes her engagement in the Dark Continent with the East End, a replacement that seems logical as both places require the same sort of attention. Sally spells out the implications to the reader as she thinks to herself how Dr Turner was “the sort of hearty Englishwoman who in other circumstances would have ... explored the upper reaches of the Zambezi. It was hard to imagine anyone more capable of dealing with the East End” (199). The wilderness of Africa is thus — entirely non-ironically — matched by London’s poorest area.<sup>157</sup> These women’s

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<sup>156</sup> This secularism clearly responds to contemporary circumstances and specifically to Pullman’s own views on religion.

<sup>157</sup> This idea reflects the discourse of Booth’s “Darkest England”.

charitable work is not inherently wrong. However, while they might be applying socialism to a certain extent through their charity, they consider the people of the East End unfit to engage in a political life yet. Thus, there is a contrast between Robbins's progressive socialist agenda and her conservative imperialist way of pursuing it.

Another example of how subtly but consistently this happens can be found when Sally accompanies Miss Robbins to inspect a blocked privy. They talk to a woman, Martha, who has been to the shelter before because her husband beats her up. Despite the fact that he now has a job and things are much better, she still exhibits livid bruises. Miss Robbins offers her help on both matters. She then goes directly from authority to authority until she gets the privy matter sorted. The discourse conflates both the idea of the missionary abroad and at home, dealing with people who are inferior to them and who desperately need their help. Not only does Martha conform physically to the stereotype of a poor woman — she is hollow-cheeked, thin and her clothes are mended yet hardly clean (208) — but she is also a victim of her husband and of the system too. She is contrasted to Miss Robbins: strong, educated, clean, and fearless. Miss Robbins effectively speaks for and takes over from Martha, as she authoritatively carries out justice. Other examples of the East End inhabitants include drunken old women and beaten up children, well-known Victorian stereotypes of the poor. Dr Turner states that the East End is full of people with talent, intelligence, and imagination, people who do not need middle-class “do-gooders” like herself (245). But the portrayals of the East End inhabitants seem to contradict this. Certainly Miss Robbins's actions imply the absolute opposite, as do Goldberg's.

Within the East End these “do-gooders” occupy specific places. Sally stands out during her first time in Whitechapel because she is in a place where she does not fit — a public house where her manners and voice give away her class. To fit in with the “locals” she is told to talk “rougher” (188), but she admits that attempting to speak cockney would be “silly” and sound “worse” (188). Immediately after this incident, she finds her way to the Mission, where her presence is accepted and welcomed. There are clear, delineated spaces where West End people can circulate in the East, which does not include the locals' own spaces. The text normalises the idea that “proper” people — that is, educated people — only go to the East to occupy certain positions, positions of power such as those Mr Goldberg and Miss Robbins occupy. Such positions imply superiority and authority over those people who surround them but are depicted as unable to speak for themselves. It seems, then, that the poor always need somebody

who has risen above their circumstances (physically denoted by their “voice”, speech, manners, and clothes, and thus associated with the West) to speak for them. Put together, these instances conjure up the same imperial discourse used by the Victorians to equate darkest Africa with darkest England. While other aspects of imperial ideology are criticised, this analogous dimension is not. The upper class (including the “modern” Sally) deals with those at the bottom just as the British Empire dealt with the colonies. Both the lower class and the colonies are seen as incapable of governing or improving themselves. This is the scenario of the stories of R. M. Ballantyne and H. Rider Haggard, which feature good British people exerting their intellectual and moral superiority over the “savages” they encountered in the colonies, exotic backward places full of strange and barbaric rites.

