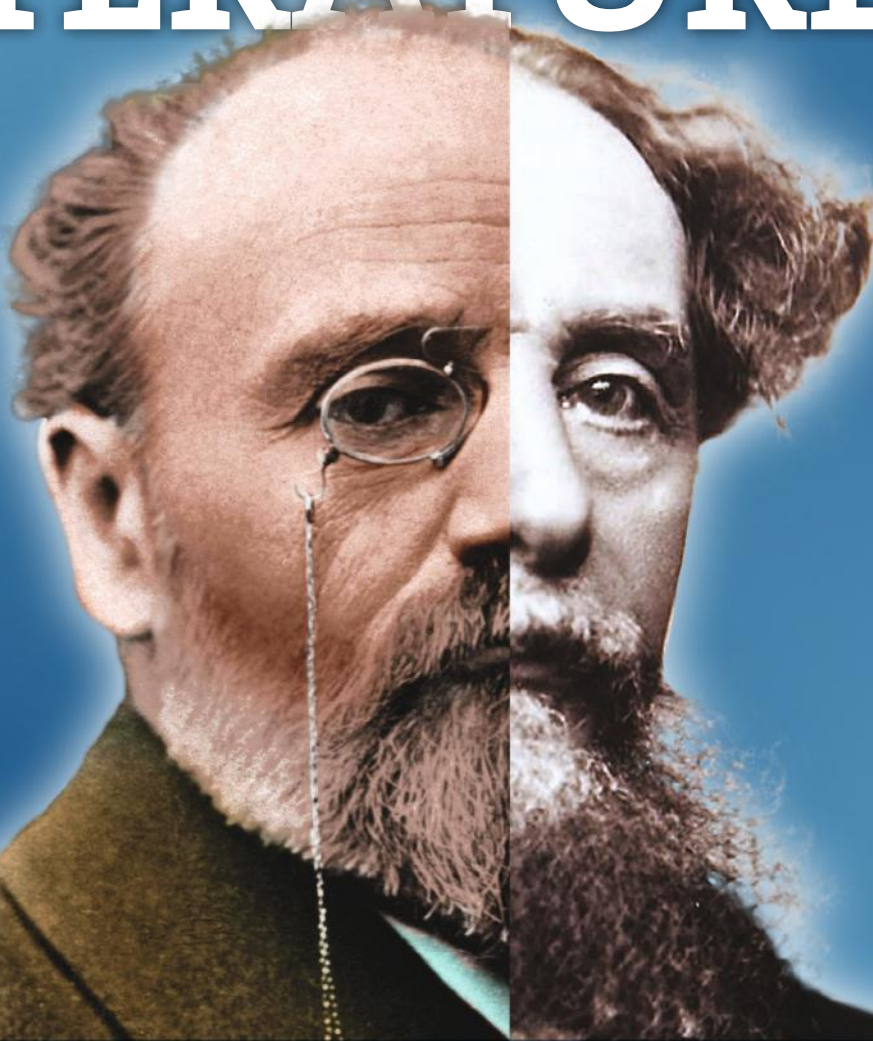


MAURO SPICCI | TIMOTHY ALAN SHAW

AMAZING MINDS

throughlines ACROSS **LITERATURES**



● Integrated development of literary, cultural and **subject-specific** competences

● Focus on Critical thinking, Social awareness, Digital and **Subject-specific** literacy



MAURO SPICCI | TIMOTHY ALAN SHAW

AMAZING MINDS

throughlines

ACROSS

LITERATURES

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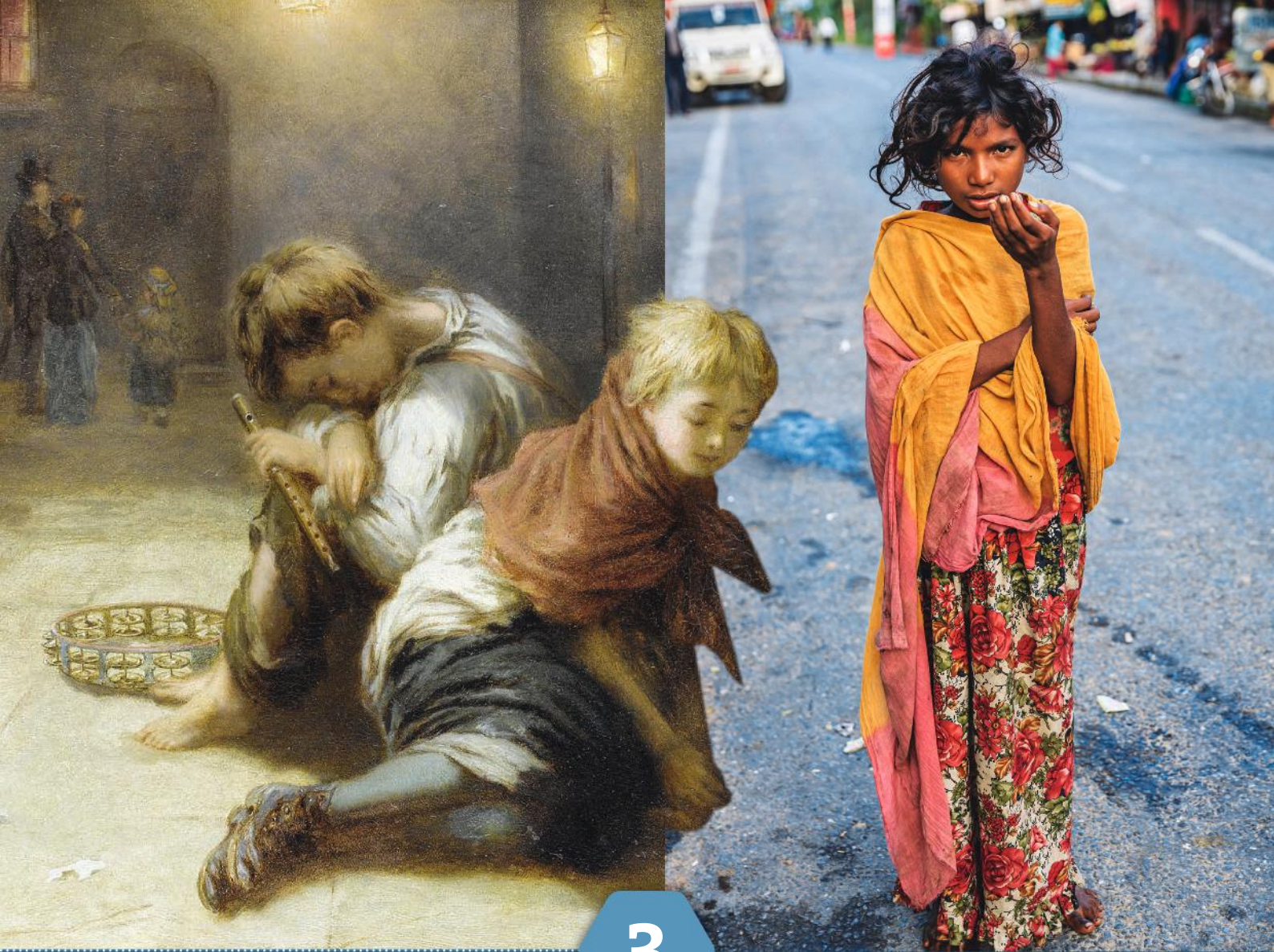
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Realism and the Untold

"The Truth is on the March"

TACKLING THE TOPIC

Look at these two images: the one on the left is taken from a 1883 painting by the Victorian realist painter Augustus Edwin Mulready entitled *Fatigued Minstrels*; the one on the right represents a contemporary poor Indian girl asking for help.

