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Research Article

The Problem of Representing the Poor

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The central paradox of representations of the poor is that in almost all instances (with a few notable exceptions), canonical authors and artists who portray the poor do not come from that class. While the poor aren't the only group that tends to be represented by the other, they have not advanced—as have other identity groups, like racialized people, women, and lgbtq+ people—to both take back the right to represent themselves and critique inaccurate or malignant representations. Among the groups in the United States, the United Kingdom, as well as in major industrialized countries that haven't yet fully been able to do that, aside from the poor, are, for example, the disabled and the Deaf, but for the latter things are changing. For the former, not so much.

While it is the job of this book to examine the maladroit and often pernicious work done by authors, artists, film-makers, and the like who blithely assume they are as credentialed to depict the poor as they are to write about the middle class, I need first to try and articulate the very

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complex problem that exists concerning this issue.

It would be right to point out that the issue of people writing about or portraying any oppressed or underrepresented group will always fall into this paradox. Even the most progressive writers with the best of intentions will often fail to re-create the conditions under which various groups live. We have a long history of women's lives being written by the very men who may well oppress them. The same is true of gay, lesbian, transgender, disabled, and Deaf people, as well as enslaved people, colonial subjects, people of color, and so on. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has called this the problem of having only "one story" available about a particular culture—in her case being a Nigerian.[1] In addition, she asks what happens when within that story the implied reader is not of the culture being written about, and therefore an actual African cannot be imagined as an interlocutor to the characters within the story. That is, the implied reader is not African—or poor.

The argument around representation goes something like this: you have to have lived the constitutive life to understand and write about it knowledgably and accurately. This contention has swung back and forth over time. Race has been a prime example. Initially, many racialized characters were primarily written about by people who considered themselves white, although there are some notable exceptions.[2] Even "negro spirituals" sung in African American churches could be written by white composers.[3] After several waves of consciousness about the issue, the assumption then became that only people of color could best write about people of color. For example, in 1933 when George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* opened on Broadway, Hall Johnson, a Black composer, wrote that Gershwin was "as free to write about Negroes in his own way as any other composer to write about anything else. [But the work] was not a Negro opera by Gershwin, but Gershwin's idea of what a Negro opera should be."[4] Duke Ellington critiqued the opera for "inventing . . . Negro music," adding, "It was not the music of Catfish Row or any other kind of Negroes."[5] James Baldwin later added the now-obvious point that the opera was "a white man's vision of Negro life."[6] It's worth noting that while the racial issue dominates the critique of *Porgy and Bess*, there is an intertwined problem of depicting poor people. In 1959 Harry Belafonte refused to play Porgy for the film version of the play, saying, "All that crap-shooting and razors and lusts and cocaine is the old conception of the Negro."[7] As a successful Black actor, he derided the class-based racist view concerning African Americans. And Black critics in the 1960s like Harold Cruse derided the opera as "a product of American developments that were intended to shunt Negroes off into a tight box of subcultural, artistic dependence, stunted growth, caricature, aesthetic self-mimicry imposed by others, and creative insolvency." He advocated that "no Negro singer, actor, or performer should ever submit to a role in this vehicle again."[8] The point here is that a robust critical pushback from African Americans places the artistic work into a dialectic of critique and acceptance. No such pushback has happened with any continuous regularity and impact from poor people (African American, Latinx, Asian, or not).

There has been a swing back to the possibility that white people could create works about people of color but always including the idea that the demographic being written about would have a strong critical role to play in discussing and delimiting the value of such work. We have seen Quentin Tarantino's film *Django Unchained* debated within African American circles for its accuracy, relevance, nuance, and tone.[9]

Transgender people have made a similar point. Fox Fisher writes:

> Anyone who belongs to an underrepresented group probably feels there is a lack of characters to relate to or that they can resonate with. As someone who has taken the leap to socially and medically transition and lived to tell the tale, I have the experience and understanding to be the one shaping stories and narratives with trans characters. Once I'd sorted myself out, I realised that I could be that creator of content to create stories and narratives that have a positive and realistic representation of trans characters. As a trans person myself I can do that with a deeper understanding of what it is to be trans.[10]

As much sense as this blog entry makes, it can always be disputed by formalists, modernists, or postmodernists who might consider that authenticity is a dodgy game made even murkier by the questionable assumption that "real" or even "accurate" representation can be achieved through signs, symbols, icons, and language games. Jacques Derrida, for one, attacks the notion of representation in discussing Antonin Artaud's idea of the theater of cruelty. Derrida derides Western civilization's belief that life can be represented in theater and art, saying, "Life is the nonrepresentable origin of representation."[11] How could a writer make characters "like me" when the "you" being written about is created out of language, pixels, or paint? Representation will always be several removes away from the original—a point that frustrated Plato a

few thousand years ago. Stuart Hall points out that representation acts like a language because it substitutes a sign for a thing. Thus, all languages are "systems of representation" rather than direct presentations of reality.[12] E. H. Gombrich has written that "all artistic discoveries are not of likenesses but of equivalences which enable us to see reality in terms of an image and an image in terms of reality."[13] He does not advocate accurate representation of objects but instead he envisions substitutions taken to be alike. Georg Lukács wants a complex synthesis in fiction that presents the dynamics of historical materialism, so he sees simple reportage as failing those goals. For him, the psychological novel and the naturalistic novel are too simple to include the dialectical relationship between history and the individual.[14] In the same line of thinking, Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar lessen the importance of facts per se and want to implicate ideology as the grounds in which the dialectic struggle takes place. Knowledge then is seen as "an abstraction."[15] Fredric Jameson values realist representation but does not posit a one-for-one substitution between the historical world and the fictional world. Instead, Jameson sees the relation as "an analogy."[16] In synthesizing this line of Marxist thinking, June Howard concludes, "Literary texts like other texts are constructed not out of innocent 'facts' but on the basis of already complex structures of representation. And the operations performed on this raw material in order to produce a novel are specifically literary operations; they are distinct from the operations that would be performed to produce, say, a monograph on genetics or economics or history, and it is inappropriate to expect a narrative to provide knowledge in the same sense."[17] Indeed, even one's personal, original existence is composed of memories, experiences, and sensory information that are touched and enhanced by other sets of representations. As Richard Dyer notes, "There is no such thing as unmediated access to reality."[18] Is it then pointless to talk about the accuracy or authenticity of the depiction of the poor?

There are at least two approaches to the issue of representation. One is to see the produced narrative, including the characters and their way of speaking, being, and moving through the world, as the issue. The idea is that such a representation needs to resonate with those who are being depicted and strike them as an accurate or meaningful representation. But another way of seeing this is that the person who is doing the representing needs to be a good and accurate representer. In some ways the two are linked since an accurate or true representer will give us a better version of what is being represented. Dorothy Hale notes that writers like Henry James emphasize the "foundational characteristic of the individual identity" of the writer while theorists like Percy Lubbock see the representation as more important than the sensibility of the writer.[19] For Hale, "social formalism" mistakenly shifts from "that of the representer to that of the represented."[20] In this work I am reversing and making more complex that trend, in effect, by claiming that the representer needs to be considered more deeply and in a way that is somewhat different than has been considered thus far.