Another imperial vestige comes through the books’ racial stereotypes. To the Victorian, the East (Asia) was a mysterious space, exotic and violent (as already noted in the Chapter Three). This Victorian view is reflected by Pullman in *The Ruby in the Smoke* where the Orient stands for what is sensual. The Maharajah’s palace in India has exquisitely carved marble pillars, and floors inlaid with lapis lazuli and onyx. The fountains flow with rose-scented water, and the musicians play “strange, languid melodies” while the obscenely large Ruby of Agrapur lies as the table’s centrepiece (34). The Maharajah is from the tradition of the *Arabian Nights* — he buys Pretty Molly’s virginity with the ruby, only to cruelly throw her out without the precious stone. The beauty and riches of the East are always accompanied by the threat of violence and horror. And, when there is not a feast of wealth to awaken the senses, the Orient is a place of dingy, dirty ports full of opium dens, where dodgy activities are pursued by murderers and pirates. There are the “Chinese devils” (133) who smash the lifeboats of the *Lavinia* so that none might survive the sinking ship, while their chief, Ah Ling, “the most murderous, bloodthirsty savage in the South China Sea” (133), dominates the book’s pages.<sup>158</sup> Significantly, Ah Ling is half-Chinese, half-Dutch. Thus the most cunning and dangerous villain in the books is tied to the European world as the brains of the organisation — an opium smuggling secret society — while the more “menial” tasks are left to the full-blooded Asians.

There is, however, a condemnation of racism and violence against immigrants. This is especially true regarding Jews. The politician Arnold Fox accuses immigrants

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<sup>158</sup> The character infuses fear from the opening of the book. Mr Higgs literally falls dead after the sole mention of *The Seven Blessings*, Ah Ling’s secret society.

of polluting England (*Tiger* 307–8). This reflects Victorian xenophobia, but his words are reminiscent of both those used against the Jews during World War II and of contemporary immigration tensions.<sup>159</sup> He first sets the scene by telling his audience how rich, pure, and noble their English stock is, then discusses “how low and verminous were those outside, how filthy their habits, how rotten their bodies” (308). Their women’s birthrights are getting corrupted and plundered by these outsiders who come to Britain (308). But Fox is corrupt and manipulative and Goldberg dismisses every last allegation logically.

The heroes’ deeds in the face of villains such as Fox and others mark what it means to be British and a gentleman. An indirect example can be found in Major Marchbanks’ narration of the Indian Mutiny. He writes: “On the horrors and savagery of the Mutiny itself it is not my present concern to dwell. Others more eloquent than I have told the story of this time, with its deeds of heroism shinning like beacons amid scenes of hideous carnage” (*Ruby* 36). It can be argued that Pullman is merely trying to capture the voice of a Victorian military man. Still, there are other instances that slowly build the image of England as a great nation because of its courageous people, their “deeds of heroism”, and their willingness to make justice prevail. When Rev Nicholas Bedwell learns his brother is being kept by Mrs Holland, he tells Sally “This is England! You can’t hold people against their will” with such a “pugnacious” expression that “Sally feared for anyone who tried to stop him” (81). The phrase is repeated (*Shadow* 194; *Tiger* 398) as characters protest against injustices which are not to be permitted on British soil, even if they are in foreign places. And so Pullman promotes an idealistic version of nationalism.

In *Shadow*, Swedish industrialist Alex Bellmann has manufactured a weapon to be used in pogroms. He declares that despite what Sally thinks of the British people, “They’d have no scruples about making the most horrible weapon ever invented — none whatever” (257). Sally’s answer is to speak to Bellmann about Fred in order to make him understand how wrong he is:

He was brave and he was good and he trusted human goodness, Mr Bellmann; he understood things you’ll never understand, like decency and democracy and truth and honour. Everything you said to me ... made me sick and cold and frightened,

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<sup>159</sup> Fox describes the Jews for his audience as people with “red-rimmed eyes”, “rotten teeth”, “greasy locks”, “fleshy noses”, and a “foul stench” (*Tiger* 308).

because I thought for a minute that you were right—about everything, about people ... But you're not—you're *wrong* ... because you don't understand loyalty, you don't understand love, you don't understand people like Frederick Garland. (266–7)

Fred is thus the ideal British gentleman, a representative of many others who are like him. All the way through, he has been courageous and honest. He not only offers Sally help the first time he meets her, alone and running away from Mrs Holland, but his life ends with a heroic gesture of sacrifice. He dies trying to save a woman from the flames, knowing full well that this will result in his death. Another exemplary gentleman is Sally's father, Captain Lockhart. During the Indian Mutiny, he exchanges the Ruby of Agrapur for Sally because he does not want her to grow up with a coward for a father (*Ruby* 189) — that is, a man who has debts, who smokes opium, and who got too scared to stay in his post during the Mutiny, an action that resulted in the assassination of the Maharajah. Thus, both Fred and Lockhart possess not only values that the Victorians would have regarded as “British”, but they also support the advent of liberated women. Thus Pullman attaches a modern value to a sanitised “Victorian” stereotype. Lockhart nurtures and provides so that Sally may be an independent woman, and Fred values and respects her independence.

