The representation of the working class in 19th-century literature

Dhurgham Saad Beshbush Shams Aldin
Ministry of Education, Open Educational College, Najaf
dhurghamshamsaldin@gmail.com

Abstract

In this study, the representation of the working class in literature of the nineteenth century is discussed and analyzed, keeping in mind the overall context of the processes of industrialization, urbanization, and the creation of the modern class system. In the context of the processes of industrialization and the creation of the modern class system, the representation of the working class becomes evident, and the genre of literature becomes a tool to represent the working class through the common themes of materialism, morality, victimization, and survival. In the context of the representation of the working class, the study also focuses on the fact that the working class cannot be considered a homogeneous entity. Through the common representation of the working class, the study argues that the representation of the working class played a central role in the literature of the nineteenth century and, therefore, affected the social construction of the working class. Through the analysis, the study also argues that literature served not only as a tool of criticism of the processes of industrialization but also as a platform where the class system was constructed, negotiated, and contained.

Keywords: working class, nineteenth-century literature, industrialization, poverty, social inequality, realism, naturalism, class representation

تمثيل الطبقة العاملة في الأدب في القرن التاسع عشر
وزارة التربية، الكلية التربوية المفتوحة، النجف الاشرف
م.م. ضرغام سعد بشبوش شمس الدين

الملخص:

تتناول هذه الدراسة تمثيل الطبقة العاملة في أدب القرن التاسع عشر ضمن سياق التصنيع، والتحضر، وصعود الانقسامات الطبقية الحديثة. ومع التحولات التي أحدثها الرأسمال الصناعي في طبيعة العمل وتفاقم اللامساواة الاجتماعية، أصبحت حياة الطبقة العاملة أكثر حضورًا في النصوص الأدبية. ومن خلال أجناس أدبية متعددة مثل الرواية الاجتماعية، والكتابة الواقعية والطبيعية، والشعر، والأدب الشعبي، صوّر الكُتّاب العمال عبر أنماط متكررة من المعاناة المادية، والتقييم الأخلاقي، والضحية الاجتماعية، والصمود. وقد سعت هذه التمثيلات غالبًا إلى كشف الاستغلال وإثارة التعاطف، لكنها كانت في كثير من الأحيان خاضعة لسلطة سردية من الطبقة الوسطى، مما حدّ من صوت الطبقة العاملة وفاعليتها داخل النص. كما تؤكد الدراسة أن الطبقة العاملة لم تُقدَّم بوصفها فئة موحّدة، بل اختلفت صورها تبعًا للجندر، والعمر، والمكان، حيث برزت الفوارق بين عمل النساء، وعمل الأطفال، وتجارب العمال في المدن مقارنة بالريف. ومن خلال تتبع هذه الأنماط التمثيلية، ترى الدراسة أن تمثيل الطبقة العاملة كان عنصرًا محوريًا في الثقافة الأدبية للقرن التاسع عشر، وأسهم في تشكيل التصورات الاجتماعية حول الفقر والعمل واللامساواة. وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن الأدب مثّل في آنٍ واحد نقدًا للظلم الصناعي ومجالًا ثقافيًا تشكّلت داخله الهويات الطبقية وتفاوضت أحيانًا ضمن حدود اجتماعية معينة.

الكلمات المفتاحية :الطبقة العاملة، أدب القرن التاسع عشر، التصنيع، الفقر، اللامساواة الاجتماعية، الواقعية، الطبيعية، تمثيل الطبقة

1. Introduction

This research examines the major ways in which literature of the nineteenth century depicted the working class and seeks to evaluate the cultural implications of such depictions. The social and economic changes of the nineteenth century, marked by the rise of rapid industrial capitalism, urban growth, and changes in labor organization, created new patterns of inequality and brought the lives of wage earners, factory workers, servants, and the urban poor into sharp focus. As the working class emerged as a distinct social force in modern industrial society, literature emerged as one of the primary cultural arenas in which class was depicted, understood, and contested. The novel, poetry, and other forms of popular literature were not simply reflective of the social changes of their time; they were also instrumental in shaping the social and cultural understandings of the day.

Representation of the working class in literature of the nineteenth century, particularly in Britain and Europe, assumes a prominent place. The rise of industrialism created stark contrasts between the haves and have-nots, and literature of the period sought to highlight the social implications of factory work, overcrowded living, and economic uncertainty. Through its depictions of working-class characters and environments, literature of the period hoped to highlight the miseries and injustices of the working class and prompt middle-class readers to consider their implications. However, such depictions were often not politically objective and were largely shaped by dominant moral and ideological discourses, which often split the working class into respectable and deviant categories and depicted the working class as objects of sympathy, reform, or social concern, and not as autonomous individuals.

The current analysis argues that the representation of the working class in the literature of the nineteenth century was not only a product of the cultural understanding of industrial modernity but also achieved particular cultural functions. The representation of the working class is repeatedly mediated through the themes of material hardship, moral judgment, and victim narratives or endurance across different literary genres, including social problem fiction, realism, naturalism, poetry, and popular literature. This demonstrates the potential of literature to critique social inequality while also highlighting the limitations of the mediated representation of social inequality. The representation of the working class is mediated through the perspective of the middle-class author across many of the canonical texts of the period, which creates important questions of voice, sympathy, and representation.