But there is a further complexity to this issue. If we, for the moment, set aside two major functionaries in representation—what or who is represented and also by whom this representation is represented—there are still a few more players in this script. There are the receivers of the representation and then the social, political, and cultural surround that provides a context and meaning to representation. In effect, rather than a dialectic, there is a quadralectic with all four elements in constant play and interaction with each other. The representation as a product—a character, object, conversation, or narrative line—will be in dynamic tension with the person who created the representation as well as with the audience who will critique or praise it.[21] Add to this the milieu, which shifts and changes as it both creates an environment in which utterances and representations can be contextualized and at the same time alters itself to address the changing cavalcade of representations over time.

Unlike with regard to race and gender, the social-cultural-political milieu has not changed much regarding who should depict the poor. From the medieval period through the early twentieth century, the vast majority of depictions of the poor have been made by those who are not poor. The primary reason for this is that the poor did not have in the past access to the means of cultural production. Pierre Bourdieu would say that the cultural arbitrary always expresses and reproduces the interests of the dominant class. As such, it is virtually impossible that a poor person could get to the means of cultural production and then change the cultural arbitrary to express endogenous insights.[22]

Issues of authenticity have a particular historical resonance. Regina Bendix in her book *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies* points to a potentially pivotal moment when Johann Gottfried Herder emphasized the authenticity of "the folk" (*Volk*). As opposed to the stilted language and pretensions of high culture, folk culture and its songs and poetry would be more authentic to some true sense of a self uncontaminated by

adulteration and pretense.[23] Herder, tellingly, excluded the urban poor. As he wrote, "*Volk* does not mean the rabble in the alleys; that group never sings or rhymes, it only screams and truncates."[24] German scholars were intent on getting to some authentic original through the process of collecting and preserving folk songs and poetry. To them, oral sources seemed more authentic than written ones—a feeling that evokes the kind of orality philosophers like Jacques Derrida in *Of Grammatology* saw as a mistaken belief that spoken language was truer to the essence of language than written language. In the United States, by contrast, there was little to no interest in the same era in plumbing the authentic poetry and song of Native Americans to find the essential truth of being. While some regarded the indigenous nations as being in touch with nature and containing within themselves a simplicity and innocence of being, their language was found to be both primal and yet wanting in complexity.[25] Instead, the trend was toward the language of "the common," what Ralph Waldo Emerson calls the "vigorous Saxon" laborers.[26] In addition to that turn toward the white workers, there was a parallel movement to see African American songs and stories as containing an essential link to the authentic. Antonín Dvořák, noting his own credentials as "the son of poor parents," asserted of the United States, "I am now satisfied . . . that the future music of this country must be founded on what are called negro melodies. . . . These are the folk songs of America and your composers must turn to them. All of the great musicians have borrowed from the songs of the common people."[27] Field researchers like Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes sought anthropological material among southern Black people and then incorporated their findings into novels and poetry.[28] And critics like Houston Baker and Henry Louis Gates placed emphasis on the Black vernacular, music, and forms of signifying as inherently more radical than standard English.

Likewise, literature that was written about the poor had a cultural resonance of being more authentic and realistic than that written about the rich. The move toward naturalism in nineteenth-century novels was an implicit statement about poverty being equated with the authentic. Poor and working-class people were living essential life while the rich were living a rarified and removed version of existence. Readers, writers, and publishers voted with their choices to focus on the former over the latter. But as was the case throughout, this "authentic" life was to be created largely by those who were not of that life. Research and undercover reporting were the methods that allowed better-off folks to record the lives of their worse-off fellow humans and then monetize the results.

This aspect of poornography changed in the United States during the 1920s and 1930s with the rise of proletarian literature. Working-class writers, Black, white and brown, got to be heard, seen, and published. But the vast majority of those books have failed to enter the canon. I discuss the few outliers later in this book. Now, it is occasionally possible for poor people to shift class through the process of accessing cultural production. The most dramatic cases of this are rappers who have come from poor neighborhoods and backgrounds and now have access to large audiences and paychecks. It is also true that the internet, for those with access to it, affords many poor people entrance to social networks in ways they did not have before. Still, it must seem clear that those poor people who have reached larger audiences now are still a tiny group within a vastly larger population. A publication like *poor Magazine* and its related Poor News Network has a Facebook and internet presence and is a significant activist organization but is thus far unknown to most people.[29] Likewise, the Class Work Project and its publication, *Lumpen*, are doing good work in the United Kingdom but, again, remain relatively unknown.[30] And very important, poor people do not have access to a collective mechanism by which works about them can be critiqued and evaluated. In other words, there is no regulatory mechanism by which poor people can publicly and influentially debate work about themselves in the way that other groups have done over time.

Given this somewhat persistent situation, I am arguing that only people who have grown up poor, those I am calling endo-writers and endo-artists, actually can and should make creative works about poverty at this juncture. This position no doubt seems reactionary given a set of assumptions about literature that we have inherited and adopted in academia and elsewhere. I recently gave a talk on this subject, and a friend who is a Marxist said to me afterward that he was sorry to see me endorse identity politics. That comment raises the question, Do the poor constitute an identity? Clearly not in the way that identities are formulated nowadays. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *identity politics* as the adherence of a group of people of a "particular religion, race, social background, etc., to political beliefs or goals specific to the group concerned."[31] The poor are too heterodox a group to adhere to a goal specific to themselves, and they are not defined by any clearly delimited set of physical, ethnic, or social qualities. It seems a bit of a stretch, in that case, to say that the poor represent an identity group at this

point in our history. I would say that rather than endorsing identity politics (which, as a disability studies scholar, I don't oppose in principle), I am opposing a demeaning set of stereotypes that nonpoor people have assembled to describe, contain, and control a group they would like to continue being subservient, docile, and largely silent. I should add that my recommendations concerning who should represent the poor do not necessarily apply across the board, as in the notion that only in-group people can represent those within such groups. With the poor, a group that generally does not have access to publishers, distributors, agents, and such, there is a specific need to have in-group representatives, most likely transclass writers and artists, represent them.

Instead of authenticity, it would make more sense to talk about accountability. Rather than looking to the content of the work to see if it is an accurate reproduction of the lived experience of poor people, we might want to question the author who assumes that they have the proper background to write about a specific oppressed group. We have no problem nowadays insisting that members of various identity groups should be the prime describers of that group, but we have not reached that point with those who represent the poor. If we make the analogy with transgender issues, as we have by adopting the term *transclass*, we might want to also add the notion of cis to the mix. Can we speak of a cis-class person as one who remains in the social class into which they were born? If so, then the question becomes, How accountable is a cis-middle-class person when they depict the life of a poor person? The cis-class writer might even be able to reproduce some aspects of the lived experience of the poor person, just as male writers have sometimes done with female characters, but how accountable are they for doing so? And in factoring an algorithm of accountability, questions about harm done by a particular kind of narration need to be considered. In other words, this is not a simple equation, where only a person of a certain identity can write about that identity, but a more complex set of givens that need consideration in figuring who might be the best interlocutor and what might be the optimal narration.

