

A Tale of Two Countries: Voicing the Poor in 19th-Century Britain and Italy

Week 1 – Handout 1

Text 1

Pulp, 'Common People', from the album 'Different Class', 1995

Common People

She came from Greece she had a thirst for knowledge
She studied sculpture at Saint Martin's College, that's where I caught her eye.
She told me that her Dad was loaded
I said in that case I'll have a rum and coke-cola.
She said fine and in thirty seconds time she said, I want to live like common people
I want to do whatever common people do, I want to sleep with common people
I want to sleep with common people like you.
Well what else could I do - I said I'll see what I can do.
I took her to a supermarket
I don't know why but I had to start it somewhere, so it started there.
I said pretend you've got no money, she just laughed and said oh you're so funny.
I said yeah? Well I can't see anyone else smiling in here.
Are you sure you want to live like common people
You want to see whatever common people see
You want to sleep with common people,
you want to sleep with common people like me.
But she didn't understand, she just smiled and held my hand.
Rent a flat above a shop, cut your hair and get a job.
Smoke some fags and play some pool, pretend you never went to school.
But still you'll never get it right
'cos when you're laid in bed at night watching roaches climb the wall
If you call your Dad he could stop it all.
You'll never live like common people
You'll never do what common people do
You'll never fail like common people
You'll never watch your life slide out of view, and dance and drink and screw
Because there's nothing else to do.
Sing along with the common people, sing along and it might just get you thru'
Laugh along with the common people
Laugh along even though they're laughing at you and the stupid things that you do.
Because you think that poor is cool.
I want to live with common people, I want to live with common people *[etc..]*

Exercise

Treat the text as a poem.

Who is the narrating persona?

What is his relation to the poem's other speaker?

How do the speakers relate to the poem's celebrated protagonists, the 'common people'?

How are 'common people' defined?

How are 'common people' voiced in literary and linguistic terms?

Is the voice realistic?

Text 2

Welsh, Irvine, *Trainspotting* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1993) [Nominated for the 1993 Booker Prize]

The Skag Boys, Jean-Claude Van Damme and Mother Superior

The sweat wis lashing oafay Sick Boy; he wis trembling. Ah wis jist sitting thair, focusing oan the telly, tryin no tae notice the cunt. He wis bringing me doon. Ah tried tae keep ma attention oan the Jean-Claude Van Damme video.

As happens in such movies, they started oaf wi an obligatory dramatic opening. Then the next phase ay the picture involved building up the tension through introducing the dastardly villain and sticking the weak plot thegither. Any minute now though, auld Jean-Claude's ready tae git doon tae some serious swedgin.

– Rents. Ah've goat tae see Mother Superior, Sick Boy gasped, shaking his heid.

– Aw, ah sais. Ah wanted the radge tae jist fuck off ootay ma visage, tae go oan his ain, n jist leave us wi Jean-Claude. Oan the other hand, ah'd be gitting sick tae before long, and if that cunt went n scored, he'd haud oot oan us. They call um Sick Boy, no because he's eywis sick wi junk withdrawal, but because he's just one sick cunt.

– Let's fuckin go, he snapped desperately.

– Haud oan a second. Ah wanted tae see Jean-Claude smash up this arrogant fucker. If we went now, ah wouldnae git tae watch it. Ahd be too fucked by the time we goat back, and in any case it wid probably be a few days later. That meant ah'd git hit fir fuckin back charges fi the shoap oan a video ah hudnae even goat a deek at.

– Ah've goat tae fuckin move man! he shouts, standing up. He moves ower tae the windae and rests against it, breathing heavily, looking like a hunted animal. There's nothing in his eyes but need.

Ah switched the box oaf at the handset. - Fuckin waste. That's aw it is, a fuckin waste, ah snarled at the cunt, the fuckin irritating bastard.

He flings back his heid n raises his eyes tae the ceiling.

– Ah'll gie ye the money tae git it back oot. Is that aw yir sae fuckin moosey-faced aboot? Fifty measley fuckin pence ootay Ritz!

This cunt has a wey ay makin ye feel a real petty, trivial bastard.

Text 3

Welsh, Irvine, *Trainspotting*, trans. Giuliana Zeuli (Parma: Guanda, 1996)

I ragazzi del buco, Jean-Claude Van Damme e la Madre Superiora

Sick Boy era coperto di sudore; tremava tutto. Io me ne stavo lì schiaffato davanti alla tele, cercando di non dargli retta, a quel coglione. Mi buttava giù. Provai a concentrarmi sulla cassetta di Jean-Claude Van Damme.