1. What elements do the two images have in common?
2. Which of the two images is:
 - a the more realistic?
 - b the more delicate?
 - c the more sympathetic?
 - d the more effective?
3. In your opinion which art form offers a more realistic representation of reality, painting or photography? Why?
4. Do you think writing can have the same power as painting or photography to represent the world in an objective way? How?

Share your thoughts with the rest of the class.

The 19th-century Novel – Recounting the Story of the Wretched



▲ *Old room in Slumland, London (1901).*

The 19th century brings important changes to European society, variously seen in different nations in different ways, at different times and with different speeds. Industrialisation transforms society, first and most markedly in England, bringing wealth to the nation but terrible poverty to the working class. Uncontrolled urban expansion leads to unhealthy living conditions. Darwinism shakes long-held religious certainties. The increasing importance of journalism and the development of photography document social history.

Literature follows these developments and focuses its attention on novels and short stories tracking, describing and analysing contemporary society as never before. The result is an immense production of novels attempting to provide historical and social documentation, for the first time giving ample space to the plight of the poorer, the unfortunate and the downtrodden. As we will see, this leads in several cases to very copious production, with novelists producing very extensive series of thematically linked works as they assume the function of social historians.

Britain and the Victorian Novel

● **Realism.** In Britain **Realism** mainly coincided with the Victorian period, which brought increasing concern for the conditions of the less fortunate in society. The settings of many of the novels during this period, and belonging to the tradition of Realism, with their interest in the **desperate conditions of a new urban working class amid the uncontrolled growth of industrial cities**, sets English literature apart from other European literatures in the first half of the century simply because the Industrial Revolution transformed British society decades before its continental neighbours witnessed the shift from agricultural to industrial economies.

● **Charles Dickens.** Charles Dickens (1812-1870) is probably the most famous author of English realism. Dickens' realism is very peculiar and is often referred to as 'social': this means that Dickens used his works to **criticise some of the cruellest aspects of his times**, such as the conditions of life of the poor in workhouses, the difficult life of orphans, and the problem of child labour. In many of his works Dickens represented poverty not just through the description of the conditions of life of unfortunate characters, but also through a **vivid portrait of the urban environment** in which poverty grows. The ideal setting of Dickens' novels is thus the industrial city, with its dedalus of dirty streets in which the poor live in inhuman conditions. By focusing on the most problematic consequences of Industrialism, Dickens aims to advocate a change in the structure of society and in the way in which wealth is distributed.

LITERARY NOTEBOOK

POSITIVISM AND DETERMINISM

Positivism is a philosophical system recognising as true only that which can be proved with logic or mathematics, and therefore rejecting metaphysical and theological theories. This new and modern approach was formulated by the philosopher Auguste Comte in the early 19th century.

Determinism is the philosophical theory stating that all events, including moral choices, are completely determined by previously existing causes. This theory is often thought to preclude free will.

● **Elizabeth Gaskell.** Another very important name in the genre of the realist novel in England is that of **Elizabeth Gaskell**. Gaskell (1810-1865) spent much of her life in Manchester, a city whose rapid industrialisation and growth brought both wealth and appalling squalor. In 1844 Friedrich Engels described the homes of Manchester factory workers in *The Conditions of the Working Class in England*, stating: 'The workers' dwellings of Manchester are dirty, miserable and wholly lacking in comforts. In such houses only inhuman, degraded and unhealthy creatures would feel at home.' Gaskell's first (and very successful) novel *Mary Barton* (1848) focused on the **terrible conditions of workers in the industrial towns of the north**, shocking readers and touching the conscience of a nation. Similarly to what happens in many of Dickens' novels, in *Mary Barton* Gaskell focuses on the description of the urban setting to render the squalor, the degradation and the inhumanity produced by the Industrial Revolution and its devastating effect on cities and their inhabitants.

Prolific French Writers

● **Honoré de Balzac and Gustave Flaubert.** French realist writing owes much to two leading figures: **Honoré de Balzac** (1799-1850), who composed *La Comédie Humaine*, an immense collection of stories portraying every aspect of **ordinary life in early 19th-century France**; and **Gustave Flaubert** (1821-1880), whose generally provincial settings focus on the psychological development of his characters and tell the untold through his **critical examination of bourgeois morality**. French realism was influenced by **Positivism** and by the spread of **Determinism**, which gave importance to the idea of direct observation and impersonality.

● **Naturalism and Émile Zola.** The last thirty years of the 19th century saw the emergence in France of a literary movement known as **Naturalism**, which can be considered for many reasons a development of Realism. Naturalism was characterised by the idea that **human life is subject to or indeed determined by natural laws**, and saw the everyday life of lower-class people as a subject worthy of literary works. Naturalist works called for '**documentation**', achieved through accurate detail and scientific authenticity, which gave these works value as **social history**. Economic and material elements were believed to influence behaviour: this is particularly evident in the works of **Émile Zola** (1840-1902), the leading exponent of this movement, for whom the environment is one of the factors that contribute to forming or 'determining' individual temperament. That is the reason why Zola's representation of the poor is particularly significant. His novel, *L'Assommoir*, a study of the **devastating effects of poverty and alcoholism**, was the seventh in a series of twenty works called *Les Rougon-Macquart* following the fortunes and misfortunes of two branches of a family in the second half of the 19th century.

Unlike Dickens' 'social realism', Zola's naturalism is based on a **strongly objective style** and is deeply dominated by **social determinism**. Zola's approach is **rigidly 'scientific'** and his '**objective**' portraits of the **wretched** shows poverty as the inevitable consequence of a mix of social and economical factors that the narrator needs to describe in a clear and detached way.

◀ Fernand Pélez, *Without Asylum* (1883), Musée des Beaux de la Ville, Paris.



German Literature – From Bourgeois Realism to Naturalism

● **‘Bourgeois’ or ‘Poetic’ Realism.** This movement developed around 1840 in a nation still formed of numerous small states and not yet heavily industrialised. The German Bourgeois Realists emphasised **domestic tranquillity** and were less interested in the social reality of the urban world and of the poorer working classes. Swiss writers like **Gottfried Keller** and **Jeremias Gotthelf** set their novels in country villages, while **Theodor Fontane** (1819-1898) offered examples of social criticism and psychological observation in his novels of Berlin's middle-class life, notably *Effi Briest* (1895).