The idea of accountability might seem to echo Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of answerability; however, it is quite different. Bakhtin suggests that what links life and art is that the individual, whether author or reader, needs to be answerable to the political implications of both life and art. "The poet must remember that it is his poetry which bears the guilt for the vulgar prose of life, whereas the man of everyday life ought to know that the fruitlessness of art is due to his willingness to be unexacting and to the unseriousness of the concerns in his life."[32] Bakhtin did not fully develop this idea in his early writings. He is speaking about some kind of guilt for not being political, but the idea of accountability I am proposing is less about guilt or apathy (or a linguistic sense of uttering and answering) and more actively about being responsive and responsible to the group being depicted in a work of art, particularly if that group is oppressed and lacks access to a mechanism for mounting a response to the work or the author. In Bakhtin's idea an author can answer in a variety of ways; there is no notion of responsibility to the groups depicted in a work.

In a way, I am allying myself with Plato, who doubted that artists were the best people to represent reality. In *The Republic*, Socrates argued that because artists were not specialists in a particular craft or activity, the results of their mimesis would be flawed since they were imprecise knowers of what they sought to depict. A shoemaker, as the argument goes, would know much more about shoes than an artist who paints shoes. Following that logic, am I saying that people who have experienced poverty would be the experts on poverty as opposed to middle-class writers or filmmakers who had not?

There are several modern refutations to what I am proposing. One line begins most forcefully with New Criticism. W. K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardley in 1954 put forward a clarion call against the idea that the intention of the author matters—what they called "the intentional fallacy."[33] For them the structure and function of the literary text were paramount, and therefore the history, biography, social milieu, and so on were so much less important as to be almost negligible. That position was taken up by structuralists, formalists, semiologists, and various kinds of postmodernists. I am not going to enter into the long history of this position except to say that the argument against the intentional fallacy has revolved around issues of authenticity on the one hand and the justification of authorial intention on the other.

The problem is that arguing for or against a notion of authenticity or intentionality, while very interesting in and of itself, distracts from the larger political point I am making. You can assert that the author's intention matters or not, but you aren't going to solve the bigger problem of poor people's lack of access to cultural production, or the larger political issues that surround the misrepresentation of the lives of the poor because of this lack of access. In other words, as Dyer says, "representations . . . have real

consequences for real people . . . in terms of the way representations delimit and enable what people can be in any given society."[34]

What I would like to propose is that these formalist questions are coming from a position that is necessarily askew. In my book *Resisting Novels: Fiction and Ideology*, I made the point that you don't have to look at the content of novels to find them ideological. Rather, the very structural and formal elements of character, plot, dialogue, and location themselves are imbued with bourgeois values—novels are ideological from the get-go regardless of the author's intention. I'd like to clarify that point a bit more in this book. Rather than find this determinism, if you will, primarily in the structure of novels, I'd break this down further into what have been called *ideologemes*, which might be analogous to Roland Barthes's idea of mythemes.[35]

If almost all works about the poor are written by people who are not poor (I talk more later about the special case of transclass authors who were poor originally and changed their class), then the building blocks that such authors use to create narrative structures will necessarily be determined by what is available to them and understandable to their audiences. As Dyer writes, "Representations are presentations, always and necessarily entailing the use of codes and conventions of the available cultural forms of presentation. Such forms restrict and shape what else can be said by and/or about any aspect of a reality in a given place in a given society at a given time."[36] Those preformed bits of language or predetermined visual images float in the culture like nonmaterial Lego pieces and are used by individual speakers, writers, and artists to build their constructions. These are rather like the available automobile parts that are used to construct a car. You don't start with stones, dirt, and minerals to build a car—you use the ready-made components, like computer chips, batteries, and camshafts. Likewise, if you build a novel or a film, you use those small bits of language or imagery that exist in the culture to establish what a poor person looks like, thinks like, acts like, and talks like, along with the locations that a poor person is likely to inhabit. You also are chained, as it were, to the narrative features that define something that will be recognizable and even familiar to audiences (and to authors) as a plot.

Let's say you wanted to write a novel about a poor person, and you made that person happy, intelligent, and inquisitive and had them living in a comfortable but simple dwelling, with diligent parents who weren't violent, criminal, lustful, or addicted to drugs or alcohol. Let's say they worshipped religiously, tried to be ethical, didn't swear, and spoke with an unaccented speech pattern. Let's posit that the main character fell in love with another poor person with a similar background. The first thing you'd have to say was that there was no plot, and then you'd have to ask, How does this narrative of poverty differ from a middle-class narrative?

In fact, a limited set of descriptors and visual cues are used to indicate poverty. Characteristic of poornography in general, these ideologemes of poverty have a kind of attraction for us. In the same way that Halloween costumes are always easily recognizable because they retread common perceptions—hoboes are people with dirt on their faces who carry a stick with a dangling handkerchief filled with possessions; princesses wear crowns or tiaras and are dressed in satiny clothing; witches dress in black and have pointed hats and brooms and often a hooked nose with a wart on it—so too are the trappings and environments of the poor easily recognizable.

It is actually difficult to avoid these visual cues. A look at art history shows that there really are only a few ways to visually represent poverty. The classic gesture that indicates someone is poor is an extended hand with an open palm facing upward—a visual representation of begging. The other features are ragged clothing, absence of shoes or the presence of dilapidated footwear, and emaciation, as we see in a 1662 drawing by Jacques Callot (figure 2.1). That is about it. All the complexity of a constitutive life is completely boiled down to these few attributes. Only Gustave Courbet, in his painting *The Charity of a Beggar at Ornans* (1868) (figure 2.2), introduces the element of body odor as the Roma child holds his nose as he accepts a coin from an elderly impoverished man who is represented as, of course, tattered, emaciated, and with an outstretched hand and shoddy footwear.

Poverty is difficult to represent because to the middle classes it stands for a lack.[37] As Gavin Jones writes, "Poverty loses its urgency if it is not at least . . . defined by the lack . . . of the resources necessary for subsistence, for life itself, or for health and well-being."[38] How does a painting or a photograph show something that is not there? A telling feature of exo-writers and representers is their rigid focus on the lack—in most cases lack of money, comfort, and the like. In the wake of this difficulty, middle-class authors and painters have sought ways to depict and aestheticize poverty. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, rural poverty was included in the list of perquisites

for the picturesque. In an influential book, *Essays on the Picturesque*, published in 1810, Uvedale Price included in his list of possible subjects ruins, old mills, and barns but also "wandering tribes of gypsies and beggars."[39] Nancy Armstrong makes a similar point: "From its inception, the picturesque aesthetic had been uniquely geared to the task of turning poverty into art."[40] It is easier to aestheticize poverty in rural areas than in urban settings. And it has been harder for exo-writers to develop a way of talking about the plenitude of lived experience in such settings rather than the lack of resources and amenities. Meanwhile, endo-writers seem to have no trouble doing this. Just as with disability, in which the nondisabled observer often sees only a lack or an in- ability, so too with poverty there isn't much room in the dominant cultural sensorium to imagine a plenum of life among the poor.