*The Tin Princess*, the fourth adventure of the series, reflects more strongly than any of its predecessors a nostalgic imperialism. Sally is absent here, as it is Jim (once an office boy, now a detective) and Adelaide (former street child and prostitute, now Queen) who take over the action. The setting of Razkavia, a tiny fictional central European nation, is a foil for Jim and Adelaide's “Britishness”. In a typical episode, Jim wanders into a bar where two opposing factions of students are drinking. They are discussing politics, specifically how the country's freedom is in danger, caught as it is between Germany and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Giving a speech, a student declares that he wants a “pure Razkavian royalty! ... not this mincing down of a prince and his English whore!” (62). The reference is to Adelaide, who has married the heir to the throne, for whom Jim works. The scene is theatrical. In the ensuing silence, an evidently offended Jim pushes his plate away and gets up. When a student asks him why, as a foreigner, he would care, Jim replies:

“You’re wrong ... In the first place, you’ve just said something about an English lady which demands an answer. In the second place, even if I am a foreigner, I’m Prince Rudolf’s man through and through” ... And he rolled up his sleeves, to cheers and the banging of tables from the green-and-yellows, to whistles and catcalls from the red-and-blacks. (62–3)

Jim is a principled man who will not let a “lady” (least of all an English one) be insulted. His loyalty is immovable, and he is courageous — he is outnumbered when he issues the challenge. These qualities are what make him an Englishman able to win the trust and approval of foreigners. This self-made young man is Pullman’s model of perfection — a character in whom suggestions of the Victorian stereotype of the hero combine with a modern sensibility.<sup>160</sup>

Like Captain Lockhart and Fred, Jim has (in the previous books) always respected and admired Sally, and now he treats Adelaide, too, as an equal. He gets up to defend her honour in a gesture of traditional chivalry. However, when Adelaide is Queen, Jim consults with her and they discuss their next moves together as equals. There is another aspect which reflects contemporary sensibilities; not only is Jim pro-feminist, but he shows his emotions. For Victorians, as Lori Anne Loeb has suggested, excessive public displays of emotion were “unseemly and ungentlemanly” (159). However, Jim expresses his anguish many a time. In love with Lady Mary, he meets up with her only to learn she is married. As she leaves, he “saw her look back once ... and he didn’t see any more, for something strange had happened to his eyes. He wiped them angrily with the back of his hand” (*Shadow* 209). Even if he is embarrassed, the scene encourages the reader to sympathise with his tears.

Adelaide also represents idealised Britishness. The insult at the bar might have been stating a true fact, but when it comes to loyalty and duty, she shows that such things are part of the British make-up, prostitute or not. The nation in question is not Britain, but the values exhibited by the now Queen of Razkavia speak of her sense of patriotism and nationalism. When her husband is shot on the coronation day, Adelaide takes up the task of carrying the country’s ancient flag up the hill to the Rock, a traditional ceremony that means the nation will remain free. The journey with “a

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<sup>160</sup> While in Updale’s novels the higher classes are representatives of the nation’s best qualities, here the role is reserved for the middle class. They are the nation’s strength. Jim flicking bits of paper at the Queen’s portrait (*Ruby* 44) is humorous but also serves to establish his indifference towards the upper classes. Nobility is for the most part seen as far away from normal life.

twelve-foot pole with forty-eight square feet of heavy multi-layered silk” (*Princess* 103) becomes a public display of heroism. Her shoes fall apart, she whimpers and trembles, and her fingernails bleed from the sheer effort, but she will die before giving up. When she manages, “... under the flag she’d carried to the Rock the new Queen stood, pale and trembling, and was crowned, and everyone on the summit knelt to pay her homage” (110). The girl becomes a Queen that is “patient, and gracious, and witty, and implacable” (155). If only briefly, she successfully becomes a model Queen, adored and admired by her subjects despite being British — or perhaps, eventually, because of it, as her positive qualities are associated with the British. Her reign might be doomed, but she never loses her dignity, even when faced with the annexation of the kingdom, shadowing the demise of the British Empire. What might be regarded as its approaching twilight is here linked with the perceived dawn of the German empire. The fact that it is Germany that takes over the tiny nation by force foretells the woes World War I would inflict on Europe.