● **German Naturalist movement.** The second part of the century saw the development of a **German Naturalist movement**, influenced by the French naturalist writer Zola. Standing apart from the tradition of other European literatures, German naturalism produced much of its finest work in the fields of **theatre and poetry** rather than in the novel. Berlin became a centre of the movement, home to the **‘Freie Bühne’** (‘Free Stage’), where controversial plays were performed to private audiences. One of the leading exponents of the movement was the **poet and dramatist Arno Holz** (1863-1929). Holz worked in Berlin as a journalist and writer and is best remembered for his poetry collection *Buch der Zeit* (*Book of Time*), written in 1885 at a time when he was fascinated by Darwinism.

Holz developed a theory of **‘consistent naturalism’**, stating that art was to provide an **exact description of nature and its laws**. Holz sought to **eliminate the subjective** from art, expressing his idea with a formula: **‘Art = Nature – x’**. In this formula ‘x’ represents the materials needed to produce art; for the artist to reproduce nature as closely as possible this ‘x’ must be minimised. He adopted new techniques of expression to achieve this accurate reproduction of reality, including what is called the **‘Sekundenstil’** (‘Second-by-Second style’) **describing social deprivation in exact, minute detail**. In his later poetry, he rejected traditional poetic forms, stating that works should be determined by ‘inner rhythm’, free of regular rhyme schemes and metre.

Impressed by Zola's series of novels *Les Rougon-Macquart*, in 1896 Holz began to work on a series of plays in a cycle called *Berlin*. The unfinished project, however, failed to win the favour of audiences and publishers.

▼ Robert Koehler, *The Strike* (1886). Deutsches Historisches Museum, Berlin.





▲ Bartolomé Esteban Murillo, *Beggar boys playing dice* (1675). Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

Spanish Literature and Social Concern

● **Regionalism.** The tendency towards realism that has characterised Spanish literature since its early origins thanks to the works of Miguel de Cervantes and the tradition of the picaresque novel, becomes particularly strong in the second half of the 19th century under the influence of French and English Realism. Even though they shared a strong interest in scientific observation and in documentation, the Spanish realist authors did not imitate the main trends of European realism and tended to focus on the **representation of the rural tradition of Spain**. This is the reason why the Realist tradition in Spain often goes under the name of **Regionalism**.

● **Emilia Pardo Bazán.** The author who explicitly tackled the relationship between French Naturalism and Spanish literature is **Emilia Pardo Bazán**. In her essay *La cuestión palpitante* (1883) Pardo Bazán explains the principles of her own peculiar 'realism': she is in favour of the adoption of a realistic narrative 'technique', but rejects the materialism and determinism that are typical of French naturalism in favour of a narrative style which combines **attention to the life conditions of the poor, Catholicism and a clear moralistic view**.

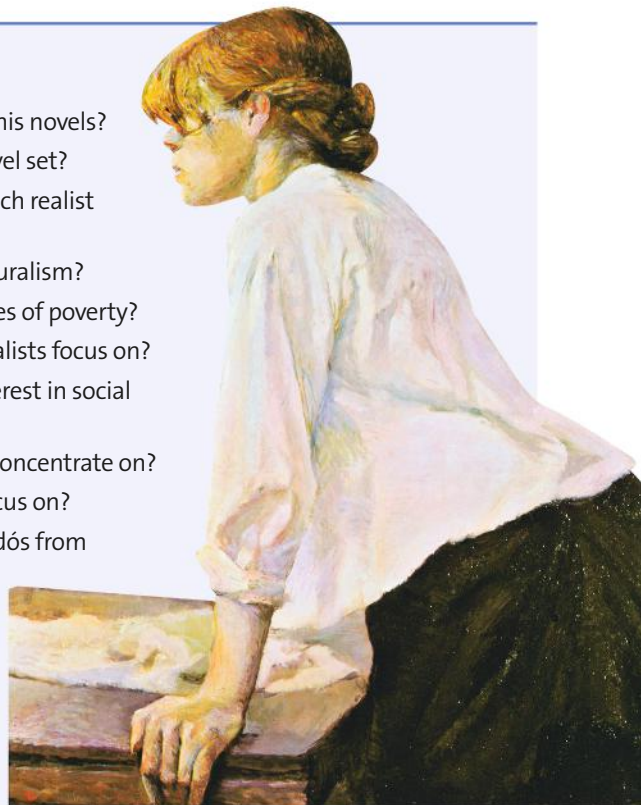
● **Benito Pérez Galdós.** The works of the most important realist novelist in Spanish literature is **Benito Pérez Galdós** (1843-1920), whose monumental works represent the highest peak of Spanish realism. In his novels Galdós uses the tools of documentation and observation to make a portrait of Spanish society in which **all kinds of social strata are represented vividly**. Galdós' style is very different from Zola's aseptic social determinism or Dickens' benevolent 'social realism': Galdós' portraits of the poor tend to **focus on single individuals** rather than on the representation of urban settings and are filled with **human compassion** for poverty, which is often represented not just as an economic condition, but rather as a **degradation of the human**.

CHECKPOINT

1. Answer the following questions.

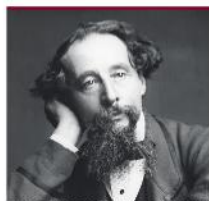
- 1 What setting did Dickens prefer for his novels?
- 2 Where is Elizabeth Gaskell's first novel set?
- 3 Which two names stand out as French realist writers?
- 4 What idea characterises French Naturalism?
- 5 What does Zola identify as the causes of poverty?
- 6 What did the German Bourgeois Realists focus on?
- 7 Which French writer stimulated interest in social issues in German Naturalism?
- 8 What literary genres did Arno Holz concentrate on?
- 9 What did Spanish realist authors focus on?
- 10 What distinguishes the work of Galdós from the writing of Zola or Dickens?

► Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec, *The Laundress* (1884-1888). Private collection.



Changes in Society and Novels

The 19th-century novel brings new interest in the fate and conditions of the less fortunate in society, providing in many cases a type of social history in which changes in society and contemporary events are reflected in the lives of ordinary people. Reflecting these changes, the phenomenon affects novelists throughout Europe though in different time scales and with different focuses as we will see in the texts below.



Charles Dickens
Oliver Twist
(1837)

→ CHAPTER 5



Jacob's Island

The passage you are going to read is taken from Chapter 50 of *Oliver Twist*, one of Dickens' most famous novels. The passage contains the description of Jacob's island, one of the poorest areas of London.

Near to that part of the Thames on which the church at Rotherhithe abuts¹ [...] there exists the filthiest², the strangest, the most extraordinary of the many localities that are hidden in London, wholly unknown, even by name, to the great mass of its inhabitants.