Walter Benn Michaels has discussed the work of photographer Viktoria Binschtok, whose series *Die Abwesenheit der Antragsteller* (*The Absence of Applicants*) (2006) (figure 2.3) is made up of seemingly abstract images that are in reality the marks left on a wall in an unemployment office by those leaning against that wall while waiting to find jobs. Visually, Binschtok is representing poor people (or at least those without jobs) by depicting their absence and thus the trace of their absence. For Michaels, this is a more formal and less content-driven way of "showing" issues around class and class difference.[41]

Or we might look at the work of photographer Dawoud Bey. *Night Coming Tenderly, Black* (figure 2.4) shows us an almost lightless rural landscape to put into context what the experience of poor enslaved people on the Underground Railroad might have been.

But generally such refined and anaclitic visions of poverty do not abound. The genre requires an indexical and iconic representation pointing to or embodying known and recognizable figures that can invoke the presence of an absence. Take, for example, the 2018 film *Roma*, by director Alfonso Cuarón. The movie is set in 1960s Mexico and focuses on a young maid named Cleo. Cuarón, who grew up in an upper-middle-class family, wanted to make a nostalgic film depicting the family's life and crisis when the father leaves the mother. But rather than have himself as a small child be the central character whose point of view was the cynosure of the film, he chose instead to have the poor maid Cleo be the central character. In this sense the film would be about her life in and among this well-off family. By definition, this should make the film political and exemplary in showing how a class division affects the way people live. The maid comes from a poor family outside of the big city. Cuarón, however, gives us a very exterior view of Cleo that amounts to an absence. We know almost nothing about her, her childhood, or her family. We see her from the outside—as a faithful servant who repeatedly is made to clean up dog excrement, an act metaphorically serving as an explanation of her subsidiary role in the family. While Cuarón's focus on the dirty work may seem to place him on the side of the poor indigenous servant, is it enough to carry through a just representation of the young woman? How can he depict the absence of money, status, agency? If he gave her a fuller inner life, would the clichés of her poverty and dependency disappear? It is telling that the last lines of the film are those of Cleo, who on returning from a trip to the beach in which she has saved the life of one of the wealthy family's children, says to the other maid, Adela, in the house, "I'll tell you about it later" ("Luego te cuenta"). Cleo may tell Adela later, but the audience never gets that interiority.

Roma won the Best Director and Best Foreign Film Awards at the Oscars in 2019. The following year another film about poverty won the Best Director, Best Picture, Best Original Screenplay, Best International Feature Awards. That film, *Parasite* directed by Bong Joon Ho is also about lack. The Kim family is poor and living in a dank, insect-infested, semibasement dwelling in Seoul, where the top 20 percent have sixty-four times the wealth of the bottom 20 percent, according to Min Joo Kim, in the July 7, 2023, *Washington Post*.[42] As viewers of *Parasite*, we experience the lack of money and the lack of the comforts it brings. The first part of the film is a sort of comic home-invasion film in which through a series of clever, if not devious, subterfuges the Kim family moves into the wealthy and privileged Park family home. A theme throughout the film is that the poor Kims, while managing to impersonate richer people, still carry the smell of poverty—a theme consonant with many depictions of the poor, including that in Courbet's painting. While Cleo in *Roma* reflects the stereotype of the deserving poor, the Kims are the dangerous poor who will stop at nothing to get money. In the second act of the film, we see, secreted in the basement of the wealthy house, the husband of the former housekeeper, who has been surviving on scraps of food pilfered at night from the refrigerator of the rich homeowners. Thus, two groups of poor people live subterranean existences off of the trickle-down spoils of the rich. Indeed, in a dramatic scene, embodying a form of pathetic fallacy, a rainstorm creates a literal trickle-down

that flows from the wealthy Park house down through the streets to the impoverished Kim basement, which is wrecked by this flood. In a symbolic move, the film shows us excremental brown effluvia from the flooding erupting from the Kims' toilet. (This echoes the constant attempts of a poor drunkard to urinate at the window of the semibasement. This is a family that is pissed and shit on.) The conflicts in the film build up to an inevitable bloodbath in which the poor kill the rich, with accompanying damage to themselves. The film ends with a kind of moral coda—a fantasy in which the poor Kim son dreams he will take over the rich house, now abandoned by the Parks and bought by Germans, and free his father from its basement, where he now hides from the police. But the final shot of the film reveals that the son is still in the semibasement where the film began, and he will never overcome his impoverished position. Clearly the Kims are the undeserving poor, motivated only by their own greed and class resentment, who get their moment to erase their lack, only to be put forcibly back into their place by the mechanisms of the plot. Message: violence and trickery won't get you out of your underground life.

Cuarón may be doing the only thing an upper-class person writing about a poor person can do—leaving things out. Bong Joon Ho, also from a privileged background, presents a more filled-in set of characters, but they are filled in mainly by their longing for the money and privilege of the well-off. It is as if the middle-class or upper-class writer cannot imagine poverty without seeing the characters as continually reflecting on their own lack. In *Parasite* a false equivalence ends up being drawn between the greed of the poor and the slack complacency of the rich. Neither deserves their money—and each needs to be punished for wanting it.

Representing poverty by absence is quite difficult, whereas representing wealth by presence is rather easy. Images and narratives abound with the cumulative possessions of the wealthy. Wealth is about superfluity, overabundance, and excess. We might think of Mother Hubbard versus Old King Cole—one has a bare cupboard, and the other has "fiddlers three." Possibly the most dramatic presentation of superfluity is the unforgettable scene in Émile Zola's *Ladies Paradise* in which pages are devoted to a minute description of a department's white sale of dry goods.[43] This amounts to what Karl Marx notes as a signature of capitalism—"an immense accumulation of commodities."[44] But when it comes to describing poverty, how can one present the absence of money and possessions? Most poornographers fall back on describing the tangible living conditions. Therefore, crumbling buildings, hanging laundry, and mounds of excrement stand in for the absence of money.

Georg Lukács notes that such reportorial writing tends to focus on the "evils of capitalist society . . . [and its] most crying abuses and grievances," written in a reportage mode by those with "petty-bourgeois radicalism, sometimes bordering on socialism."[45] Lukács's point is that while it may seem liberatory to describe the abuses of capitalism, often the exo-writers who do this kind of description are seeking more to instill a sense of simple outrage in the reader than to promote any complex plan for systematic political change.

While a presence with an absence is difficult to create narratively, it is important to understand what is missing in this absence: obviously, money and means but also personality and lived experience. The exo-writers can report only what they sense through vision, hearing, and scent and only present what they learn by research. They obviously cannot present life with any complexity or psychological interiority. On the other hand, as Lukács and others have pointed out, the hallmark of classic bourgeois novels is the creation of a psychological interiority that gives readers the impression of being inside a character's mind and thoughts. Lukács laments that reportage-type novels are in effect simply doing what the bourgeois novel does in regard to psychology. They are reproducing some aspect of the mind or the objects without providing an overall study of the mechanism of capitalism. Simply detailing abuses or absences is not enough and almost in effect makes exo-writers agents for the overarching structures of control and dominance.