The representation of the working class is not uniform across the literature of the nineteenth century. The representation of the female workforce is mediated through the ideology of domesticity and sexual morality, the representation of child labor is mediated through the trope of sentimentality to heighten the sense of ethics, and the representation of the workforce in urban versus rural settings is mediated through different social connotations. This demonstrates that the representation of the working class is mediated through the intersection of different social hierarchies rather than economic position.

Overall, the current analysis argues that the representation of the working class is an important aspect of the literary imagination of the nineteenth century that offers important insights into the cultural representation of social inequality. The representation of the working class was an important aspect of the cultural representation of social inequality during the period, which was mediated through the tensions of sympathy and control, critique and containment, and visibility and silence. The representation of the working class is an important aspect of the literature of the period that offers important insights into the representation of social inequality.

2. Historical Context of the Working Class (19th Century)

2.1 Industrialization and the transformation of labor

Throughout the nineteenth century, industrialization has been characterized by a shift in the organization of labor, an increase in production concentration, mechanization, and a shift in the relationships between laborers, their employers, and time. This has been particularly true in various regions, such as Britain, which has been regarded as the "first" industrial economy. Industrialization has been characterized by a shift in production organization from a household to a factory organization, where labor has been increasingly controlled by time, supervisors, and routines (Hobsbawm, 1968). Industrialization has not been characterized by the introduction of new machines alone, but a shift in the social experience of laborers. Industrialization has been characterized by an increase in wage labor, where reliance on wages for sustenance has been a key feature of the lives of a majority of the population—an economic shift that has been associated with new challenges when wages are low or when employment is seasonal or when there are crises.

Industrial labor has been characterized by an increase in specialization in tasks and an expansion in large-scale workplaces. While Western European industrialization has been regarded as a long-duration process, nineteenth-century European observers have been keen to highlight the social consequences of industrialization, such as the crowded factory towns, emerging employment patterns, and increasing conflicts over wages and working conditions (Landes,

1969). Industrialization has been characterized by a shift in the composition of the labor force and the manner in which labor has been performed. Industrialization has been characterized by an increase in female labor in various industries, where child labor has been a key feature of working-class households. Historical analysis based on autobiographies has been able to highlight the significance of early labor force entry and child labor earnings, particularly for working-class households (Humphries, 2010).

These modern descriptions of industrial society have heavily influenced modern ideas of "the working class" and subsequent literary portrayals. The work by Engels on industrial England, based on direct observation and reports from the time, brought the issue of urban labor and poverty into the very center of discussions on modern society, highlighting the issue of exploitation, substandard housing, and social consequences that accompanied the process of rapid industrialization (Engels, 1845). Although later scholars have disputed some of the ideas that underlay the work by Engels, the book represents a key piece of nineteenth-century literature that brought together the discourse on industrial suffering, class, and systemic critique that was so pervasive in intellectual and literary cultures (Engels, 1845). The industrialization of labor provided literature with new settings, new typologies of workers, and new questions regarding responsibility, poverty, and social order.

2.2 Urbanization and social inequality

Industrialization was also associated with rapid urban growth. Urban centers grew as the demand for labor attracted migrants from rural areas and smaller towns. This resulted in the development of dense working-class neighborhoods and commercial centers, as well as the residences of the elite classes. Urban historians have noted that Victorian cities were characterized not just by growth, but also by contrast. They noted that wealth and power coexisted with conditions of overcrowding, irregular employment, and public health crises (Briggs, 1963). Thus, the urban landscape was a conspicuous manifestation of these inequalities, which shaped the views of the Victorian middle class on the nature of class and the visible aspects of the working class.

Public health conditions took center stage in the Victorian discourse on the lives of the working class. Government inquiries and reformist writings consistently linked issues of poverty and the working class with disease, sanitation, and mortality rates. In his famous sanitary report, Edwin Chadwick presented evidence to prove that the conditions in the working class were not just "private misfortunes" but also issues of national importance (Chadwick, 1842). Subsequent studies have proved that health risks were distributed unevenly, and

the working class bore the burden of these risks, becoming the focal point for reform, surveillance, and moral judgment (Wohl, 1983).

Social investigation and reportage contributed to the consolidation of powerful images of working people and poverty in cities. Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* offered an extensive catalog of working people within the informal and marginal economy of the city, such as street vendors and casual laborers, and classified them according to categories that blended economic and moral aspects (Mayhew, 1851). In the late nineteenth century, Charles Booth's multi-volume work and poverty maps further solidified the idea that poverty in cities could be measured and represented spatially, differentiating between 'respectable' workers, precarious workers, and the poor (Booth, 1889-1903; Charles Booth's London, n.d.).

Urbanization made class inequality and social stratification visible and narratable. Literary works made use of the city as a setting that was realistic and symbolic at the same time, as a landscape that could represent and symbolize poverty, danger, and moral concerns. At the same time, social investigation and reportage contributed to the formation of the 'vocabulary' from and through which images of working people were constructed, sometimes with positive and sometimes with negative features.