It is important to notice that *Princess* — unlike Pullman’s previous novels — is initially presented as a play, with a list of “Major Characters” at the beginning. This, in addition to the imaginary country, attempts to give the whole thing a light-hearted tone, almost as if Pullman was playing at writing one of Haggard’s or Ballantyne’s novels, full of noble deeds and sacrifices. There are “real” elements here as well: Germany’s Bismarck and Franz-Josef from the Austro-Hungarian Empire are included. There is also a list of “Items of Historical Interest” (*Princess* n.pag.) given at the beginning of the novel — mentioning Germany’s increasing power and the Triple Alliance as well as a segment on a terrorist act in Dublin.<sup>161</sup> If we consider the elements gathered from the previous adventures — courage, loyalty, honesty, chivalry — we find that there is a strong sense of British identity and values — nationalism, even — running throughout the adventures. The Victorian discourse might be used as a sort of melodramatic set, but playfully or not, the reader is encouraged to follow, like, and support characters whose values are the quintessential essence of the nation and its people. While Pullman might include a feminist side in many ways it is a Victorian view that is espoused here as timeless and admirable.

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<sup>161</sup> Similarly to Updale’s, Pullman’s book also features two terrorist attacks aimed at Prince Rudolph, the last successful monarch. However, these events do not play the same function as in *Montmorency*. They are not the doing of anarchists but rather part of Germany’s intrigue.

## Eleanor Updale's Britishness and Patriotism

Updale's take on nationalism and imperialism is quite different to Pullman's. Gentlemen here are people who serve the nation, the Empire, and its interests. There are no grey areas; not to serve is to slowly become that "other", the enemy who threatens to poison the land. Updale clings to the upper-class as the defenders of the country.

In *Montmorency*, Lord George Fox-Selwyn is the biggest influence on the former criminal. He is the likeable British gentleman *par excellence*. Although he is not perfect, this mountain of a man is powerful not only physically but also because he is devoted to his country's well-being. As a gentleman he has no formal occupation but carries out investigations for the government when summoned.<sup>162</sup> One of the ways in which George is posited as a hero, and the embodiment of duty and nationalism, is that he recruits Montmorency to engage on the same career path. The pair meets by accident, with George mistaking Montmorency for a gentleman. While he cannot imagine the extent of the deception, George suspects his new friend has a dark past, which in his mind marks him as the ideal candidate for his type of work.<sup>163</sup>

The good of the nation is something that is thoroughly and positively emphasised as a central concern in the stories, and no one is more devoted to the task of defending the motherland than George. The scene where he effectively recruits Montmorency is telling in terms of what is acceptable to do for the country's sake. George tells Montmorency that Mauramia, a fictional European state (in the spirit of Pullman's Razkavia, or Anthony Hope's Ruritania) is in trouble, as rebels and exiles in London and Europe are planning to overthrow their monarch and install the Mauramian Ambassador as President. Since their King is related to Queen Victoria, they fear that she will be attacked. George's emphasis on the scale of the disaster — he mentions a major European war and fighting "here, in Britain, where we haven't had a war for more than two hundred years" (*Montmorency* 187) — makes it hard for Montmorency to resist offering his help, even though he finds the story hard to follow (188). Thus George manipulates his friend to get him to participate. He "lures" Montmorency into the club, "teases" him into "making an offer" (183), pretends to be drunker than he is

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<sup>162</sup> He makes this clear by telling Montmorency they do not pay him for the job (*Montmorency* 185). How this is said implies the contrary would be shocking.

<sup>163</sup> This says much about what type of skills are involved in keeping the country from harm.



and finally captures his friend's attention by turning the whole thing into a bet. Montmorency's involvement is then related to a monetary incentive whereas George would never accept a material reward. He sees these jobs as part of his duty; it is his sense of patriotism and loyalty — seen in his explanation of the Mauramian trouble — that drives him into action. His manipulation is seen as the most harmless way of achieving what needs to be done.