The problem is that presenting a presence with an absence allows for description without representation. That last phrase may chime with the famous political clarion call of the American Revolution—"no taxation without representation."[46] I draw that parallel because there is often more than a casual relationship between the political idea of representative democracy and the notion of authorial representation. W. J. T. Mitchell tightens this ligature when he writes, "We now think of 'representative government' and the accountability of representatives to their constituents as fundamental postulates of modern government. One obvious question that comes up in contemporary theories of representation, consequently, is the relationship between aesthetic or semiotic representation (things that 'stand for' other things) and political representation (persons who 'act for' other persons)."[47] In some

sense, Mitchell is rephrasing Gayatri Spivak's use of Immanuel Kant's term to make a distinction between *Vertretung* and *Darstellung* as two types of representation—the former being political representation and the latter aesthetic representation.[48]

While Mitchell and Spivak do not elaborate on the possible historical connection between these two types of representations, Nancy Ruttenburg does in her *Democratic Personality: Popular Voice and the Trial of American Authorship*. Her overall argument is that a democratic impulse, which she calls *democratic personality*, preceded both the founding of representational democracy and aesthetic representation in novels and poetry. That earlier impulse was transgressive, chaotic, and contradictory and had to be contained, in a way, within the strictures and structures of the state and of bourgeois literature. Her approach is mostly literary with a specific focus on religion in the United States. Here I would want to expand her quest to include more genres and historical modalities by asking, "Is there a connection between the beginning of the novel in the eighteenth century and the consolidation of representative democracy in the same period?" In both, a person is given or takes the power to represent another person or group of people. In a direct democracy, each citizen would be part of a deliberative process that sets the rules, laws, conventions, and the like for the group. In writing, this would amount to each person being the author of their own story. A direct democracy of writing would be a vast collection of memoirs or something like the npr radio project StoryCorps, which has kiosks and locations in which ordinary people can record their personal stories.[49] In another sense, family gatherings or attendance at a pub, bar, or other communal location allows for a free exchange of stories and anecdotes in which individuals can shape a narrative about themselves.

However, with the rise of the novel and the development of the publishing industry, a direct writing public is displaced to a representative authorship in which certain individuals gain cultural capital in representing the lives of others. If we think of the early emphasis on epistolary fiction, we might understand that early fiction writers like Samuel Richardson or Frances Burney might have been trying to hijack direct writing to create this new and unique form of fiction. In so doing, the author re-presents the activity of ordinary direct letter writers and in the process makes themselves a re-presenter of that activity. To think this through, we could revise one motto of the American Revolution by converting "No taxation without representation" to "No novelization without representation." While a bit awkward, the revised credo has some relevance. As mentioned, at the same time as Western bourgeois society was concerning itself with the issue of political representation, the novel as a form was developing. Indeed, the word *representation* was first used by Edmund Burke in 1769 in the political sense we know, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which defines the term as "the action, fact, or right of being represented or representing others in a legislative or deliberative assembly; the principles or system associated with this." At the same time, the novel was concerned with the problem of representing the individual in a parallel process—rendering the life of an individual and re-presenting it in language. Plays were interested in reproducing social situations and the life of a person at a crucial or stressful moment. Epics depicted an idealized individual in battle, in which the fate of their society depended on their heroic acts. But the novel sought to represent an individual life over a period of time.

An Ngram chart shows us that the words *representative*, *representation*, *author*, and *reader* all spike between 1790 and 1810 (figure 2.5). Although Google Ngram is not the most reliable source, it does give us an idea that the confluence of the notion of representation and narrative held a distinct interest among those who were writing and reading books at the time.

To solve the problem of representation (and the accuracy of that representation), writers had to engage in a dialectic between factuality and fictionality. I have discussed this at much greater length in my book *Factual Fictions: Origins of the English Novel*. If there were a productive ambivalence between the factuality of the work and the credence of the reader, novelists could claim that because a work was "true," its content could be instructive and useful. Claiming that a novel was true was a way of asserting that its representation was accurate. When the "editor" of *Robinson Crusoe* claims the work is a real document, he bypasses the dodgy issue of representation.[50] Something is not a representation if it is in fact simply a presentation. To re-present a person or situation, an author must claim a certain privilege or right, which in turn is granted to the writer by groups of readers.

While novelists were working out these problems, political thinkers like James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay were hashing out in *The Federalist Papers* the details of how political representation might work. In this sense they were working out similar problems to those faced by novelists. If there were individuals who were to be both governed how should their being and

wishes be represented in a government? A similar problem of accuracy and veracity is found with novels, in the way that citizen readers choose individuals/characters to represent their wishes, desires, and opinions.

Madison was worried that there might be a misalignment in representation because the type of person chosen by an election might not correctly represent the interests of those who had cast their votes. As he wrote, "Those who administer it [government] may forget their obligations to their constituents and prove unfaithful to their important trust" (No. 62; 304).[51] Likewise, there might not be a sufficient number of representatives to proportionately stand for the interests of the voting public majority and minority. These concerns might equally relate to the reading public. Authors might not accurately represent the expectations and ideology of readers, and there might not be enough authors in the mix to do so in proportion to the types of readers.

I'm not saying that the reading public and the voting public were identical in the eighteenth century. Nor am I claiming that the processes of political representation and literary representation facilely map onto each other in that era. But this framework allows us to understand something about the process of representation and the issue of accuracy. In some sense, we might be able to reframe the argument about accuracy and authenticity if we think of the problem from the point of view of those who are represented in narrative. If they concur with the author's representation, then they will buy the book and, as a demographic, approve of the depiction of themselves presented in narrative form. This is less, in fact, about accuracy than about recognizing oneself and one's lived experience, as complex and ideological as that may be, in the textual representation. As Bruce Robbins writes, "Once literary representations are no longer judged by the criterion of an impossible immediacy . . . then their 'literariness' . . . becomes a medium or arena of political skirmishing, alive with the turbulent significance of moves and countermoves."[52] Those "moves and countermoves" amount to a quadralectic among author, audience, the represented, and milieu.

Representational inequality can be seen as a constantly fluctuating problem tied to the demographic representation of readers. The point is that readers will drive attitudes toward various marginalized and dominant identities. White middle-class readers in the nineteenth century, for example, supported writers who would convey to them their own experience of the world, including their view or imagined view of the poor, women, people of color, and colonized and enslaved people.

In this regard, we might take the example of Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor*, which is often cited, along with Charles Dickens's novels, as a resource for understanding the poor and working classes in Victorian England. It is important also to note that when such works enter the canon, any doubt as to their accuracy or standing is erased. They simply become the go-to books on the subject. One art historian notes that dubious representations, illustrations, and paintings in the nineteenth century "are increasingly regarded not as works of art but as evidence; and their 'realism' has been taken for granted. They are accepted as accurate and objective records of the age."[53] This seems to be the case with "authorities" like Mayhew. He himself was raised by a wealthy solicitor father in comfortable digs near Regents Park. Mayhew had financial troubles and often lived hand to mouth. His series of articles on the London poor for the *Chronicle*, later assembled into a book, became his best-known work and eventually the canonical book on the subject.