2.3 Emergence of class consciousness

The nineteenth century saw the simultaneous development of working-class politics and the consolidation of "class" as an accepted social identity. "Class" developed in response to economic change, which created a sizeable wage-dependent population, but it was shaped through workplace struggles, mutual societies, trade unions, politics, and reform movements. A leading analysis suggests that "class" in this period was not simply an objective economic category, but a historical construction created through shared struggles, cultural practices, and political mobilization (Thompson, 1963). This approach is particularly useful for literary analysis, as it helps us understand the nature of changing representations of the working class, since the working class now appears not just as an accumulation of poor individuals, but also as an actor that can be organized and articulate its interests. Political movements made working-class interests visible. Chartism, for example, enlisted mass support for political rights in Britain, thus capturing popular politics in an industrial society (Chase, 2007; Thompson, 1984). From the perspective of political ideas in Europe, class struggle was now openly discussed, becoming global in scope. Marx and Engels' Communist Manifesto (1848) outlined modern history in terms of class struggle and argued that industrial capitalism created new class antagonisms between bourgeoisie and proletariat (Marx & Engels, 1848). However, this perspective,

whether it was accepted, feared, or opposed, shaped social conflict for many writers and readers, particularly strikes, social unrest, and the "poverty problem."

Most importantly, however, the concept of "class consciousness" was not universal but differentiated by region, trade, gender, skill level, and job security. Yet throughout the century, the interrelationship of industrial labor, urban inequality, and mass political movements ensured class was a dominant concept in the understanding of society, and the literature responded by dramatizing the conflict between workers and capitalists, the collective action of workers (sometimes heroically, sometimes with anxiety), and the debate about whether poverty was caused by moral failing or structural injustice, debates also present in the rhetoric of reform and the social sciences (Chadwick, 1842; Mayhew, 1851; Thompson, 1963).

3. Dominant Modes of Representation

The working class is rarely portrayed as a cohesive whole in nineteenth-century literature, but it is always portrayed in ways that conform to a set of familiar representational strategies, configurations of representation that render working-class individuals legible, morally intelligible, and emotionally engaging to readers. In the political condition and industrial fiction of the British, these strategies of representation often developed in relation to debates on political economy, the poor laws, factory discipline, and social unrest, often in relation to the tension between social inequality and social power (Briefel, 2025; Gallagher, 1985). In the French realist and naturalist traditions, representation is often heightened by documentary detail, the extent of industrial conflict, and social forces (Baguley, 1990; Nelson, 2020; Reid, 1992).

3.1 Poverty, labor, and material hardship

One form of representation is material realism, where the texts focus on bodily fatigue, housing, hunger, precariousness, hazardous working conditions, and the rhythms of the economy of wage labor. In material realism, poverty is not only represented but also contextualized as a social condition caused by industrial capitalism, the distribution of wealth, and the absence of worker protection (Briefel, 2025; Gallagher, 1985). Hardship, as a representation, is typically expressed through the following:

- The body as evidence
- Space as ideology
- Time as discipline

In the industrial and social problem fiction of the Victorian era, specific details are typically employed to convince the middle-class reader that poverty is not only

the poor's problem but also a widespread social problem, but the texts also limit the representation by shifting the focus from the poor to the middle-class observers, reformers, or readers (Betensky, 2010; Briefel, 2025). In the representation of hardship, the texts are both social problem fiction and a plot device, encouraging the reader's sympathy, morality, and action, but also putting the reader in the position to "feel for" the poor, which does not necessarily promote the idea of working-class action (Betensky, 2010).

Some texts that are representative of the representation of hardship in the Victorian era are Charles Dickens's industrial and urban fiction, Elizabeth Gaskell's industrial and urban fiction, Victor Hugo's detailed representation of poverty and urban inequality in Les Misérables (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.), and the representation of the world of miners in Germinal by Émile Zola (Nelson, 2020).

3.2 Moralization of the working class (respectability, discipline, deviance)

The second dominant pattern is that of moral sorting. It is characterized by the way in which the novelist portrays the working-class characters in terms of binaries such as respectability/unrespectability, industriousness/idleness, deservingness/ undeservingness, and deviance/discipline. It is important to note here that this language of morality was certainly not created by the writers; it is closely related to the language of welfare and governance in the nineteenth century and in Britain in particular after the New Poor Law. The language of literary works often echoes (and sometimes subverts) the way in which the state and other actors saw and managed the poor as a problem to be managed and controlled (Muller, 2020; Stokes, 2001).

Two patterns are dominant in this respect and need to be emphasized here:

1. The pattern of respectability as a way of gaining entrance.

There are many novels in which some of the working-class characters are made worthy of the reader's sympathies by virtue of their sobriety, cleanliness, sexual restraint, family commitment, and self-sacrifice. All these are signs of respectability and a commitment to mainstream values (Muller, 2020).

2. The pattern of deviance as a way of creating fear.

There are also many novels in which some of the working-class characters are depicted as deviant and are shown as criminals, drunkards, shirkers, and bad women. The tendency here is to create the impression that the poor are poor because of their deviance. However, some literary works also subvert this pattern by showing how institutions create deviance (Stokes, 2001).