Come in tutti i film del genere, l'inizio era drammatico: era quasi obbligatorio. Poi, nel pezzo che veniva dopo c'era un grande sforzo per creare atmosfera, facendo tra l'altro entrare in scena il cattivo, e per far stare in piedi una trama proprio scacata. Comunque, Jean-Claude sembrava pronto a menare le mani da un momento all'altro.

«Rents, devo vedere la Madre Superiora», fa Sick Boy col fiato corto, scuotendo la testa.

«Ah», faccio io. Volevo mandarlo affanculo. Perché non si levava dai coglioni? Io volevo restarmene lì con Jean-Claude. Però già sapevo che stavo per sfasciarmi anch'io, non ci mancava molto, e se quello andava a farsi adesso poi mi lasciava a secco. Lo chiamano Sick Boy non perché sta sempre male per crisi di astinenza, ma perché è un coglione che ha la testa fuori posto.

«Andiamo, cazzo.»

«Aspetta un momento.» Volevo vedere Jean-Claude farlo a pezzi, quello stronzo, che se la tirava tanto. Se ce ne andavamo adesso, rischiavo di non vederlo più. Al ritorno sarei stato troppo fottuto, e poi magari non tornavamo prima di due o tre giorni. Così gli dovevo pagare anche la multa a quel negozio del cazzo, per una cassetta a cui non avevo dato neanche un'occhiata.

«Devo andare, cazzo, e subito!» ulula lui, alzandosi in piedi. Se ne va alla finestra e ci si appoggia contro: respira pesante, da animale braccato. Negli occhi ha un bisogno disperato e nient'altro.

Io allora spengo il video col telecomando. «Cazzo, che spreco», ringhio in faccia a quel coglione, a quel colossale rompipalle.

Lui getta la testa all'indietro, con uno scatto, e tira su gli occhi verso il soffitto. «Te lo do io i soldi per riaffittarla. È solo per questo che sei tanto incazzato? Per cinquanta miseri pence?»

Il coglione ha quel modo tutto suo di farti sentire un vero bastardo.

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Week 1 – Handout 2

Text 4

Wordsworth, William, *Lyrical Ballads* (Harlow: Pearson, 2007) [With Samuel Taylor Coleridge. First published 1798, but revised 1800, 1802, 1805; Preface first published 1800, definitive version 1802]

Extracts from Preface

The first volume of these Poems has already been submitted to general perusal. It was published, as an experiment, which, I hoped, might be of some use to ascertain, how far, by fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of the **real language of men** in a state of vivid sensation, that sort of pleasure and that quantity of pleasure may be imparted, which a Poet may rationally endeavour to impart.

[...]

Several of my friends [...] advised me to prefix a systematic defence of the theory upon which the Poems were written. But [...] to treat the subject with the clearness and coherence of which I believe it susceptible, it would be necessary to give a full account of the present state of the public taste in this country, and to determine how far this taste is healthy or depraved; which, again, could not be determined, without pointing out in what manner language and the human mind act and re-act on each other, and without **retracing the revolutions, not of literature alone, but likewise of society itself**.

[...]

They who have been accustomed to the **gaudiness and inane phraseology of many modern writers**, if they persist in reading this book to its conclusion, will, no doubt, frequently have to struggle with feelings of **strangeness and awkwardness**: they will look round for poetry, and will be induced to inquire by what species of courtesy these attempts can be permitted to assume that title.

[...]

The principal object, then, proposed in these Poems was to choose incidents and situations from **common life**, and to relate or describe them, throughout, as far as was possible in a selection of **language really used by men**, and, at the same time, to throw over them a certain **colouring of imagination**, whereby **ordinary** things should be presented to the mind in an **unusual** aspect [...]

[...]

Humble and rustic life was generally chosen, because, in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a **plainer and more emphatic language**; because in that condition of life our elementary feelings coexist in a state of greater **simplicity**, and, consequently, may be more accurately contemplated, and more forcibly communicated; because the manners of rural life germinate from those elementary feelings, and, from the necessary character of **rural occupations**, are more easily comprehended, and are more durable; and, lastly, because in that condition the passions of men are incorporated with the beautiful and permanent forms of **nature**. The language, too, of these men has been adopted (**purified indeed from what appear to be its real defects**, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust) because such men hourly communicate with the best objects from which the best part of language is originally derived; and because, **from their rank in society** and the sameness and narrow circle of their intercourse, being less under the influence of social vanity, they convey their feelings and notions in **simple and unelaborated expressions**. Accordingly,

such a language, arising out of repeated experience and regular feelings, is a more permanent, and a far more philosophical language, than that which is frequently substituted for it by Poets [...]