But while middle-class and wealthy readers liked the depictions they saw in Mayhew's work, he was roundly criticized by the very demographic he sought to portray. In one of the unusual instances of poor people's voices being noticed (although subsequently lost over time), a group of street vendors in London met on two occasions, covered by the press, to denounce Mayhew's work. They had invited the author to appear in person, but Mayhew refused. The chairperson of the meeting attacked the author, saying that his behavior was "ungentlemanly and unjust." We should note how the lower-class spokesperson turns the class tables on Mayhew using his gentleman status as a foil for his behavior, which the critic characterized as an attempt to "wage war against one of the poorest, the lowest, and the most illiterate classes of the community . . . to injure a class of society that never injured him." He elaborated that Mayhew "had got up his book to suit the tastes and views of the upper and middle classes, and he had selected a helpless class to be the victim of slanders—the butt and target to be fired at by public scorn and ridicule.[54] Indeed, Mayhew set up a meeting of "street people" in a large hall in Holborn by distributing free tickets widely to anyone who earned their living selling objects or produce on the streets. But as soon as the meeting opened, Mayhew was criticized for using the meeting as a pretext to profit personally by publishing what people said. He then canceled the meeting. George Martin, an official of the Street Trader's Protection Association, wrote about this fiasco,

saying that his organization came into being as a protest against Mayhew's writings. "Mayhew has charged us with vices he cannot prove. . . . [H]e or his agents have used petty and disgraceful tricks to elicit statements from poor men addicted to intoxication . . . exaggerated the information received . . . and . . . caricatured, and sneered, and vilified, and exposed the worst and hidden the best of our nature."[55] If this group of poor people had any representational equality, they might have influenced the reception of Mayhew's "classic" work. Instead, the canonical work displaces the actual subjects of the work and becomes the preferred narrative. The voices of the street vendors are drowned out by the official and dominant narrative of poornography.

One might add that the canonical status we have granted Mayhew's work could be very far off from what Mayhew intended. Far from seeing his work reverentially, Mayhew himself may have regarded his work as somewhere between sensational and comic. Indeed, Mayhew was one of the founders (if not *the* founder) of the satirical magazine *Punch*. He did not think it was inappropriate to stage at St. Martin's Hall in 1857 a combined lecture and comic recitation "which exploited" his own book. In this public event, Mayhew "spoke about his work and imitated various London street-sellers. James Hatton accompanied him on the piano and sang comic songs."[56] He then took this show on the road for three months around the provinces. One can imagine, given this almost vaudevillian approach, that the organization of street sellers may well have had valid objections when they protested Mayhew's portrayal of them.

As the demographics changed, in the 1920s, for example, and more working-class people and people of color became involved in reading and writing, the nature of the representation changed. As with a voting public, the sheer number of readers of a certain perspective will drive the election of various novelists who share that perspective through the simple act of buying their books. I'm not suggesting that a free market exists with books any more than with any other commodity since the publishing industry is far from being a level playing field. But the circulation of ideas (and ideas about how the world looks and feels) could be said to have a quasi-order to it.

If I am postulating a kind of shadow democracy based in literary models, is what I am discussing already conceptualized in Jürgen Habermas's idea of the public sphere?[57] One could argue that the public sphere, with its coffeehouses, magazines, pamphlets, and the like, amounts to a kind of humanistic government outside of the government. While that may be true, the public sphere isn't based so much on the concept of a single writer representing the wishes of a group of people who buy that writer's work and therefore choose that writer as a representative spokesperson. The public sphere is made up of a vast variety of dialogic voices. These may or may not include fictional characters whose lives represent the world the readers live in. If there is representation at all, it is through the personae of the writers, who might assume names like Publius or Isaac Bickerstaff. But recreating a world within a book isn't the job of the public sphere, although some novels, for example, might well come to represent or stand for some positions espoused in the public sphere.

To go back to the issue of modernism and postmodernism in regard to realism and authenticity, the model I am proposing in some sense bypasses or short-circuits the philosophical argument about intention. It should be clear as well that what I'm describing is not exactly reader-response theory either.

While most identity groups have now been incorporated into the reading franchise, as it were, one of the few groups that still remains outside of this paradigm is the poor. In that sense, both as voters and as consumers of art and culture, they can't publicly opine on their representation, by consumption or at the polls, nor can they engage in the public sphere, which would allow their issues and lived experience to be accurately represented in the representational sensorium. In fact, only about 20 percent of poor people vote in political elections.[58] How many fewer "vote" for cultural representation?

It is also important to note that this state of affairs can change through the withdrawal of consent or the ratification of new representatives, and when (and if) that withdrawal happens, then the issues being raised here would become moot. In other words, this isn't a permanent situation but depends on a complex political, social, and personal mix of interactions and concatenations.

It might be fair to complain about what I've presented. What if middle-class writers get it wrong but their efforts achieve some kind of social or economic change that helps poor people? Paul Lauter stresses that many writers who are not from poverty are writing to effect change. Rather than focus on class origin, he argues, isn't it more importaant to say how well the writer accomplishes this task?[59] Didn't Dickens help reform some of the worst abuses of

the Poor Laws? Didn't Dorothea Lange's photograph *Migrant Mother* call attention to starving pea pickers and their plight in California? Isn't this simply one argument in the long line of leftist theorists decrying the bourgeois function of literature and art under capitalism or neoliberalism? To buttress this objection, one might want to cite Lynn Hunt's book *Inventing Human Rights: A History*, which argues, in part, that novels in the eighteenth century helped create human rights by fostering empathy. Hunt notes that the wild popularity of the big- three epistolary novels—Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa* and Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Julie, Or the New Heloise* created a reading public who became acutely attuned to the suffering of characters. For Hunt the fact that novels and human rights came about in the same period suggests that the former encouraged the latter. "Learning to empathize opened the path to human rights."[60]

Likewise, one might want to cite Steven Pinker, who himself approves of Hunt when he says that "whether or not novels in general, or epistolary novels in particular, were the critical genre in expanding empathy, the explosion of reading may have contributed to the Humanitarian Revolution by getting people into the habit of straying from their parochial vantage points."[61]

While there is some truth to this point, its flaws are manifest. How would we measure the effectiveness of art in achieving change? Is this the change that the poor want? Is the relief structured by them or thrown at them? And how much do the fame and effectiveness of the middle-class "spokespeople" for the poor actually crowd out and prevent organic intellectuals among the poor from coming to occupy the public and prominent place held by their unelected doppelgängers? It is here that the idea of accountability, instead of authenticity, comes into play. Would not the authors and the readers have to grapple with a level of accountability in which authors would have to discuss their ability to depict the group they are representing? Instead of dwelling with the poor, they are selling the poor.

Another argument against my general point might be that the middle-class writers are simply better writers. Their writing abilities have gotten them prominence, not their ideological positions. Writers from the working class may be inferior writers given their lack of education and most likely autodidactic training. The popularity of exo-writers may just be based on a meritocratic surge of interest in the better writer. This point has the problem of being hard to actually prove since aesthetics is a relative subject, and prominent writers will shape the aesthetic response of readers, who have become used to, and therefore expect, a particular type of writing. But it would be wrong to see endo-writers like Richard Wright, Henry Roth, James Baldwin, and Tillie Olsen as poor writers in comparison with the exo-writers who have become very well known.