This pattern is also common in works that deal with the workhouse and poor relief. It is in these contexts that inspection and control are likely to occur (Stokes, 2001). It is also in this context that the language of deservingness and undeservingness is closely related to gender and respectability in the Victorian period (Muller, 2020).

3.3 Victimhood and social injustice

A third modality places the working class predominantly as victims of injustice in society—not just unfortunate but also wronged. The analytic focus here is on how law, police, and the economy shape life chances. This modality is also evident in the nineteenth-century novel's concern with social explanation: the novel as a forum for experiencing institutionalized cruelty and inequality as personal tragedy (Gallagher, 1985; e.g., reference works commonly describe Hugo's Les Misérables as a social justice novel) (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.; Oxford Reference, n.d.).

Yet this approach also generates an intrinsic contradiction:

- Strength: The victim approach makes politics clear—poverty as produced by systems, not nature.

- Danger: This victim approach can also reduce the working-class individual to a pitied object and hence reduce their complexity and the scope of self-representation.

It is also part of the reason why some of the scholarly debates on the Victorian social problem novel focus on the organization and direction of sympathy—toward workers who suffer, toward middle-class characters who sympathize with workers, and toward narratives of reconciliation and harmony (Betensky, 2010). Thus, injustice is the moral motor of the novel, but the politics may remain ambiguous.

Some of the emphases of this modality are Dickens's attacks on institutions and their effect on the poor; Hugo's attack on injustice and suffering in prisons (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.; Oxford Reference, n.d.); and industrial novels that show exploitation while "guarding" against any positive endorsement of revolt (Briefel, 2025).

3.4 Dignity, endurance, and collective identity

Besides pity and moral judgment, there is a type of working-class dignity that is fostered within the literature of the nineteenth century, which is based on endurance, competence, solidarity, and, in some cases, the nascent awareness of

a collective identity. This does not negate the suffering, but rather seeks to place laboring life within a context that contains values and identities that transcend the judgment of the middle-class.

Two prominent forms of this are:

1. Dignity through endurance and ethical agency.

Some of the literature portrays the working-class characters as having a type of moral agency that is based on endurance, concern for family or community, or a simple acknowledgement of the situation. Even when this is done within a limited scope, there is a subversion of the idea that poverty is a sign of moral failure (Betensky, 2010; Muller, 2020).

2. Collective identity through labor conflict and politicization.

The literature that is based on labor strikes, industrial conflict, or socialist/radical politics is the type that portrays the collective identity of the working-class. Zola's *Germinal* is said to portray the workers at a point when they are beginning to formulate a type of political voice, while the outcomes are left ambiguous (Nelson, 2020). Reid's analysis of *Germinal* demonstrates the ways that the novel engages the debates of the time, including the paternalistic rhetoric that is used by the management or the authorities, yet this rhetoric also serves to point out the relationship between the powers that be and the workers (Reid, 1992).

However, within the industrial fiction of Britain, the collective action of the working-class is portrayed within an ambivalent light, as the literature seeks to critique the exploitation of the workers while at the same time being wary of the idea of mass revolt or the legitimacy of the revolt itself, as this is tied to the cultural anxieties of the period about "numbers" (Briefel, 2025). This is the type of compromise that is seen within the literature of the period, wherein the dignity of the working-class is praised, the endurance is admired, but the collective action is subverted or deflected into the reformist or moralistic plot.

4. Narrative Perspectives and Mediation

4.1 Middle-class authorship and narrative authority

Another feature of nineteenth-century "working-class representation" in mainstream literary discourse, which can be seen as constant, is the fact that it was created within middle-class institutions of literature: commerce, periodical culture, and reviewing. Even when the intention of the text is to enlighten the middle-class reader about the sufferings of industrialism or the poor living conditions in cities, the narrative authority always lies in the hands of the

enlightened narrator, reviewer, or the socially mobile working-class character who represents working-class culture to the middle-class reader. This is important because it creates a mediating relationship between representation and the working class, where the working class becomes not just the subject of representation, but also its object.

Scholars have shown that the Victorian novel has its own specific forms of making 'the social' intelligible through its narrative form. Gallagher's work on Victorian industrial-era fiction has highlighted how novels engage and rework social discourse from that era, particularly that of reform, political economy, and social investigation, so that 'private' and 'public' social issues may be narrated within a shared framework (Gallagher, 1988). This does not mean that social discourse within the novel simply reflects that of reform; rather, narrative form becomes a means to an end for social intelligibility, often through granting the narrator or narrative system an overview position, that is, an ability to connect individual sufferings to social conditions (Gallagher, 1988).

Poovey has shown that within nineteenth-century British culture, the social body of the population came to be represented as an entity, an entity directly tied to reform-writing and new forms of social knowledge (Poovey, 1995). In terms of literary representation, this has allowed for narrators to speak authoritatively about 'society,' 'the poor,' 'the working class,' even if the voices of individual workers remain underdeveloped. The social representation of this has a double edge; that is, it can lead to an increased intelligibility of social inequality, but equally to social hierarchy through the middle-class narrator speaking for and about the working class (Poovey, 1995).