[...]

Wordsworth's subjects in *LB* will include:

'maternal passion'; 'the last struggles of a human being, at the approach of death'; 'objects of nature'; 'goings-on of the universe'; 'daily life'; 'appearances of the visible universe [...] storm and sunshine, [...] revolutions of the seasons, [...] cold and heat, [...] loss of friends and kindred, [...] injuries and resentments, [...] gratitude and hope, [...] fear and sorrow'.

[...]

Wordsworth on current state of literature as affected by social change. He's proposing to focus on the ordinary, the natural:

For a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and, unfitting it for all voluntary exertion, to reduce it to a state of almost savage torpor. The most effective of these causes are the **great national events** which are daily taking place, and the **increasing accumulation of men in cities**, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident, which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies. To this tendency of life and manners the literature and theatrical exhibitions of the country have conformed themselves. The invaluable works of our elder writers, I had almost said the works of Shakespeare and Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse.

[...]

Wordsworth comments on his style:

[...] personifications of abstract ideas rarely occur in these volumes; and are utterly rejected, as an ordinary device to elevate the style, and raise it above prose. My purpose was to **imitate**, and, as far as possible, to adopt **the very language of men**; and assuredly such personifications do not make any **natural** or **regular** part of that language. [...] I have wished to keep my Reader in the company of **flesh and blood** [...]

'little of what is usually called **poetic diction**'; 'little falsehood of description';

Poet's relations with society:

'while he **describes** and **imitates passions**, his situation is altogether slavish and mechanical, compared with the freedom and power of **real and substantial action and suffering**. So that it will be the wish of the Poet to **bring his feelings near to those of the persons whose feelings he describes**, nay, for short spaces of time, perhaps, to let himself slip into an **entire delusion, and even confound and identify his own feelings with theirs**; modifying only the language which is thus suggested to him by a consideration that he describes for a particular purpose, that of giving **pleasure**. Here, then, he will apply the principle of selection which has been already insisted upon.

[...]

'poetry is the image of man and nature'

[...]

'Poets do not write for Poets alone, but for men'

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Collegio S. Caterina, April-May 2016
Dr Paul Howard, Trinity College, Cambridge
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Week 1 – Handout 2

Text 4

Wordsworth, William, *Lyrical Ballads*
(Harlow: Pearson, 2007) [With Samuel Taylor
Coleridge. First published 1798, but revised
1800, 1802, 1805]

Goody Blake and Harry Gill
A True Story

Oh! what's the matter? what's the matter?
What is't that ails young Harry Gill?
That evermore his teeth they chatter,
Chatter, chatter, chatter still!
Of waistcoats Harry has no lack,
Good duffle grey, and flannel fine;
He has a blanket on his back,
And coats enough to smother nine.

In March, December, and in July,
'Tis all the same with Harry Gill;
The neighbours tell, and tell you truly,
His teeth they chatter, chatter still.
At night, at morning, and at noon,
'Tis all the same with Harry Gill;
Beneath the sun, beneath the moon,
His teeth they chatter, chatter still!

Young Harry was a lusty drover,
And who so stout of limb as he?
His cheeks were red as ruddy clover;
His voice was like the voice of three.
Old Goody Blake was old and poor;
Ill fed she was, and thinly clad;
And any man who passed her door
Might see how poor a hut she had.

All day she spun in her poor dwelling:
And then her three hours' work at night,
Alas! 'twas hardly worth the telling,
It would not pay for candle-light.
This woman dwelt in Dorsetshire,
Her hut was on a cold hill side;
And in that country coals are dear,
For they come far by wind and tide.

By the same fire to boil their pottage,
Two poor old Dames, as I have known,
Will often live in one small cottage;
But she, poor Woman! dwelt alone.
'Twas well enough when summer came,
The long, warm, lightsome summer-day;
Then at her door the *canty* Dame
Would sit, as any linnet, gay.

But when the ice our streams did fetter,
Oh! then how her old bones would shake!
You would have said, if you had met her,
'Twas a hard time for Goody Blake.
Her evenings then were dull and dead:
Sad case it was, as you may think,
For very cold to go to bed;
And then for cold not sleep a wink.

O joy for her! whene'er in winter
The winds at night had made a rout;
And scattered many a lusty splinter
And many a rotten bough about.
Yet never had she, well or sick,
As every man who knew her says,
A pile before hand, wood or stick,
Enough to warm her for three days.