To reach this place, the visitor has to penetrate through a maze³ of close, narrow, and muddy streets, thronged⁴ by the roughest and poorest of waterside people, and devoted to the traffic they may be supposed to occasion. The cheapest and least delicate provisions are heaped⁵ in the shops; the coarsest⁶ and commonest articles of wearing apparel dangle at the salesman's door, and stream from the house-parapet⁷ and windows. Jostling⁸ with unemployed labourers of the lowest class, ballast-heavers⁹ coal-whippers, brazen women, ragged children, and the raff and refuse of the river, he makes his way with difficulty along, assailed by offensive sights and smells from the narrow alleys¹⁰ which branch off on the right and left, and deafened¹¹ by the clash of ponderous waggons that bear great piles of merchandise from the stacks of warehouses that rise from every corner. Arriving, at length, in streets remoter and less-frequented than those through which he has passed, he walks beneath tottering house-fronts¹² projecting over the pavement, dismantled walls that seem to totter as he passes, chimneys half crushed half hesitating to fall, windows guarded by rusty¹³ iron bars that time and dirt have almost eaten away, every imaginable sign of desolation and neglect.

In such a neighborhood, beyond Dockhead in the Borough of Southwark, stands Jacob's Island, surrounded by a muddy ditch¹⁴. [...] Crazy wooden galleries common to the backs of half a dozen houses, with holes from which to look upon the slime beneath; windows, broken and patched, with poles thrust out, on which to dry the linen that is never there; rooms so small, so filthy, so confined, that the air would seem too tainted¹⁵ even for the dirt and squalor which they shelter; wooden chambers thrusting themselves out above the mud, and threatening to fall into it—as some have done; dirt-besmeared¹⁶ walls and decaying foundations; every repulsive lineament of poverty, every loathsome indication of filth, rot¹⁷, and garbage; all these ornament the banks of Folly Ditch.

In Jacob's Island, the warehouses are roofless and empty; the walls are crumbling down; the windows are windows no more; the doors are falling into the streets; the chimneys are blackened, but they yield no smoke. [...] The houses have no owners; they are broken open, and entered upon by those who have the courage; and there they live, and there they die.

- 1 abuts: confina
- 2 filthiest: la più sporca
- 3 maze: labirinto
- 4 thronged: popolata
- 5 are heaped: si ammucciano
- 6 coarsest: più grossolani
- 7 stream from the house-parapet: fluiscono lungo la facciata
- 8 jostling: urtando
- 9 ballast-heavers: scaricatori
- 10 narrow alleys: viuzze
- 11 deafened: assordato
- 12 tottering house-fronts: facciate di case vacillanti
- 13 rusty: arrugginite
- 14 ditch: fossato
- 15 tainted: contaminata
- 16 dirt-besmeared: ricoperti di sudiciume
- 17 rot: marciume

C. Dickens

• **Hard Times**

The representation of the industrial city is a typical theme of realist novels. In English literature probably the most famous literary representation of an industrial city is Coketown, the city in which Dickens' novel *Hard Times* is set. Coketown is the prototype of a modern industrial city: it is a place of efficiency and rationality, in which there is space only for facts.

→ CHAPTER 5

- Read the description of Coketown: is it more realistic than the description of Jacob's Island? Why/Why not?

COMPREHENSION AND INTERPRETATION

1. Answer the following questions.

- Where does the scene described in this passage take place? Find reference in the text to support your answer.
- Underline the adjectives used by Dickens in the first paragraph to describe the area.
 - List them. Are they mainly positive or negative?
 - What idea do they suggest? Tick as appropriate:

i. healthiness	ii. mystery	iii. danger	iv. other (specify)
----------------	-------------	-------------	---------------------
- Focus on the second paragraph. Find in the paragraph the part that makes you think that:
 - the place is like a labyrinth.
 - the area smells awfully.
 - food in this area is not healthy.
 - the houses are rather faulty.
- The third paragraph contains the description of the houses of Jacob's Island.
 - Find in the paragraph at least three adjectives/nouns related to filth.
 - What atmosphere do these adjectives/nouns create?
- In line 29 the narrator writes: 'there they live, and there they die'. What does he mean by this?
- What aspects of the industrial city are mainly represented in this passage? Tick as appropriate.

a lack of humanity	b progress	c alienation	d poverty	e other (specify)
--------------------	------------	--------------	-----------	-------------------
- Focus on the narrator used by Dickens in this passage. Answer the following questions.

a Is it omniscient or non-omniscient?	d Do you think the choice of the narrator contributes to creating a sense of objectivity in the representation of Jacob's Island?
b Is it intrusive or non-intrusive?	
c Is it a first-person or a third-person narrator?	

THINKING ROUTINE

See, think, wonder

C COMPETENCES: developing awareness of learning and thinking processes

SEE

- This is a famous representation of the city of London made by the French artist and engraver Gustav Doré in 1859. Look at it and answer the following questions.
 - What colours does the artist use to depict London?
 - What can you see in the background?
 - Can you see any people in the engraving?

THINK

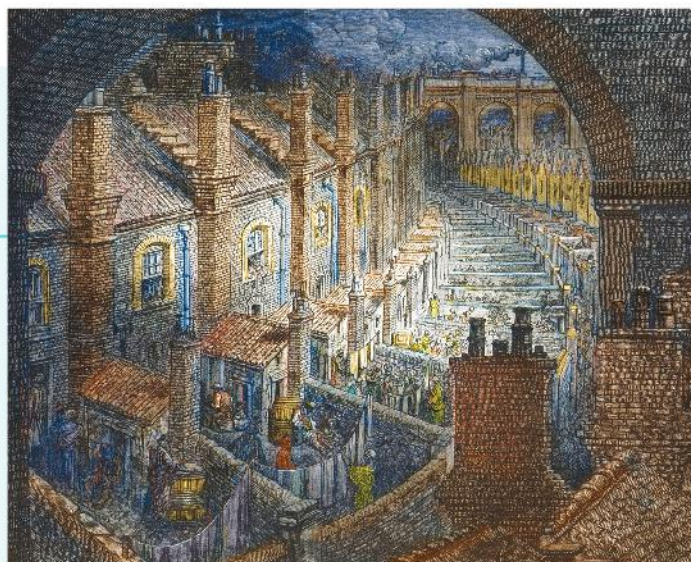
- What ideas about the city of London do you think the artist want to express in this engraving? Tick as appropriate.

a London is a rich city.	c London is a place of alienation.
b London is an industrial city.	d People are happy to live in London.
- How do you think people feel in this illustration? Tick as appropriate.

a lonely	b sad	c empowered	d satisfied	e frustrated
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WONDER

- What ideas about the Industrial city emerge from the illustration?
- Does this illustration correspond to your idea about London? Why/Why not?
- Can this illustration be considered a representation of Jacob's Island? Why/Why not?





Elizabeth Gaskell

Mary Barton

(1848)

Elizabeth Gaskell was born in London in 1810. After marrying William Gaskell, she settled in Manchester, one of the biggest industrial cities in Britain. Her first novel, *Mary Barton* (1848), was an immense success and transformed her into a full-time writer and one of the most famous writers of the Victorian Age. Her other main novels are *Cranford* (1853) and *North and South* (1854). She died in 1865.