It might make sense here to focus on a moment in a "classic" novel about poverty—*Mary Barton* (1848), by Elizabeth Gaskell. Gaskell, her-self a writer from the well-to-do classes, is one of the first British authors, along with Frances Trollope, to write about the poor. In a telling moment in *Mary Barton*, a group of workingmen come to negotiate with the factory owners. Gaskell sets the scene by describing the men approaching the room:

Tramp, tramp, came the heavy clogged feet up the stairs; and in a minute five wild, earnest-looking men stood in the room. . . . Had they been larger boned men, you would have called them gaunt; as it was they were little of stature, and their fustian clothes hung loosely upon their shrunk limbs. . . . [They wore] dilapidated coats and trousers. . . . It was long since many of them had known the luxury of a new article of dress; and air-gaps were to be seen in their garments. Some of the masters were rather affronted at such a ragged detachment.[62]

Here of course we see the required ideologemes or classemes in the sartorial description of the workingmen. Their physical appearance, unlike our contemporary view of hulking workmen, was more in line with a eugenic vision of a stunted, degenerated, and enervated race of humans. Gaskell, however, does not condemn their minds, as she adds, "The operatives had more regard to their brains, and power of speech, than to their wardrobes."[63]

Pertinently, the narrator does not describe how the "masters" are dressed since they are the degree zero of identity and most likely are in the same or a similar class as the projected reader of the novel. Gaskell occupies a particularly difficult role as a narrator mediating between labor and capital. She admits to being agnostic as to the benefits or demerits of the factory system when she says in her preface, "It is not for me to judge. . . . I know nothing about political economy, or the theories of trade."[64] Her goal as a novelist is to create "sympathy" between masters and men. To occupy this middle ground, she employs the classemes of ragged clothing while annealing that observation with a positive sense of the workingmen's minds and eloquence. This strategy may derive from Gaskell's religious sense of the equality of souls.

While the men are meeting, the ne'er-do-well son of one

of the masters takes out his silver pencil and draws "an admirable caricature of them— lank, ragged, dispirited, and famine stricken." In drawing this picture, Harry Carson is essentially putting into visual relief the verbal description already provided by Gaskell. In this sense, he is a secret sharer of the narrator's art. Less willing to admit to the quality of their minds, Carson scribbles "a hasty quotation from the fat knight's well-known speech in [Shakespeare's] Henry IV."[65] In the speech referred to, Falstaff demeans his soldiers, calling them "scarecrows," "most of them out of prison. There's not a shirt and a half in all my company." Hal calls them "pitiful rascals," and Westmoreland replies, "They are exceeding poor and bare—too beggarly." Falstaff responds that they are "good enough to toss; food for powder, food for powder. They'll fill a pit as well as better." And he adds, "For their poverty, I know not where they had that, and for their bareness, I am sure they never learned that of me."[66] Falstaff 's callousness about his impoverished soldiers is thus inscribed on and into Carson's drawing, a reflection of his equal callousness toward the workingmen standing before him. Carson then passed the caricature around to the other masters in the room, who "all smiled, and nodded their heads."[67] The assumed superiority of the masters, who have the shared cultural capital to recognize the quote from William Shakespeare as describing the worthlessness of the men before them, who are excluded from that circle of knowledge and power, is sobering.

When Carson tears the drawing in two and throws the two twisted pieces into the fireplace, "careless as to whether they reached their aim or not," we note his louche insouciance as to even the value of such ephemera.[68] However, one of the men notes what has transpired and retrieves the drawing. When he brings it before the original models for the caricatures, those men react. One recognizes a friend "by his big nose" but also notes, "That's me, by G-d, it's the very way I'm obligated to pin my waistcoat up, to hide that I've gotten no shirt." While Carson has the details right, his decision to include embarrassing details of the men's poverty causes pain in those men.[69] "That is a shame, and I'll not stand it," says the person whose absence of a shirt has been rendered.[70]

John Slater, the man with the large nose, admits, "I could laugh at a jest as well as e'er the best on 'em, though it did tell again myself, if I were not clemming." Gaskell has her characters speak in the Lancashire dialect, in which *clemming* means "starving."[71] Here is a pivotal point—Gaskell herself has an unflinching eye and ear when it comes to depicting these men. While she recognizes the difficulty and even embarrassment of portraying what she sees, including a kind of guilty reference to her own actions in this scene, she nevertheless is doing her job as narrator. Slater's "eyes filled with tears; he was a poor, pinched, sharp-featured man, with a gentle and melancholy expression of countenance."[72] Is Gaskell trying to ameliorate her Carson-like description by her tribute to Slater's gentle countenance?

Slater continues, saying that the cries of his starving family haunt him, and will even if he were dead, so he "cannot laugh at aught." Reaching for the moral, Gaskell has Slater lament, "It seems to make me sad that there is any as can make game on what they've never knowed; as can make such laughable pictures on men, whose very hearts within 'em are so raw and sore as ours were and are, God help us."[73]

John Barton, Mary's father, who has become embittered by the treatment of the workingmen, then speaks. He begins by noting the improved economic conditions and the influx of orders, so that it made sense for the workingmen to approach the masters and ask for a raise in wages. Of those masters' refusal to raise wages, he adds, "One would think that it would be enough of hard-heartedness, but it isn't. They go and make jesting pictures on us! I could laugh at myself, as well as poor John Slater there; but then I must be easy in my mind to laugh. Now I only know that I would give the last drop o' my blood to avenge us on yon chap, who had so little feeling in him as to make game on earnest, suffering men." This bitter declaration is echoed by the assembled workers: "a low angry murmur" goes around, "but it did not yet take form or words."[74]

It is important to note here that the men are reacting to the caricature, not the words scribbled beneath it with Falstaff 's condemnation of the poor. We know from the novel that John Barton, Mary Barton, and Wilson all can read. Thus, their lack of reaction to the words of Shakespeare cannot be due to illiteracy. One can speculate that though they can read the Bible, poetry by the likes of the working-class poet Samuel Bamford, and the radical newspaper the *Northern Star*, there might be an issue around their cultural literacy. Shakespeare may well be considered impenetrable to the workingmen, although clearly understood by some of the masters. But the point I'd like to draw from this scene is that Gaskell herself might have some guilt around her own portrayal of the men in words. Therefore, she displaces, from language to visuality, her awkward position of chronicler to Harry Carson and his caricature.

We might want to remember that one of the complaints listed by Chartist journalists was the depiction of working-class people by the likes of Gaskell. A writer from the *English Charter Circular*, another radical newspaper, pointed out this problem: "Whenever sketches of the poor are given in any literary periodical, it is generally the composition of some clever, irresistible humorist, seeking to raise, it may be, a good natured smile, or even a broad grin at provincialisms; the peculiar habits and usage of trade, the eccentricities of individuals remarkable in some other mode than their poverty, but how rarely do we hear of the benevolence, the active sympathy, or charities of the poor."[75] One notes that the working-class writer here objects to the very kind of humor that Carson uses and sympathizes with the reaction of the working-class characters to that humor. More interesting is that the author here also complains about "sketches," which can apply to either words or drawings.

In either case, the workmen in *Mary Barton* may remain ignorant of the words of Shakespeare while taking the meaning of the verbal and visual ridicule to heart. In fact, in the plot they are driven to kill Harry Carson and draw lots to do so. John Barton draws the fatal lot and ends up murdering the son and heir of his own boss. As Gaskell points out, the image in question provokes an emotional reaction but no words.