Despite his love of the good life — drinking and women — George does not allow his preferred lifestyle to detract him from his prime concerns: the safety of the nation and its people.<sup>164</sup> Faced with a dilemma, his actions always prove that, though an excellent friend, he is first and foremost a loyal subject. When Montmorency becomes an addict, George is disgusted because Montmorency is endangering the lives of the citizens he is supposed to protect. George insists that should Montmorency's "weakness" threaten the nation (*Rocks* 44), his ultimate allegiance is to his country. While we are to sympathise with Montmorency, he is a flawed character who sometimes "just makes bad decisions" (*Assassins* 359), and it is only with time that he learns where his duty lies. In contrast, the figure of George is exemplary. He becomes a martyr when he is shot in the back, by a man he believed to be a friend, as he is making sure Queen Victoria will not be the next target of terrorists (*Revenge* 44).

Sir Gordon Pewley is Fox-Selwyn's opposite. A wealthy industrialist, he is characterized as loud, over-familiar, ordinary, and most importantly "un-gentleman like". When he first appears, he speaks with the "unmistakable over-refined tone of someone trying to cover up a Birmingham accent" (*Montmorency* 180). The narrator offers a short background story about him which is coloured with a negative judgement. Pewley, we are told, has gained his knighthood through his involvement in public projects — from which he has profited immensely (180). He has used this money to buy the estates of hard-pressed aristocrats, and is on the verge of demolishing a Jacobean mansion to build something new. But his vulgar dress (204) and lack of manners with women (206) are used to underline the fact that his title has been bought. When Pewley, in his "self-regarding pomposity", gossips about the royal family, "[e]ven Montmorency found that a bit vulgar and Fox-Selwyn was scandalized by the indiscretion of it" (210). All this explains George's dislike of the man; not having

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<sup>164</sup> How much his preoccupation is related to the "common man" is made clear when, accepting an investigation about a bombing in London, he says he is doing it for the Queen, "but most of all so that a fellow can go to a station without getting blown to bits" (*Rocks* 102).

wanted him admitted into his gentleman's club, he stiffens with disgust at the sight of Pewley (180). Pewley's status as an undesirable character is confirmed by his conspiring with the Mauramians. Montmorency already knows this when he is forced to put Pewley, half-drunk, in a cab. Afterwards, Montmorency finds himself "wiping his fingers with his handkerchief as if to rid himself of some noxious contagion, just as one of the members of the Scientific Society had done after handling his own body five years before" (211). The idea that Pewley is somehow contagious reflects his treacherous association with foreigners. He has become the "other", the threat that lurks within and must be expelled if the nation is to be safe. The idea of how infectious and dangerous such foreign agents can be is also exposed in the drug incident in *Rocks* — where the foreign drug is seen corrupting the English landscape (see Chapter Three). There is a reproach in how Montmorency imitates a snubbing gesture he despised when he was himself the "other"; the fact that Pewley is a traitor in the end seems to justify his motion. The threats posed to the nation are always embodied by foreigners or other misfits. If anything is avowed and defended here, it is the importance of class structure; that is, to maintain an arrangement where upper-class people know better and make decisions while those below remain blissfully ignorant.

Foreign threats, criminal physiognomies (see Chapter Five), international plots — these represent what must be fought against. On the other side stand nationhood, pride in Queen and Country, and the monarchy and the class system as the heart of the nation. At one point Dr Farcett asks whether Montmorency should be distracted by other matters "when a life — a royal life — was at stake?" (*Assassins* 329). He rates a royal life as more precious than an ordinary one. And, after the plot to kill the Queen of Italy is foiled, George feels he must keep investigating in Italy because he has a duty to England: "I've read what these anarchists say about the British Empire. I know it's our Queen they'll be after next ... I have a duty to stay" (435). The idea of putting the royals before one's own family is depicted as the ultimate gesture of patriotism, and one that should be happily carried out. "Is our family's reputation more important than the safety of royalty?" asks Gus — Frank's father — before concluding that "if the price of saving the Prince of Wales and his relations" means people will think Frank is mad, it is a "price" which must be paid (*Revenge* 27).