WARM UP

1. If you think about the word 'poverty', what related concepts come to your mind?
 - 1 Write at least five concepts and share them with the rest of the class.
 - 2 Are there any common elements among the concepts you have come up with as a class?



A Victorian Industrial City

The passage you are going to read is taken from *Mary Barton* (1848), which focuses on the representation of the difficult life of the poor in a Victorian industrial city. The passage is taken from Chapter 6 and contains the description of a very poor house in Manchester.

- 1 unpaved: priva di selciato
- 2 gutter: canale di scolo
- 3 Gardez l'eau!: Gardez l'eau! (segnale usato per denotare il lancio delle deiezioni notturne dalla finestra)
- 4 slops: brodaglia
- 5 Heaps of ashes were the stepping-stones: le pietre di passaggio erano cumuli di cenere
- 6 dainty: delicati
- 7 damp muddy wall: il muro umido e fangoso
- 8 rags: stracci
- 9 dusky: crepuscolare
- 10 inured: abituata
- 11 nay wet: bagnati
- 12 oozed up: penetrava
- 13 lair: tana

Barton growled inarticulated words of no benevolent import to a large class of mankind, and so they went along till they arrived in Berry Street. It was unpaved¹: and down the middle a gutter² forced its way, every now and then forming pools in the holes with which the street abounded. Never was the old Edinburgh cry of Gardez l'eau!³ more necessary than in this street. As they passed, women from their doors tossed household slops⁴ of EVERY description into the gutter; they ran into the next pool, which overflowed and stagnated. Heaps of ashes were the stepping-stones⁵, on which the passer-by, who cared in the least for cleanliness, took care not to put his foot. Our friends were not dainty⁶, but even they picked their way, till they got to some steps leading down to a small area, where a person standing would have his head about one foot below the level of the street, and might at the same time, without the least motion of his body, touch the window of the cellar and the damp muddy wall⁷ right opposite. You went down one step even from the foul area into the cellar in which a family of human beings lived. It was very dark inside. The window-panes, many of them, were broken and stuffed with rags⁸, which was reason enough for the dusky⁹ light that pervaded the place even at midday. After the account I have given of the state of the street, no one can be surprised that on going into the cellar inhabited by Davenport, the smell was so foetid as almost to knock the two men down. Quickly recovering themselves, as those inured¹⁰ to such things do, they began to penetrate the thick darkness of the place, and to see three or four little children rolling on the damp, nay wet¹¹ brick floor, through which the stagnant, filthy moisture of the street oozed up¹²; the fire-place was empty and black; the wife sat on her husband's lair¹³, and cried in the dark loneliness.

COMPREHENSION AND INTERPRETATION

2. Answer the following questions.

- 1 The narrator points out that the street where the two characters are is 'unpaved'. What does this characteristic suggest?
 - a It is a new street.
 - b It is a very poor area of the city.
 - c It is a dirty street.
- 2 What two verbs used by the narrator underline the idea that the quantity of dirt accumulated in the street is huge?
- 3 Focus on the second paragraph. What does the narrator underline about the place? Tick as appropriate.

a It is small.	d It is a place where an
b It is strange.	entire family lives.
c It is very dirty.	e It is dangerous.
- 4 What aspects of the room denote the poverty of the people who live there? List them.
- 5 What sense does the narrator refer to describe the lack of hygiene of the inhabitants of the cellar?
- 6 What device does the narrator adopt to involve the reader directly? Tick as appropriate and find reference in the text to support your choice.
 - a The use of hyperboles.
 - b The use of the 'you' pronoun.
 - c The use of a proper name.

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

3. Answer the following questions.

- 1 Both Dickens and Gaskell describe several aspects of the modern city.
 - a What elements do both authors mention?
 - b Which of the two authors is more emotionally engaged? Why?
- 2 One of the main aspects of the urban environment described by Dickens and Gaskell is dehumanisation. Where can you find references to this concept in the two texts you have read?

► A move in 'Slumopolis', London (1901).

W. Blake • **Songs of Innocence and Experience**

The squalor of industrial London is a common theme in *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, the famous collection of poems written by the pre-Romantic artist William Blake.

➔ CHAPTER 4

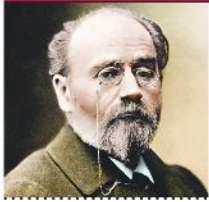
- Unlike Dickens, who chooses to depict the city of London through the eyes of a 3rd-person narrator, Blake uses a different perspective. Can you describe it?

THINKING ROUTINE

Take a different stance

C COMPETENCES: developing awareness of learning and thinking processes

1. In the text you have just read the scene is described by an external, 3rd-person narrator who speaks in an objective and realistic way. Consider the passage you have just read from the point of view of the woman described at the end of the passage and answer the following questions:
 - a Why are you crying?
 - b How would you feel if two external observers entered your house?
 - c What would you think about the place where you and your family live?
2. What changes in the narrative when the narrator becomes a 1st-person narrator? Share your ideas with the rest of the class.



Émile Zola

L'Assommoir

(1877)

Émile Zola (1840-1902) was a French novelist, playwright and journalist and a leading figure in the genre of Naturalism. His series of twenty works, *Les Rougon-Macquart*, follows two branches of a family in 19th-century Paris tracing the environmental causes of violence, alcohol and prostitution.

The Tenement of Misery

L'Assommoir (1877), the seventh novel in the Rougon-Macquart series, is a shockingly realistic portrait of alcoholism and poverty set in the working class districts of Paris. It tells the story of a young washer-woman called Gervaise Macquart. Gervaise bravely attempts to create a decent life for herself and her little children. She works hard and saves her money so that she can open her own laundry business, but is finally ruined by the alcoholism and violence of the two men in her life. In the following extract Gervaise sees for the first time the tenement building in which she is going to live with her future husband.

Gervaise [...] ne put s'empêcher de s'enfoncer sous le porche, jusqu'à la loge du concierge, qui était à droite. Et là, au seuil, elle leva de nouveau les yeux. A l'intérieur, les façades avaient six étages, quatre façades régulières
 5 enfermant le vaste carré de la cour. C'étaient des murailles grises, mangées d'une lèpre jaune, rayées de bavures par l'égouttement des toits, qui montaient toutes plates du pavé aux ardoises, sans une moulure; seuls les tuyaux de descente se coudaient aux étages, où les caisses béantes
 10 des plombs mettaient la tache de leur fonte rouillée. Les fenêtres sans persienne montraient des vitres nues, d'un vert glauque d'eau trouble. Certaines, ouvertes, laissaient pendre des matelas à carreaux bleus, qui prenaient l'air; devant d'autres, sur des cordes tendues, des linges
 15 séchaient, toute la lessive d'un ménage, les chemises de l'homme, les camisoles de la femme, les culottes des gamins; il y en avait une, au troisième, où s'étalait une couche d'enfant, emplâtrée d'ordure. Du haut en bas, les logements trop petits crevaient au dehors, lâchaient des
 20 bouts de leur misère par toutes les fentes. En bas, desservant chaque façade, une porte haute et étroite, sans boiserie, taillée dans le nu du plâtre, creusait un vestibule lézardé, au fond duquel tournaient les marches boueuses d'un escalier à rampe de fer; et l'on comptait ainsi quatre
 25 escaliers, indiqués par les quatre premières lettres de l'alphabet, peintes sur le mur. Les rez-de-chaussée étaient