Now, when the frost was past enduring,
And made her poor old bones to ache,
Could any thing be more alluring
Than an old hedge to Goody Blake?
And, now and then, it must be said,
When her old bones were cold and chill,
She left her fire, or left her bed,
To seek the hedge of Harry Gill.

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Now Harry he had long suspected
This trespass of old Goody Blake;
And vowed that she should be detected,
And he on her would vengeance take.
And oft from his warm fire he'd go,
And to the fields his road would take; 70
And there, at night, in frost and snow,
He watched to seize old Goody Blake.

And once, behind a rick of barley,
Thus looking out did Harry stand:
The moon was full and shining clearly,
And crisp with frost the stubble land.
--He hears a noise--he's all awake--
Again?--on tip-toe down the hill
He softly creeps--'tis Goody Blake;
She's at the hedge of Harry Gill! 80

Right glad was he when he beheld her:
Stick after stick did Goody pull:
He stood behind a bush of elder,
Till she had filled her apron full.
When with her load she turned about,
The bye-road back again to take;
He started forward with a shout,
And sprang upon poor Goody Blake.

And fiercely by the arm he took her,
And by the arm he held her fast, 90
And fiercely by the arm he shook her,
And cried, "I've caught you then at last!"--
Then Goody, who had nothing said,
Her bundle from her lap let fall;
And, kneeling on the sticks, she prayed
To God that is the judge of all.

She prayed, her withered hand uprearing,
While Harry held her by the arm--
"God! who art never out of hearing,
O may he never more be warm!" 100
The cold, cold moon above her head,
Thus on her knees did Goody pray;
Young Harry heard what she had said,
And icy cold he turned away.

He went complaining all the morrow
That he was cold and very chill:
His face was gloom, his heart was sorrow,
Alas! that day for Harry Gill!
That day he wore a riding-coat,
But not a whit the warmer he: 110
Another was on Thursday brought,
And ere the Sabbath he had three.

'Twas all in vain, a useless matter,
And blankets were about him pinned;
Yet still his jaws and teeth they clatter;
Like a loose casement in the wind.
And Harry's flesh it fell away;
And all who see him say, 'tis plain,
That, live as long as live he may,
He never will be warm again. 120

No word to any man he utters,
A-bed or up, to young or old;
But ever to himself he mutters,
"Poor Harry Gill is very cold."
A-bed or up, by night or day;
His teeth they chatter, chatter still.
Now think, ye farmers all, I pray,
Of Goody Blake and Harry Gill!

(1798)

Week 1 – Handout 3

Text 7

Wordsworth, William, *Lyrical Ballads* (Harlow: Pearson, 2007) [With Samuel Taylor Coleridge. First published 1798, but revised 1800, 1802, 1805]

The Old Cumberland Beggar

I saw an aged beggar in my walk,
And he was seated, by the highway side,
On a low structure of rude masonry
Built at the foot of a huge hill, that they
Who lead their horses down the steep rough road
May thence remount at ease. The aged Man
Had placed his staff across the broad smooth stone
That overlays the pile, and, from a bag
All white with flour, the dole of village dames,
He drew his scraps and fragments, one by one, 10
And scanned them with a fixed and serious look
Of idle computation. In the sun,
Upon the second step of that small pile,
Surrounded by those wild unpeopled hills,
He sat, and ate his food in solitude:
And ever, scattered from his palsied hand,
That, still attempting to prevent the waste,
Was baffled still, the crumbs in little showers

Fell on the ground; and the small mountain birds,
Not venturing yet to peck their destined meal, 20
Approached within the length of half his staff.

Him from my childhood have I known; and then
He was so old, he seems not older now;
He travels on, a solitary Man,
So helpless in appearance, that for him
The sauntering horseman-traveller does not throw
With careless hand his alms upon the ground,
But stops, that he may safely lodge the coin
Within the old Man's hat; nor quits him so,
But still, when he has given his horse the rein, 30
Towards the aged beggar with a look
Sidelong, and half-reverted. She who tends
The toll-gate, when in summer at her door
She turns her wheel, if on the road she sees
The aged beggar coming, quits her work,
And lifts the latch for him that he may pass.
The post-boy, when his rattling wheels o'ertake
The aged beggar in the woody lane,
Shouts to him from behind, and if, perchance
The old man does not change his course, the boy 40
Turns with less noisy wheels to the roadside,
And passes gently by, without a curse
Upon his lips, or anger at his heart.
He travels on, a solitary Man;

His age has no companion. On the ground
His eyes are turned, and, as he moves along
They move along the ground; and, evermore,
Instead of common and habitual sight
Of fields with rural works, of hill and dale,
And the blue sky, one little span of earth 50
Is all his prospect. Thus, from day to day,
Bow-bent, his eyes for ever on the ground,
He plies his weary journey; seeing still,
And never knowing that he sees, some straw,
Some scattered leaf, or marks which, in one track,
The nails of cart or chariot-wheel have left
Impressed on the white road, in the same line,
At distance still the same. Poor Traveller!
His staff trails with him; scarcely do his feet
Disturb the summer dust; he is so still 60
In look and motion, that the cottage curs,
Ere he has passed the door, will turn away,
Weary of barking at him. Boys and girls,
The vacant and the busy, maids and youths,
And urchins newly breeched all pass him by:
Him even the slow-paced waggon leaves behind.