Udale's writing betrays a sense of frustration, a fear the young might not understand what their land represents, what it should mean to be British and uphold such a venerable tradition. The importance of doing so is emphasised through an

episode involving Frank — a young character readers can relate to. Frank fails to operate according to Montmorency's — and Fox-Selwyn's — attitude to the Crown. In London, he is made to do a clerk's work for the police when he would rather be looking for the man who killed his uncle. Disinterested in his current mission, he frequents pubs and is dangerously close to becoming an alcoholic. The portrayal reflects anxieties regarding contemporary young men and their disconnection with national matters more than a typical Victorian youth. Montmorency urges Frank to keep at his task:

“Don't be stupid. You can't leave London now. The queen [*sic*] may die at any time.”

“What do I care about that? George is dead already, and we've done nothing about it ...”

“That's enough!” shouted Montmorency ... “We have to help Inspector Howard ... We would never forgive ourselves if anything happened to the royal family.”

“Well, I would!” shouted Jack. “... I'm leaving now!” (*Revenge* 107–108)<sup>165</sup>

That Frank's attitude is blasphemous is confirmed by what follows. The runaway Frank is found by schoolmaster Matthew Joskyns, chloroformed, taken to Westminster Abbey, and sat under the vaults where kings and queens have been crowned over the centuries. When Joskyns literally turns on the light, which is “unbearably bright against the darkness” (109), we feel that enlightenment will follow. Knowledge is not gently provided but rather beaten into Frank: Joskyns kicks, slaps, drags, and even grabs Frank by the throat while talking to him, urging him to look around, to understand where he — as a British subject — comes from and the importance of what is at stake:

“Look at that ceiling ... It's been here for hundreds of years. It watches over what you should be trying to protect. Get up.” He kicked Jack again and pulled him to his feet, dragging him among the tombs and monuments listing the kings and queens buried there.

“Henry VII, Mary, Elizabeth I, James I, Charles II, William and Mary. Queen Anne. Are you getting the idea boy? ... I could show you more, going back

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<sup>165</sup> Frank has been using another name — Jack Scarper — when working in London.

almost a thousand years. This is the tradition we are trying to uphold. This is the monarchy we treasure” (109)

Joskyns also explains that his Uncle George would have been appalled if he knew Frank was running away from the chance of serving the Crown (110).<sup>166</sup> We may be reassured, moreover, that Joskyns is a good character: after his beating, Frank laughs with him, proving the schoolmaster is no monster. What he has done was with Montmorency’s permission, seen as necessary for the youngster to understand the enormity of what is at stake in their mission: the nation itself.

Frank still wants to avenge George, sometimes placing this personal vendetta above protecting the nation’s interests. This is portrayed negatively: the more he criticises others for serving the country instead of looking for George’s murderer, the more he resembles Montmorency’s degenerate Scarper persona. His selfish actions are contrasted with those of the rest of the characters, all devoted to making sure there are no attacks on the royal family, that the nation can grieve for Queen Victoria in peace, and that Westminster can eventually witness the crowning of yet another heir.

## **Conclusion**

Pullman and Updale have different ideological agendas. Despite their political differences, however, they seem to share a middle-class world-view. It is through principles of order and cleanliness that their East End looks chaotic and dirty. Promoting the importance of work, education, and family, they see East Enders as loiterers doing nothing but causing trouble. Such people must be cared for by the educated middle-class.

Updale and Pullman also idealise what might be described as a “chivalric code”. Jim, Fred, and George are loyal to their values, their families, and to Britain. They are courageous, selfless, and strong (Pullman adds support of the feminist cause and what might be called “emotional intelligence” to these qualities). All three heroes are heir to this Victorian ideal, and two die in acts that consolidate their statuses as heroic British gentlemen.

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<sup>166</sup> The language used is also important in building this national discourse: it is about serving, sacrificing, protecting, and upholding the Crown.

Neither author offers a purely Victorian picture, but then neither reproduces a historically authentic nineteenth-century either. Both resort to a Victorian world based on fiction, using that fiction to create a background for their treatment of twentieth-and twenty-first-century issues. This is particularly clear in Pullman's promotion of an (albeit muted) socialism, and in Updale's demonisation of quasi-terrorist anarchism.