Gervaise [...] could not resist going through the porch as far as the concierge's room on the right. And there, on the threshold, she raised her eyes. Inside, the building was six stories high, with four identical plain walls enclosing the broad central court. The drab walls were corroded by yellowish spots and streaked by drippings from the roof gutters. The walls went straight up to the eaves with no molding or ornament except the angles on the drain pipes at each floor. Here the sink drains added their stains. The glass window panes resembled murky water. Mattresses of checkered blue ticking were hanging out of several windows to air. Clothes lines stretched from other windows with family washing hanging to dry. On a third floor line was a baby's diaper, still implanted with filth. This crowded tenement was bursting at the seams, spilling out poverty and misery through every crevice. Each of the four walls had, at ground level, a narrow entrance, plastered without a trace of woodwork. This opened into a vestibule containing a dirt-encrusted staircase which spiraled upward. They were each labeled with one of the first four letters of the alphabet painted on the wall. Several large workshops with weather-blackened

aménagés en immenses ateliers, fermés par des vitrages noirs de poussière: [...] près de la loge, un laboratoire de teinturier lâchait à gros bouillons ce ruisseau d'un rose tendre coulant sous le porche. Salie de flaques d'eau teintée, de copeaux, d'escarbilles de charbon, plantée d'herbe sur ses bords, entre ses pavés disjoints, la cour s'éclairait d'une clarté crue, comme coupée en deux par la ligne où le soleil s'arrêtait.

35 Du côté de l'ombre, autour de la fontaine dont le robinet entretenait là une continuelle humidité, trois petites poules piquaient le sol, cherchaient des vers de terre, les pattes crottées.

skylights were scattered about the court. Near the concierge's room was the dyeing establishment responsible for the pink streamlet. Puddles of water infested the courtyard, along with wood shavings and coal cinders. Grass and weeds grew between the paving stones. The unforgiving sunlight seemed to cut the court into two parts. On the shady side was a dripping water tap with three small hens scratching for worms with their filth-smeared claws.

COMPREHENSION AND INTERPRETATION

1. Answer the following questions.

- How tall is the building seen from the inner courtyard?
- What aspects of the walls give a sense of squalor?
- How do the windows suggest dirtiness?
- What suggests that the building is full of families?
- How does this passage handle the description of the building?
- Which sentence in the first paragraph explicitly indicates the condition of the inhabitants?
- What does the courtyard itself contain?
- What form of life heightens the impression of uncleanness in the court?

2. Complete the text with the words below.

comment • observer • personal • reactions • realistic • unobtrusive



▲ Edgar Degas, *Ironing women* (1884-86).
Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

Both Elizabeth Gaskell and Émile Zola offer a description of degraded urban settings, characterised by dirt and squalor. Zola is an 1. third-person narrator who offers a highly 2. description of the Parisian tenement seen by Gervaise. Gervaise herself plays no role beyond being an 3. Neither she nor the narrator offers any

4. on the setting.

Elizabeth Gaskell's description, on the other hand, offers more 5. involvement, making comments on what she sees. Gaskell's text describes the life and conditions of the people who live in Berry Street and the 6. of the visitors.

VOCABULARY LAB ACROSS LANGUAGES

3. Find the corresponding in English for the following key words. Then translate them into your own language.

	English	Your language
1	cour
2	atelier
3	flaques d'eau
4	tache



Benito Pérez Galdós

Misericordia

(1897)

Benito Pérez Galdós (1843-1920) is one of the greatest novelists of Spanish literature. Born in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Pérez Galdós wrote many novels, most of which are among the finest examples of Realism in Spanish literature. His main novels are *Fortunata y Jacinta* (1886-1887), *Nazarín* (1895) and *Misericordia* (1897).

A Servant among the Poor

Pérez Galdós' *Misericordia*, which in English means 'mercy', is a novel about self-sacrifice and ingratitude. The novel revolves around the character of señá Benina, the servant of doña Francisca Juárez, a bankrupt widow. Benina is a faithful servant and continues to serve her lady in spite of her poverty even begging in the streets for her. The following extract, taken from Chapter 3, shows Benina among the beggars of the Iglesia de San Sebastián, in Madrid.

La mujer de negro vestida, más que vieja, envejecida prematuramente, era, además de nueva, temporera, porque acudía a la mendicidad por lapsos de tiempo más o menos largos, y a lo mejor desaparecía, sin duda por encontrar un buen acomodo o almas caritativas que la socorrieran. Respondía al nombre de la señá Benina (de lo cual se infiere que Benigna se llamaba), y era la más callada y humilde de la comunidad, si así puede decirse; bien criada, modosa y con todas las trazas de perfecta sumisión a la divina voluntad. Jamás importunaba a los parroquianos que entraban o salían; en los repartos, aun siendo leoninos, nunca formuló protesta, ni se la vio siguiendo de cerca ni de lejos la bandera turbulenta y demagógica de la Burlada. Con todas y con todos hablaba el mismo lenguaje afable y comedido; trataba con miramiento a la Casiana, con respeto al cojo, y únicamente se permitía trato confanzudo, aunque sin salirse de los términos de la decencia, con el ciego llamado Almudena, del cual, por el pronto, no diré más sino que es árabe, del Sus, tres días de jornada más allá de Marrakesh. Fijarse bien. Tenía la Benina voz dulce, modos hasta cierto punto finos y de buena educación, y su rostro moreno no carecía de cierta gracia interesante que, manoseada ya por la vejez, era una gracia borrosa y apenas perceptible. Más de la mitad de la dentadura conservaba. Sus ojos, grandes y oscuros, apenas tenían el ribete rojo que imponen la edad y los fríos matinales. Su nariz destilaba menos que las de sus compañeras de oficio, y sus dedos, rugosos y de abultadas coyunturas, no terminaban en uñas de cernícalo. Eran sus manos como de lavandera, y aún conservaban hábitos de aseo. Usaba una venda

The woman, dressed in black, was prematurely aged rather than old, and temporary rather than new, as she begged for periods of longer or shorter time, and disappeared when she found good accommodation or charitable souls that helped her. They called her señá Benina (from which it follows that she was called Benigna), and was the quietest and humblest woman of the community, if this can be said. She was wellbred, demure and showed all the traces of perfect submission to the divine will. She never importuned the parishioners who entered or left the church; even when distributions were meagre, she never complained, nor was she seen following the turbulent and demagogic crew of the Burlada. She used with everybody the same gentle and demure language; she treated Casiana with courtesy and she respected the lame. The only exception in terms of confidence was with the blind man called Almudena: in this case, too, however, she never abandoned the terms of decency. Almudena was Arabic, from Sus, which is three days from Marrakech. This needs to be noted. Benina had a sweet voice and was well mannered. Her dark face did not lack a certain degree of interesting beauty which, in spite of her old age, was graciously vague and hardly noticeable. She had more than half of her teeth. His eyes were large and dark and started to show the red edging caused by age and cold mornings. Her nose was smaller than that of her fellow companions, and her fingers, wrinkled and with visible joints, did not end in hawk-like nails.