4.2 Sympathy, distance, and control in representation

The second dynamic deals with the regulation of the reader's emotional involvement with working-class suffering through sympathy, usually through a relationship of closeness and distance. There is a great deal of scholarly research on Victorian sympathy, and it is argued that sympathy is not only a humane emotion elicited by the poverty of characters but also a narrative device through which the writer attempts to guide the reader's emotions through the use of focalization, omniscient commentary, revealment, and observation scenes (Jaffe, 2000).

Jaffe argues that scenes of sympathy in Victorian narratives are closely related to the construction of identity and difference. It is argued that sympathy may seem to cross boundaries of class and difference while at the same time reifying these boundaries through the construction of the reader's emotions through spectacles of poverty and difference (Jaffe, 2000). This also explains the reason behind the apparent ambivalence of some of these narratives between sympathy and anxiety,

as sympathy can elicit reformist emotions while at the same time acting as a subtle tool of maintaining social order and keeping the working-class characters within a moral framework (Jaffe, 2000).

Greiner's work builds upon this by connecting the sympathetic response to narrative viewpoint and realism, arguing that realism in the nineteenth century relies upon "sympathetic protocols" which are enacted through the management of viewpoints and the guidance of the imagination (Greiner, 2012). In a number of novels, the use of omniscient viewpoint and access to interiority creates a form of "sympathetic distance": the reader is exhorted to feel for the poor, yet the narrative often takes a viewpoint which surveys working-class life as a case to be understood rather than as a viewpoint which informs the meaning of the narrative (Greiner, 2012; Jaffe, 2000).

Betensky's study of bourgeois compassion is especially relevant to a literature review because it illuminates the function of sympathy as a form of middle-class self-understanding rather than as a representation of the poor. In this model of social problem fiction, the reader achieves a broadened emotional repertoire (feeling pity, possessing a sense of moral purpose, etc.) which nonetheless retains the middle-class subject as the locus of moral agency as benefactor, interpreter, or witness (Betensky, 2010). The result is a pattern in which suffering is vividly enacted, yet the route to resolution or change is through reform, benevolence, or individual moral agency rather than through the agency of the workers themselves.

4.3 Limits of working-class voice

As a result of the positioning of narrative authority outside the working class, a third recurring concern is the restricted presence of the working-class voice, especially as expressed through interiority, first-person authority, or discursive autonomy. In many nineteenth-century novels, the working-class voice is represented as speech, restricted to the modes of reported speech, stylized dialect, short scenes of testimony, or dialogue accompanied by a framing narrative that interprets, translates, and evaluates speech. While such modes can produce the "authenticity effects" of the working-class voice, they simultaneously keep the working-class voice under narrative control.

Parallel to these trends, the nineteenth century was not devoid of instances of the working-class self-writing. In fact, these works were positioned alongside the novel, rather than within the novel. David Vincent's historical overview of the development of the working-class autobiographies of the nineteenth century reveals that, from the early decades of the century, the genre had become sufficiently established to attract the attention (and disapproval) of literary gatekeepers, thus underscoring the role of the market in the construction of the

legitimacy of the novel. The extensive annotated bibliography of the genre produced by Burnett, Vincent, and Mayall reveals the extent of the production of the working-class autobiographies, thus emphasizing the fact that the "working-class voice" is not simply a concept, but a body of works that has the potential to complicate the novelistic representations of the worker as a speaking subject who is not allowed to speak as a worker (Burnett et al., 1984).

Recent historical studies that have used these same autobiographies argue that a different picture emerges when working-class narrators are given control over point of view and emotion. For example, Tomkins argues that "autobiographies of Poor Law institutions show a range of emotions that are remembered in different ways, which do not necessarily conform to middle-class assumptions about the workhouse, and so demonstrate the limits of knowledge in reformist or externalist representations" (Tomkins, 2021). For studies concerned with literary representation, the implication is a methodological as well as an interpretive one: "the limits of working-class voice in canonical fiction are not simply a matter of voicelessness, but rather a matter of the locatedness of the voice, in the narrators, the institutions, and the readerships, through which working-class experience is often represented in terms of morality, sentiment, and administration" (Poovey, 1995; Vincent, 2016).

5. Variation Across Genres and Contexts

The representations of the working class in nineteenth-century literary works show no consistency due to genre conventions and formats of publications and intended readerships. The "working-class character" functions differently in the genre of social problem novels of the mid-nineteenth century, French naturalism, Chartist poetry, and penny serials written for a mass readership. Genre is important as it determines (a) the relationship between explanation and dramatic representation, (b) the emotional impact elicited (such as feelings of sympathy, fear, and/or admiration), and (c) the representation of workers as individual characters, typified characters, and/or groups of actors.

5.1 Social-problem fiction

Social problem fiction, also called the social problem novel or the social protest novel, was a dominant form of fiction in the middle of the 20th century, concerned with the representation of labor, poverty, and class struggles. The early works on the subject describe social problem fiction as a genre of fiction that dramatizes a common social problem, typically class conflict, through its impact on characters, and which achieved prominence in Great Britain and the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. In the social problem fiction tradition, the representation of the working class is typically structured around the theme of legibility, where the

worker's struggles must be made legible and compelling to a reader assumed to be socially distant from the world of industrial labor.

