**Ends and Beginnings:**

**Late 19th & Early 20th Century Literature & Culture**

Arthur Morrison: *A Child of Jago* (1896)

- The Jago based on the Old Nichol – a real East End slum.

- Father Sturt was largely modelled on Rev. Arthur Osborne Jay, whose parish included the Old Nichol.

- Morrison was born in John Street, Poplar, East London in 1863 and belonged to the ranks of the respectable working poor.

“This street is in the East End. There is no need to say in the East End of what. The East End is a vast city, as famous in its way as any the hand of man has made. But who knows the East End? It is down through Cornhill and out beyond Leadenhall Street and Aldgate Pump, one will say: a shocking place, where he once went with a curate; an evil plexus of slums that hide human creeping things; where filthy men and women live on penn’orths of gin, where collars and clean shirts are decencies unknown, where every citizen wears a black eye, and none ever combs his hair.”

**--- Morrison, Arthur. “The Street” *Macmillan’s Magazine.* 1891. Print.**

**Points to Consider**

- Does Morrison offer any solutions to the problems of the Slums? What is the significance of Morrison’s ending?

- How far is this a “true” reflection of the East End?

- Think about Morrison’s literary styles. In what ways does the novel engage with modernism?

- “[T]hough the steps between be smaller, there are more social degrees in the East End than ever in the West.” In what ways are respectability and status important for the inhabitants of the Jago?

- In what ways does Morrison incorporate “native” dialect, and what effect does this have on the reader?

- What kind of language frames the Jago? What kind of metaphors are employed?

- Consider the use of the child as protagonist in slum fiction.

- In what ways do the geographical movements of the characters mirror their shifting moral codes?

- In what ways does Morrison engage with the theories of degeneration and eugenics?

- Compare and contrast with Harkness’ text. How do each attempt to communicate the conditions of the slum?

*To try to access the “real” historical Nichol before its demolition is to accept the presence of contradiction. It was a neighbourhood where children played safely in the street, and market porters and sawmill workers loaded them down with free potatoes and fuel. It was also a zone of gang wars, extortion, fist-fights, petty crime, and raids on vans carrying merchandise. A similar friction appears in Morrison’s own art. In scattered scenes, individual characters show empathy and support towards one another. Kiddo Cook tends Hannah and the children while Josh is in prison. Pigeony Poll grieves at the death of Hannah’s baby. But just as frequently, Morrison steps back to tar the Jagos, not merely as violent, but—going further than Harding—as fevered, feral, and atavistic. Street roughs triumphantly plunder Biddy Flynn’s gown and raid her orange basket; Sally Green gnaws Hannah Perrott’s nape with abandon. Stylistically, these moments are so vivid and energetic that they eclipse the more compassionate exchanges in readers’ memories of the book.* (14-15)

*Morrison arrived [at the Nichol] after one-fifth of the locals had been evicted from the tenements [however] as the remaining slums awaited demolition, the district was subject to an influx of criminals and loafers from all corners of London, who squatted rent-free in the vacant flats and anticipated compensation from the LCC for having to forfeit the properties later. During Morrison’s sojourn there, the neighbourhood was a frightening one for the casual visitor (and for new arrivals to the emerging Boundary Estate), but ultimately, its ruffians were not the original Nichol tenants.* (21-22)

***---* Multz, Diana. Introduction. *A Child of the Jago* By Arthur Morrison. 1896. Peterborough: Broadview, 2013. Print.**

“Here lies the Jago, a nest of rats, breeding, breeding, as only rats can […] Sometimes we catch a rat. And we keep it a while, nourish it carefully, and put it back into the nest to propagate its kind.” “Is there a child in all this place that wouldn’t be better dead—still better unborn?”

A. The lowest class, which consists of some occasional labourers, street-sellers, loafers, criminals and semi-criminals, I put at 11,000, or 1¼% of the population, but this is no more than a very rough estimate, as these people are beyond enumeration, and only a small proportion of them are on the School Board visitors' books […] there is little regular family life among them, and the numbers given in my tables are obtained by adding in an estimated number from the inmates of common lodging houses, and from the lowest class of streets. With these ought to be counted the homeless outcasts who on any given night take shelter where they can, and so may be supposed to be in part outside of any census. Those I have attempted to count consist mostly of casual labourers of low character, and their families, together with those in a similar way of life who pick up a living without labour of any kind. Their life is the life of savages, with vicissitudes of extreme hardship and occasional excess. Their food is of the coarsest description, and their only luxury is drink. It is not easy to say how they live*;* the living is picked up, and what is got is frequently shared; when they cannot find 3d for their night's lodging, unless favourably known to the deputy […] From these come the battered figures who slouch through the streets, and play the beggar or the bully, or help to foul the record of the unemployed; these are the worst class of corner men who hang round the doors of public-houses, the young men who spring forward on any chance to earn a copper, the ready materials for disorder when occasion serves. They render no useful service, they create no wealth: more often they destroy it. They degrade whatever they touch, and as individuals are perhaps incapable of improvement; they may be to some extent a necessary evil in every large city, but their numbers will be affected by the economical condition of the classes above them, and the discretion of "the charitable world"; their way of life by the pressure of police supervision.

 It is much to be desired and to be hoped that this class may become less hereditary in its character. There appears to be no doubt that it is now hereditary to a very considerable extent. […] While the number of children left in charge of this class is proportionately small, the number of young persons belonging to it is not so—young men who take naturally to loafing; girls who take almost as naturally to the streets*;* some drift back from the pauper and industrial schools, and others drift down from the classes of casual and irregular labour. I have attempted to describe the prevailing type amongst these people, but I do not mean to say that there are not individuals of every sort to be found in the mass. Those who are able to wash the mud may find some gems in it. […] The hordes of barbarians of whom we have heard, who, issuing from their slums, will one day overwhelm modern civilization, do not exist. There are barbarians, but they are a handful, a small and decreasing percentage: a disgrace but not a danger.

**--- Booth, Charles. *Labour and Life of the People. Volume 1: East London*, 3rd Edition, London: Williams and Norgate, 1891. Print.**