negra bien ceñida en la frente; sobre ella pañuelo negro, y negros el manto y vestido, algo mejor apañaditos que
 35 los de las otras ancianas. Con este pergenio y la expresión sentimental y dulce de su rostro, todavía bien compuesto de líneas, parecía una Santa Rita de Casia que andaba por el mundo en penitencia. Faltábanle sólo el crucifijo y la llaga en la frente, si bien podría creerse
 40 que hacía las veces de esta el lobanillo del tamaño de un garbanzo, redondo, cárdeno, situado como a media pulgada más arriba del entrecejo.

Her hands were typical of a washerwoman, and still retained grooming habits. She wore a close-fitting black band on the forehead; on top of it she wore a black scarf and a black cloak, which she arranged more accurately than the other elderly women. With this appearance and sentimental and sweet expression on her balanced face, she looked like a Santa Rita da Cascia who went around the world in penance. She only lacked the crucifix and the wound on her forehead, although it was possible to believe that she took her role thanks to the round, blue, pea-sized wen that was half an inch above the eyebrows.

COMPREHENSION AND INTERPRETATION

1. Answer the following questions.

- What is the dominant colour in the description of Benina?
- What is Benina's main occupation?
- Underline all the expressions referred to Benina's tone and voice. What does her voice reveal of her character?
- How would you describe the narrator used by Galdós in this passage? Tick as appropriate.
 a omniscient/non-omniscient b obtrusive/unobtrusive c 1st-person/3rd-person
- In the passage the narrator describes indirectly the environment in which Benina lives. What is the main social problem that characterises it?

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

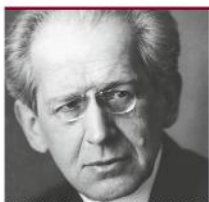
2. Answer the following questions.

- Unlike what happens in Dickens' or in Gaskell's passages, Galdós' representation of 'poverty' is not characterised by a sense of squalor, but by a sense of respect. What adjectives/expressions make you think this?
- What elements typically associated with poverty are not mentioned by Galdós?
- The narrator in Galdós' passage tries to inspire a sense of benign sympathy towards Benina. Is it the same in Dickens' passage?

VOCABULARY LAB ACROSS LANGUAGES

3. Find the corresponding in English for the following key words. Then translate them into your own language.

	English	Your language
1	mendicidad
2	caritativas
3	ancianas



Arno Holz
Nachtstück
 (1885)





Intercultural links

Describing poverty – from past to present

In this brief extract from Poverty in Contemporary Literature, the authors examine ways in which writing today continues to describe poverty using ideas and models that go back to 19th-century Realism, as well as ways in which literature can offer a new perspective on the issue of poverty and social deprivation.

In light of the perpetuation of a specific imagery of poverty, it seems problematic how often the contemporary book market still configures poverty within established patterns and tropes, unfortunately even in books by writers whose fame guarantees their novels wide attention (and good sales figures). The characters of many novels and memoirs – not infrequently children ‘innocently’ exposed to poverty – experience lives that range from having to live on cheap and unhealthy food to outright starvation, from having to wear second-hand clothes to the pitiful lack of proper shoes, from irregular schooling to outright neglect and homelessness. Dirtiness, violence and criminal behaviour are extreme outgrowths of material deprivation and social exclusion. Dilapidated housing and run-down urban areas provide a typical setting, and the council estate in particular has emerged as an equivalent of the Victorian slum. Poor people thus appear as marginalised not only in social, but also in spatial terms, sometimes living in literal ghettos or underground. Their poverty is also not ethnically specific. The book market of the 21st century depicts poverty among white Britons alongside poverty within immigrant, non-white communities, generally responding to a growing societal concern about a new white ‘underclass’.

However, while the depiction of poverty in lifewriting and fiction is still often predictable and even clichéd, our investigation has brought forth that literature – like photography, film or theatre – also projects alternative ways of seeing and thinking about the poor, or that it at least complicates our ways of seeing and thinking. Literature shows that the poor are not only contained in established patterns, but that such patterns can be broken – not just by the poor themselves, but also in the social and cultural imaginary. As we have seen, different kinds of literature contribute to this re-figuration in different ways: by re-working a rags-to-riches theme (in fantasy), or employing social realism to show how people in even the most miserable circumstances can survive and escape from the poverty trap. Through characterisation, plotting and perspective, literary texts can destabilise views that establish a seemingly unavoidable link between material deprivation and victimisation, and thus defy figurations that construct the poor as absolutely depending on the compassion and aid of others.

(from *Poverty in Contemporary Literature – Themes and Figurations on the British Book Market*, by Barbara Korte and George Zipp – Palgrave Macmillan, 2014)

CHECKPOINT

1. Answer the following questions.

- 1 What problems do the authors of this article identify in the contemporary book market?
- 2 What elements characterise poverty and degradation?
- 3 What are the perceived effects of material deprivation and social exclusion?
- 4 What element is not identified as a characteristic of poverty?
- 5 In what ways can literature (and other forms of expression) modify and ‘destabilise’ this way of seeing and thinking?
- 6 What ideas about poverty and the poor can be modified?
- 7 Think about works you have read. Can you give an example of a character who manages to ‘escape from the poverty trap’?

VOCABULARY LAB ACROSS LANGUAGES

2. Find words or expressions in the article above which match the following definitions (1-9).
 - 1 suffering or death caused by lack of food
 - 2 the condition of having no place to live in
 - 3 the state of being extremely poor
 - 4 the state of not being cared for or looked after
 - 5 the condition of not having basic essentials necessary for life in a society
 - 6 considered as being insignificant in a society
 - 7 a figurative or metaphorical use of a word or expression; a recurrent theme
 - 8 poor parts of towns occupied by disadvantaged minority groups
 - 9 rising from extreme poverty to wealth



TITLE: Salaam Bombay!
DIRECTOR: Mira Nair
MAIN ACTORS: Shafiq Syed, Hansa Vithal, Chanda Sharma
YEAR: 1988
COUNTRY: India

Salaam Bombay! is a 1988 film directed by the Indian director Mira Nair. The film tells the story of a 11-year-old boy called Krishna, who, after being bullied by his elder brother, decides to destroy his motorbike as an act of revenge. Sent to a circus in order to earn money to repair his brother's motorbike, Krishna finds himself in the poorest slums of Bombay. The film is a superb document representing the extreme poverty of one of the poorest areas of India and is a hymn to freedom and bravery. Search for the trailer of the film using the Internet and say if any of the elements of social realism that have been identified in 19th-century European literature can be found also in the representation of the story of Krishna.