An important feature of social problem fiction is the reformist logic of its narratives. In the social problem fiction tradition, the working class is often represented as an object of concern and solicitation, which needs to be recognized and acted upon through the improvement of legislation, charity, education, public health initiatives, or changes in the conduct of employers. This does not necessarily make the genre propagandistic, but rather highlights the way the genre represents the working class and the way the representation of the working class and the representation of social problems are linked to the representation of solutions.

Scholars' research on the fiction of the industrial era helps us see the reasons behind the rise of this genre to the position of dominant class representation. Gallagher's research on English fiction of the era focuses on the way in which this fiction assimilated the "social discourse" of the era and began to create new forms of narrative that could connect individual experience to structural conditions like industry, politics, welfare, and family economy in a way that made social problems narratable as a plot. This is a genre that often represents workers in scenes of suffering and testing; however, it is also a genre in which the narrative may function to circumscribe the voice of the working class by giving the reader interpretive authority in the figure of the narrator or a socially elevated point-of-view character.

Social problem fiction is a genre that focuses on the need for sympathy and reform; however, it is also a genre in which the working class is represented in terms of moral categorizations like "respectable" and "irresponsible," "deserving" and "undeserving," in a way that follows the dominant modes of social regulation in the nineteenth century.

5.2 Realist and naturalist writing

Where social problem fiction tends to be grounded in the appeal to morality and the reformist imperative, realist and naturalist writing tends to be grounded in the appeal to the documentary, the dense description of environments, labor processes, and the material determinations of choice. While these modes are differently inflected in different national traditions, they are equally necessary to the development of representations of the working class in the nineteenth century because of their extension of the descriptive and explanatory possibilities of writing about labor, poverty, and constraint.

In the context of French literary culture, naturalism is most commonly associated with the appeal to scientific method. Émile Zola's critical text *Le Roman*

expérimental (1880), commonly translated as *The Experimental Novel*, is a programmatic text that argues for the application of the "experimental method" to the writing of fiction, positing the novel as a kind of investigative tool for exploring the world of reality. The appeal to the determinative forces of causality—environment, heredity, institutional pressure—tends to produce representations of the worker as not primarily a figure of morality, but as a figure produced by the systems of industry, labor discipline, and class conflict.

Further, naturalist representation also tends to extend its scope from individual misfortune to broader social issues, such as labor troubles, strikes, and general suffering among the working classes. The discussion on Zola's industrial fiction often emphasizes this extension of scope and scale as an integral part of the representation of working-class individuals, who are not just unfortunate individuals but also members of a class who are dealing with a system of power. However, it is also possible that, as a part of this emphasis on determinism and system, naturalist fiction also imposes its own restrictions on the representation of workers, who are depicted as being part of a system and are not entirely political agents.

British realism, in a broader sense, often also exhibits a strong sense of realist concern for settings and a strong sense of system, which is also more likely to incorporate a strong sense of morality and reconciliation, especially within Victorian commercial fiction. Gallagher's discussion on this period also helps understand the role of the novel as a medium for exploring industrial society while also negotiating various demands and issues. Realist and naturalist traditions often also heighten their focus on settings and system, which enables a more social and systemic focus on the representation of the working classes.

5.3 Poetry and popular literature

Working-class representation in the nineteenth century goes beyond the boundaries of the middle-class novel; poetry and popular print media carry diverse voices, audiences, and political intentions, and may offer a clearer articulation of labor identity.

Working-class and 'laboring-class' poetry flourished alongside, and sometimes against, high literary culture. Existing literature on poetry from the nineteenth century describes the formation of a tradition of working-class poets and cultural debates about their legitimacy and reception, often describing them as 'uneducated' and socially marginal, even when they were admired. A comprehensive analysis of working-class literature from nineteenth-century Britain states that working-class literature has to be understood in relation to working people as readers and writers, and to the cultures of self-education that supported literary production outside the institutions of high culture.

Chartist culture is an interesting case to illustrate the use of poetry as both aesthetic and political practice. Chartist literature has been understood as working-class literature associated with mass politics and the formation of social identity; its use of poetry and songs has been documented to be part of meetings, print media, and performance culture. For the purpose of this topic, Chartist poetry is significant as it portrays workers not only as objects of identification but as speaking subjects articulating their rights and dignity.

Other than politically conscious poetry, popular literature such as cheap fiction, penny fiction, and sensational fiction also played an important role in the construction of working-class representation. According to the historical overview provided by the British Library on penny dreadfuls, the popularity of penny dreadfuls can be attributed to the rise in literacy levels and the advent of cheaper print technologies, which again points to the role of fiction in the construction of working-class representation. According to popular academic references, penny dreadfuls and penny bloods were cheaply serialized sensational fiction, often written for, and marketed to, working-class young readers in the Victorian period.