The words that end up killing Carson are actually and literally those of Samuel Bamford, the working-class poet whose verse is included in *Mary Barton*. The paper on which one of Bamford's poems was transcribed is used as wadding in the gun that kills Carson. Perhaps this is a heavy-handed symbol of the power of words used in the wrong hands. And fittingly, the poem itself decries the lot of the poor. When John Barton hears this poem, he asks his daughter to copy it for him on a piece of paper. Mary writes the poem on the verso of a valentine given to her by Jem Wilson, a working-class man who loves her but is scorned, at least initially, by Mary in favor of the rake Harry Carson, who only intends to take her virginity without offering marriage. (Bad guys in this kind of novel are often really bad in a variety of ways.) The logic of the novel's imagery is that the lack of attention to the poor, described by Bamford, is then the remedy to Carson's crude caricature of the workingmen. Gaskell, in effect, is killing the part of her that dares to write about the poor but doing so with the very means she herself is guilty of using—literary language.

This extended example from Gaskell's novel illustrates in detail the complexities around the idea of representing the poor. The representer is both exhibiter of the abuses against the poor and at the same time perpetrator of the same. Writing is not a neutral act, and any attempt to take no position automatically takes a position. Gaskell would like to condemn callous depictions of the poor, but she, unconsciously at least, supports that same act of harsh description in her authorial command. In effect, it is hard to get out of the car while you are driving it.

My point in this chapter is that representation is a complex process by which authors are chosen by reading demographics (and publishers who intuit the needs of that demographic) and then often present back to those publics their own set of expectations. These expectations can change over time and under various kinds of political and social pressures. Rather than thinking of representation as an act of authenticity, it might be more apt to think of it as a combination of responsiveness to a demographic (or demographics) and accountability to such. In addition, the presence in the authorial sensorium of ideologemes will precraft certain kinds of narratives by providing only a limited set of tools to build representations. In this case, stories about the poor will seem real or accurate only if they are filled with ideologemes that match readers' genre expectations. This "filling" is a sublimination of the inability of writers and visual artists to depict lack. Therefore, authors may not be in full control of the representations they present and therefore might be unrepresentative representers. Representative equality will then depend on the extent to the which the author or artist depicting poverty is dwelling with and justly representing not the expectations of middle-class and upper-class readers but the poor people to whom they are accountable.

Notes:

1. Adichie, “Danger.”
2. See, for example, Carretta, *Unchained Voices*.
3. McCaulley, “Meaning of a Song.”
4. Quoted in M. Cooper, “Complex History.”
5. Quoted in Kennicott, “*Porgy and Bess*,” 28.
6. Quoted in M. Cooper, “Complex History.”
7. Quoted in Kennicott, “*Porgy and Bess*,” 28.
8. Cruse, *Crisis*, 103–4.
9. M. Scott, “‘Django Unchained.’”
10. Fox Fisher, “Fox Fisher on Trans Representation in Literature.”
11. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, 234.
12. Hall, *Representation*, 4.
13. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion*, 345.
14. Lukács, *Essays on Realism*, 45–71.
15. Althusser and Balibar, *Reading Capital*, 36.
16. Jameson, *Marxism and Form*, 195.
17. Howard, *Form and History*, 28.
18. Dyer, *Matter of Images*, 3.
19. Hale, *Social Formalism*, 221.
20. Hale, *Social Formalism*, 221.
21. Nancy Ruttenburg claims that the contradiction between represented and representer is resolved to some degree in the person and persona of Walt Whitman, who she claims “annulled the gap between being and representation, self and other,” by combining in himself the “genuine American author and exemplary American character.” While the claim seems valid, it is unlikely that a single author can change in one fell swoop the complicated problematic I am discussing. See Ruttenburg, *Democratic Personality*, 295.
22. Bourdieu and Passeron, *Reproduction*, 34.
23. Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity*, 27–44.
24. Johann Gottfried Herder, *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern*, edited by V. Muller, quoted in Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity*, 40.
25. Ruttenburg, *Democratic Personality*, 312–14.
26. Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity*, 73.
27. Dvořák, “Antonin Dvorak”; and Dvořák, “Real Value,” 28.
28. Morgan, *Frankie and Johnny*, 18–19.
29. Poor Magazine. http://www.poormagazine.org. Accessed February 26, 2024.
30. The Class Work Project, https://www.theclassworkproject.com. Accessed: February 26, 2024.
31. *Oxford English Dictionary*, “identity politics (n).”
32. Bakhtin, “Art and Answerability,” 2. Michael Holquist tries more fully to develop the idea of answering in his “Answering as Authoring.”
33. Wimsatt and Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy,” 468–88.
34. Dyer, *Matter of Images*, 3.
35. Lylo, “Ideologeme.”
36. Dyer, *Matter of Images*, 2.
37. This emphasis on lack can be seen as parallel to a deficit model described by Eve Tuck, who sees a problem in education around immigrants and other marginalized groups. Tuck, “Suspending Damage.”
38. Jones, *American Hungers*, 3.
39. Price, *Essays on the Picturesque*, 272–75.
40. Armstrong, *Fiction*, 95.
41. Michaels, *Beauty of a Social Problem*, 65.
42. Min Joo Kim, “Gangnam style vs. Squalor.”
43. Zola, *Ladies Paradise*, 390ff.
44. Marx, *Capital*, 35.
45. Lukács, *Essays on Realism*, 48.
46. There is a complex history of the rise and use of this phrase. See J. Bell, “No Taxation without Representation.” For our purposes it is enough to stress that there was a tandem coevolution of the notion of representation in its political and aesthetic sense.
47. Mitchell, “Representation.”
48. Spivak, “‘Can the Subaltern Speak?,” 34.
49. npr, “StoryCorps,” accessed February 26, 2024, https://www.npr.org/series/4516989/storycorps.
50. Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*.
51. Hamilton, Madison, and Jay, *The Federalist Papers,* 303–4.
52. Robbins, *Servant's Hand*, 8.
53. Woods, “Doré's London,” 341.
54. *Reynold's Newspaper*, May 18, 1851, 14, quoted in Mayhew, *London Labour*, 315–16.
55. *Reynold's Newspaper*, June 15, 1851, 14, quoted by Mayhew.
56. Humpherys, *Travels*, 10.
57. Habermas, “Public Sphere.”
58. Kurtzelben, “Fact Check.”
59. Lauter, “Under Construction,” 74–75.
60. L. Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights*, 68.
61. Pinker, *Better Angels*, 177.
62. E. Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, 241.
63. E. Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, 241.
64. E. Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, 29–30.
65. E. Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, 243.
66. Shakespeare, *Henry IV, Part One*, 4.2.36–69.
67. E. Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, 243.
68. E. Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, 244.
69. E. Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, 247.
70. E. Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, 247.
71. E. Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, 247.
72. E. Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, 247.
73. E. Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, 247.
74. E. Gaskell, *Mary Barton*, 248.
75. *English Charter Circular* 1 (1841): 162, quoted in Vicinus, *Industrial Muse*, 2, quoted in Uglow, *E. Gaskell*, 103–4.

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