## CONCLUSION

These twentieth-century remakes and riffs of the Victorian are not without their contradictions and blind spots. (Kaplan 155)

As Christine L. Krueger noted in 2002 “in our society at large, Victorian culture has probably never been more popular and influential” (xiii). This is confirmed by the narratives this thesis explores. But if, as Mark Llewellyn has argued, writing “back” to the nineteenth century aims at revitalising Victorian texts for the here and now (171), questions arise about which the nineteenth century aspects are being rewritten, and how they relate to the present. As we have seen, these young adult recreations inhabit the skin of Victorian characters, tropes, and myths while reflecting contemporary ideologies.

The result is a rather historically invalid and homogenous image of the nineteenth century. Although our texts cover different periods — from 1855 to 1901, in fact — they tend not to offer a differentiated view. Rather, they feature loosely (and stereotypically) “Victorian” dimensions — the East End, the opium dens, the ragged street Arabs — or the Victorian postcard of present-day popular imagination. While the plots do not, on the whole, depend upon key historical events, these events (the Great Stink, Albert’s death, the building of the sewers, the Queen’s death) are used to anchor the stories within their settings. Such events subtly confirm a promise of the real (in the historical sense) which, in most cases predominantly serves to conceal the constructed character of the narratives and the modern bias of the representations (and interpretations) offered. In addition, while undeniably working within the “sphere of influence” of Victorian literature, the narratives also violate their nineteenth-century literary models.

Certain stereotypes — ones that featured in the Victorian imagination — are reproduced unchallenged. London is a divided city. The perpetually dark and labyrinthine East End — always the refuge of the grotesque and the criminal — is posited against a rich and educated West End where the protagonists retire between adventures. East London, then, is the abject reflection of a gentrified, less industrialised, and more pastoral England. London becomes the über Victorian city, collapsing all others, with the rest of England seemingly a peaceful countryside. This

dichotomy originated, it would seem, out of Victorian middle-class paranoia, but it also corresponds more directly to contemporary nostalgia.

Other aspects of the pseudo-Victorian novel are mostly twentieth and twenty-first-century imports — the prevalence of strong, self-reliant female protagonists being an obvious example. The readers related to such protagonists, disjointed from their nineteenth-century surroundings. This reflects years of women's emancipation and twentieth-century feminism. Twentieth-century gender politics are also evident in the absence of the “fallen woman”, a central figure of much of Victorian literature. Prostitutes, however, remain. Unwilling to sanction the profession for contemporary young adult readers, our authors employ the fictional downward spiral popularised by actual Victorian literature, and represent prostitution as exploitation.

The same conflicting impulses can be seen in the treatments of the orphan, a figure reflective of Victorian anxieties regarding bloodlines, legitimacy, and usurpation. Indeed, orphan protagonists (with some exceptions) are shown as robbed of their true positions. Most of these texts encourage the reader to support the restitution of hierarchical order through the rightfully restituted orphan, and to regard those who wish to disturb it (“anarchists”, “terrorists”, and East Enders) as criminals obstructing justice, peace and the traditions of the land. This conservative position has become more prominent in the post-millennium works, as Pullman's writing does not deal with the reinstatement of the aristocracy but rather the advent of the middle class. The contemporary political climate may account for this particular quasi-Victorian dimension. Race is a topic that — as in the Victorian originals — hardly features. Since our authors have been willing to accommodate feminism, their resistance to ethnic diversity may be telling. It is suggestive, perhaps, of contemporary nostalgia for a less cosmopolitan “Englishness”.

Simon Joyce's notion that we look back at the Victorians through a rear-view mirror seems apt: the image can become distorted (3). The vilified “Great Unwashed”, the sinister East End, the cruel low-class criminals and the foreign masterminds who endanger the nation, the decadent opium den in the hands of Orientals — all of these concepts have a double function: they derive from the Victorian era (historical or imaginative) but also embody contemporary middle-class fears of political agitation, violent uprisings, organized criminals, terrorism, and immigration.

The Victorianism of these narratives may be regarded as insidious, if fictionalised and fabricated images displace true reflections of an ever-receding era.

Dyos and Wolff suggest that one must beware of “mixing up the scenery ... of creating fantasy” (906–07). Only Pullman and Lee attempt — through metafictional cues — to warn the reader of the fictionality of their renditions, but even they offer generic Victoriana. Recognisable or not, the modern world seems to lurk in the margins of the text, sometimes in a cautionary role, sometimes in a condemnatory one, and sometimes in a voice imbued with nostalgia.



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