The significance of popular literature in the construction of class representation lies in the fact that it often focuses on the affective and the plot, moving away from the reformist tone that is often found in other genres of literature. However, popular literature often has the potential to reinforce the stereotype of the "dangerous classes." Implication for your research: the role of poetry and popular literature in the construction of working-class representation lies in the fact that it points to the role of class movements in the construction of working-class representation, which is not imposed upon the working class by the elite but is an inherent part of the class itself.

6. Internal Differentiation Within the Working Class

The working class in literature of the nineteenth century is rarely depicted as a single entity. Rather, it repeatedly makes distinctions in working-class life in terms of gender, age, and geographical location (urban and rural). These differences are seen in the range of laboring activities depicted in literature, such as working in factories, serving as domestic workers, working in agriculture, and street vendors. There are also differences in the moral judgments made of working-class people and the level of sympathy extended to them in literature. In many cases, literature follows and constructs social frameworks of the nineteenth century, which were prevalent in the broader society, such as social reform, social inquiry, and middle-class ideology of home and family, and class is seen in terms of intersecting categories, rather than purely in terms of economic categories (Davidoff & Hall, 1987; Gilbert, 2004).

6.1 Gender and labor

Gender is a major axis of differentiation, which affects the kinds of labor represented as well as the kinds of moral frameworks that are invoked to understand the lives of the working class. In the 19th century, the dominant culture of the British middle class was committed to the ideology of the "separate spheres," which emphasized the difference between the public sphere of work dominated by men and the private sphere of the home dominated by women. Although the reality of the working class was not quite so simple, as many women workers contributed to the income of their families, the language of domesticity was sometimes invoked to describe women's labor and their moral worth (Davidoff & Hall, 1987; Flanders, 2003).

Women's labor is represented as being of two kinds, which are prominent in the literature. First, women's labor is portrayed as being paid work that is socially "acceptable" (though not as well paid as other kinds of labor, nor as easy to perform). Second, women's labor is portrayed as domestic service, which is the connection between the classes because servants work within the home of the middle class but are socially subordinate to the middle class. Social histories of the 19th-century home remind us of the labor-intensive nature of the work done within the home, which was sometimes done by women servants (Flanders, 2003). In the literature, the presence of servants is common, though they are not always given much interior life as a character. They are the background labor that makes the middle-class life possible without being socially visible.

Gender also plays a role in the representation of the working class through sexual respectability. One of the most common aspects of the representation of the working class in the nineteenth century is the moral judgment of the bodily and sexual practices of the members of the working class, especially the women, in urban centers. For instance, the historical literature on Victorian prostitution reveals the complex relationship between sexual regulation and the power of the state, and the way in which 'fallen women' were socially seen as a problem that needed to be contained and regulated (Walkowitz, 1980).

Finally, the differentiation between the genders is also seen in the representation of the male as the breadwinner and the female as the carer, as the primary ideal in the literature. Even if the literature represents the reality that women and children also work, the primary focus is on the figure of the male worker who is struggling to provide for his family, or the figure of the 'good mother' who is struggling to provide for her family, as seen in the way in which the ideology of domesticity dominated the representation of the working class (Davidoff & Hall, 1987).

6.2 Child labor and sentimental representation

Age is another important category in terms of differentiation, as a range of nineteenth-century texts place the figure of the child at the center in order to represent working-class suffering. The figure of the child laborer is a historically significant one in working-class family economies, particularly in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Research that draws on a broad corpus of working-class autobiography reveals the extent to which children's labor could become structurally embedded in working-class family economies (Humphries, 2010). This historical context is important in terms of understanding the extent to which child laborers figure so prominently in literary representations of the working class, as a child represents a key site in terms of debates on exploitation and the human cost of industrialization.

At the level of representation, child labor is often present in the form of sentimental framing, in which the suffering child serves as an emotional and moral catalyst. In the nineteenth century, there was also an emerging and contested concept of childhood, including notions of childhood innocence, education, protection, and dependency, making the exploited child a representation through which the text dramatizes the transgression of an ideal concept of childhood (Cunningham, 2020). As suggested by Cunningham, as revealed through his extensive historical research, the concept of childhood in the modern period is not fixed but is subject to historical change in relation to social, familial, educational, and political developments (Cunningham, 2020). Literary texts, in this regard, play an important role in this historical development by using child hardship to translate structural inequality into an immediate ethical appeal to the reader.

This, however, does not suggest that sentimental representations of child labor are unproblematic in their political appeal. On the one hand, sentimental representations of child labor can serve to heighten the political appeal of child labor exploitation by forcing the reader to engage with the issue as an ethical imperative. On the other hand, it is also possible that sentimental representations of child labor may shift the focus of the reader from the politics of child labor to the politics of pity, charity, and rescue, leaving the economic structures of child labor relatively unchanged (Humphries, 2010; Cunningham, 2020).

6.3 Urban versus rural workers

A further significant differentiation is spatial in nature, with literature from the nineteenth century often making a distinction between the working-class urban and rural experience. The growth and development of industrialization and urbanization meant that the city became an important setting for the representation of social class in literature. In the urban setting, there are images of crowded cities, slums, factories, pollution, and unemployment. At the same time, however, there remains a significant representation of the rural setting in literature, which is often

based on a sense of pastoralism or the "traditional" community and the fear of the disappearance or decline of the rural.