LITERARY ISSUE

Urban problems – yesterday and today

C **COMPETENCES:** critical thinking • making connections • digital literacy • effective communication

The question of urban poverty is not an issue of the past. It is still very much a present-day reality both in the developing world and in the developed nations of our own continent. The problems, indeed, are being aggravated by growing immigration to Europe.

Most of the world's economy and more than half of its population are now in urban areas. About one billion people today live in informal settlements in urban areas and more than this are probably in poverty. But the scale and depth of poverty is underestimated by most governments and international agencies as low-income urban dwellers have little voice and influence within governments and aid agencies.

STEP 1 DISCUSSING THE ISSUE

Consider the ten points listed below. Which do you consider to be the most and the least important? Number them in order from 1-10 and discuss your decisions with your classmates.

- ☐ Inadequate provision of basic food.
- ☐ Lack of access to healthcare, emergency services and policing.
- ☐ Lack of entertainment facilities.
- ☐ Lack of safe, readily available, water supplies.
- ☐ Limited access to education.
- ☐ Limited access to the Internet and technology in general.
- ☐ Locations at high risk of disasters and with risk levels increasing because of climate change.
- ☐ Poor provision for sanitation and drainage.
- ☐ Poor quality of transport infrastructures.
- ☐ Poor quality, overcrowded housing.



STEP 2 RESEARCHING

Use the Internet to find out more information about the situation of poor, homeless people in European cities today. Look for a document called the Homeless Bill of Rights, published by the Housing Rights Watch. Take notes on the problems listed in the document. Is your city a signatory to this document? What forms of help and assistance are available in your city?

STEP 3 TAKE ACTION

Work in small groups. Choose one of the issues mentioned above in Step 1 and 2. Consider the issue in the context of your own town/city. Create a short presentation explaining what the problem is, what (if anything) is being done about it and suggesting practical solutions that could be implemented.



THEME: Translate a website

TASK: With this task students are asked to translate into English an official website. This may be the website of an important event staged by their town or city, the website of an important local institution or even the website of a local company or industry.



COMPETENCES:

- accuracy and precision;
- analysis and decision making;
- communicative skills;
- planning, organisation;
- control, meeting deadlines, achieving targets;
- team work, collaboration.

STEP 1 CHOOSING THE MATERIAL TO WORK ON (full class and group work)

Phase 1 – Researching (full class). The first step you must take is to decide what material you intend to translate. You might choose among:

- city tourism sites;
- sites featuring museums, art galleries and places of historical interest;
- commercial sites – the websites of local companies and industries in your area.

You should choose a site that has not already been translated. You should also take into consideration the practical value of your translation. This means you should choose a website which might attract potential visitors who would benefit from an English version of the material. Use the Internet to make a list of possible sites from the categories above. Draw up a list of 5 or 6.

Phase 2 – Analysis (group work). Work in small groups – one for each of the potential sites you have identified in Step 1. Each group should analyse the site that has been identified considering the following criteria:

- utility – is this a site that could benefit from an English translation?
- feasibility – do you have the linguistic competences to produce a good translation of this site? Avoid sites which are excessively technical.
- quantity – does this site contain a suitable quantity of textual material or is there too little or too much?
- timing – if this site is related to an event, can you finish your translation in time for the event?

Phase 3 – Discussing and deciding (full class). Each of the groups formed in Phase 2 should report their findings to the whole class. The class should then draw up a short list of three sites (in order of preference) that can be taken into consideration.

STEP 2 COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION (full class)

In order to transform the project into a real-life experience and not merely an academic exercise, the class should approach the owners of the website (local town council, institution, society etc.) and inquire about their interest in the project and willingness to publish the students' work. The class should prepare an email to the subjects interested, explaining the nature of the project, asking for an expression of interest and for possible assistance and co-operation. The email should be sent to the 'clients' in order of preference until a positive response is obtained.

SOFT SKILLS

HOW TO DEVELOP COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS

Communicative skills reflect the ability to transmit and share ideas in a clear and effective manner.

In contacting potential 'clients' the students should ensure that they:

- choose the correct form of address;
- explain clearly who they are;
- give full details of their project and their request;
- arrange a timetable and set up a deadline for the project;
- indicate clearly who will be responsible for contacts with the client and how he/she can be contacted;
- thank the client for any interest or assistance that they might offer.

STEP 3 PREPARING THE PROJECT (group work)

Having chosen a suitable site, the class can be divided into groups. Each group should read the original material carefully and note down:

- the register and tone of the message – formal/informal?
- the structure of the material – paragraphing, sentence structure;
- the technical features of the site/pages – use of hyperlinks and illustrations, typographical elements (fonts, colours, dimensions etc.);
- the lexical difficulties presented by the text.

Groups should then share and discuss their findings.

STEP 4 FINDING THE NECESSARY TOOLS (group work)

The project will require the use of good bi-lingual dictionaries and online dictionaries. More specific help with particular lexical questions can be found by looking for similar topic-based material online. In groups students should use the Internet to find similar sites written in English (sites of local municipalities, institutions or companies in English-speaking countries) or Italian sites which also publish English versions of their material online.

Groups should evaluate the usefulness of these sites, take note of and keep relevant website addresses and share this information with the whole class. At this stage the whole class should discuss and agree on a uniform translation of any specific and recurrent term in the text.

STEP 5 TRANSLATING THE MATERIAL (group and class work)

The class should divide into groups and assign parts of the material to each group. The groups can now proceed with a first-draft translation of their part. Deadlines should be set for the completion of each first draft. The first drafts should be reviewed by the whole class so that any error or inconsistency of lexical or stylistic nature can be identified and corrected. At this stage the 'client' may be contacted for advice with any problems that have emerged.

SOFT SKILLS

PLANNING AND ORGANISATION

A project involving an extended number of actors (the class) needs careful planning and organisation.

The class should appoint one student who will be responsible for:

- assigning tasks to individuals and groups;
- setting and checking progress and deadlines;
- providing encouragement, feedback and assistance if and when problems emerge.

STEP 6 CONSOLIDATION, PROOFREADING AND FINAL CHECK (full class)

All the material should now be consolidated into a single document, matching the structure and layout of the original text. The text now requires proofreading so as to eliminate any remaining problems. At this stage, the class should seek a native speaker of English who will be asked to read the text and make suggestions about any possible corrections and modifications to the text.

SOFT SKILLS

ACCURACY AND PRECISION

The entire group should be responsible for producing a text which is as precise and accurate as possible.

This can be achieved through:

- the assistance of a native speaker for a final check;
- dialogue with the client to seek clarification in dealing with any uncertainties.

STEP 7 DELIVERY (group work)

The completed text which has now been approved should be sent to the 'client'. The student who established the initial contact with the 'client' should send the project with a suitable accompanying email.

The group will meet again to discuss any feedback from the client and be prepared to effect any modifications that may be required.