Raymond Williams's work on the representation of the rural and urban in English literature argues that the "country" and "city" are not only spatial divisions in English literature but also significant structures of feeling and symbolic oppositions in English culture as a whole (Williams, 1973). In other words, the rural and the urban are not only spatial divisions but also significant symbols in English culture as a whole, which have been used to describe the relationship between classes in English literature.

With regard to the representation of working-class culture in literature, it should be noted that the rural working class is often represented in two distinct ways: as part of the romantic landscape or as a result of the impact of economic changes in the rural areas and the growth of migration from the rural to the urban areas.

This rural-urban dichotomy also influences the way class consciousness is portrayed within literature. Urban settings are far more likely to feature portrayals of mass labor, strikes, and confrontations, while rural settings are far more likely to feature portrayals of seasonal struggles, dependency, and gradual change. However, as a result of Williams' work, the country and the city cannot be seen as dichotomous elements, as the country and the city have always been intertwined throughout history, and portrayals of the country are based upon myths or projections of the city, and vice versa (Williams, 1973). In fact, literature of the nineteenth century commonly features the theme of migration from the country to the city as a means of creating a connection between class transformation, as the worker's cross-space movement is a vehicle for the portrayal of the emergence of new labor identities and novel forms of poverty.

Lastly, the spatial differentiation of class is also related to gender and age. Urban settings are far more likely to feature portrayals of sexual danger and surveillance, particularly for the women of the working class, while rural settings are far more likely to feature portrayals of the family, tradition, and tragedy. Both of these settings act as a means of providing a moral map to the reader to help them "read" class, thus reinforcing the mediation of the working-class identity through space as much as through occupation (Gilbert, 2004; Williams, 1973).

7. Conclusion

This research proves that nineteenth-century literature follows a series of recurring and identifiable patterns through which the working class is represented. Most commonly, working class life is represented through the lens of hardship and work, highlighting the physical and economic struggles that working class individuals face. Poverty is not often depicted as an unfortunate circumstance, but

is tied, often implicitly, to the rise of industrial capitalism, urbanization, and institutionalized systems of everyday life (Gallagher, 1988; Hobsbawm, 1968). Working class life is also represented through the lens of morality, often classifying working class individuals by respectability and deviance, highlighting the difference between the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor. These classifications are often tied to broader nineteenth-century discourses surrounding morality, discipline, and social control (Poovey, 1995; Stokes, 2001). However, even in literature that works to subvert class inequality, it does so within borders that reinforce middle class dominance and control.

Another major trend is the representation of the working class as victims of social injustice. The literature repeatedly discloses the harshness of the conditions of work, housing, and the law, and translates structural inequality into moving stories of victimhood. Nevertheless, the focus on victimhood also limits the representation of agency and reduces the working class to the status of objects of pity, as suggested by Betensky (2010). In contrast, other works stress dignity, resilience, and class identity, particularly in the genres of realism, naturalism, and political literature, in which the laboring classes appear as morally resilient or increasingly class-conscious (Thompson, 1963; Williams, 1973).

Finally, the present analysis highlights that "the working class" is not a unified category in the literature of the nineteenth century. The representation of the working class varies significantly depending on the representation of gender, age, and geography. The representation of women's work is mediated through the ideology of domesticity and sexual virtue, the representation of children's work is often sentimentalized to heighten the ethical imperative, and the representation of urban and rural workers is imbued with different symbolic meanings and narrative expectations (Davidoff & Hall, 1987; Humphries, 2010; Williams, 1973). The variations within the representation of the working class indicate that the representation of the working class is closely related to other social hierarchies and cannot be seen in isolation.

These findings, when taken in totality, suggest that the representation of the working class is an essential element in the study of nineteenth-century literature, as it was not an ancillary or secondary feature of the period. In fact, literature was an important site where the social effects of industrialization were discussed, debated, and interpreted from a moral perspective. By making economic and structural transformations visible in narrative form, literature was an important contributor in shaping readers' perceptions of poverty, responsibility, and social order.

At the same time, the study also highlights the limitations of literature in the representation of the working class, as most canonical representations of the

working class have been mediated through middle-class authorship, narrative authority, and readership, which ultimately meant that even the most sympathetic representations of the working class reproduced pre-existing social hierarchies of knowledge and narrative authority. Such an understanding of literature is essential in interpreting nineteenth-century literature, as it enables scholars to read between the lines and identify what is revealed and what is contained in literature (Poovey, 1995; Vincent, 2016).

Further, the study of the representation of the working class in literature provides an important insight into the role of literature in nineteenth-century culture, as literature was not merely a passive reflection of social transformations, but an active contributor in shaping perceptions of class identity, morality, and social belonging. In fact, literature was an important contributor in shaping perceptions of social order, which continue to influence contemporary perceptions of the nineteenth century as an era of class conflict and social transformation.

In this regard, the representation of the working class is an essential element in nineteenth-century literature, as it provides an important insight into how literature negotiated the tension between sympathy and control, critique and containment, visibility and silence, which continue to influence literature and culture in the nineteenth century.

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