But deem not this Man useless. – Statesmen! ye
Who are so restless in your wisdom, ye
Who have a broom still ready in your hands
To rid the world of nuisances; ye proud, 70

Heart-swoln, while in your pride ye contemplate
Your talents, power, or wisdom, deem him not
A burthen of the earth! 'Tis Nature's law
That none, the meanest of created things,
Of forms created the most vile and brute,
The dullest or most noxious, should exist
Divorced from good – a spirit and pulse of good,
A life and soul, to every mode of being
Inseparably linked. While thus he creeps
From door to door, the villagers in him 80
Behold a record which together binds
Past deeds and offices of charity
Else unremembered, and so keeps alive
The kindly mood in hearts which lapse of years,
And that half-wisdom half-experience gives,
Make slow to feel, and by sure steps resign
To selfishness and cold oblivious cares.
Among the farms and solitary huts,
Hamlets and thinly-scattered villages,
Where'er the aged beggar takes his rounds 90
The mild necessity of use compels
To acts of love; and habit does the work
Of reason; yet prepares that after joy
Which reason cherishes. And thus the soul,
By that sweet taste of pleasure unpursued,
Doth find herself insensibly disposed
To virtue and true goodness. Some there are,

By their good works exalted, lofty minds
And meditative, authors of delight
And happiness, which to the end of time 100
Will live, and spread, and kindle; minds like these
In childhood, from this solitary being,
This helpless wanderer, have perchance received
(A thing more precious far than all that books
Or the solitudes of love can do!)

That first mild touch of sympathy and thought,
In which they found their kindred with a world
Where want and sorrow were. The easy man
Who sits at his own door, and, like the pear
That overhangs his head from the green wall, 110
Feeds in the sunshine; the robust and young,
The prosperous and unthinking, they who live
Sheltered, and flourish in a little grove
Of their own kindred, all behold in him
A silent monitor, which on their minds
Must needs impress a transitory thought
Of self-congratulation, to the heart
Of each recalling his peculiar boons,
His charters and exemptions; and, perchance,
Though he to no one give the fortitude 120
And circumspection needful to preserve
His present blessings, and to husband up
The respite of the season, he, at least,
And 'tis no vulgar service, makes them felt.

Yet further. – Many, I believe, there are
Who live a life of virtuous decency,
Men who can hear the Decalogue and feel
No self-reproach; who of the moral law
Established in the land where they abide
Are strict observers; and not negligent, 130
Meanwhile, in any tenderness of heart
Or act of love to those with whom they dwell,
Their kindred, and the children of their blood.
Praise be to such, and to their slumbers peace! –
But of the poor man ask, the abject poor,
Go, and demand of him, if there be here
In this cold abstinence from evil deeds,
And these inevitable charities,
Wherewith to satisfy the human soul?
No – Man is dear to Man; the poorest poor 140
Long for some moments in a weary life
When they can know and feel that they have been
Themselves the fathers and the dealers out
Of some small blessings, have been kind to such
As needed kindness, for this single cause,
That we have all of us one human heart. – --
Such pleasure is to one kind Being known,
My neighbour, when with punctual care, each week
Duly as Friday comes, though pressed herself
By her own wants, she from her chest of meal 150

Takes one unsparing handful for the scrip
Of this old Mendicant, and, from her door
Returning with exhilarated heart,
Sits by her fire, and builds her hope in heaven.

Then let him pass, a blessing on his head!
And while in that vast solitude to which
The tide of things has borne him, he appears
To breathe and live but for himself alone,
Unblamed, uninjured, let him bear about
The good which the benignant law of Heaven
Has hung around him: and, while life is his,
Still let him prompt the unlettered villagers
To tender offices and pensive thoughts.
Then let him pass, a blessing on his head!
And, long as he can wander, let him breathe
The freshness of the valleys; let his blood
Struggle with frosty air and winter snows;
And let the chartered wind that sweeps the heath
Beat his grey locks against his withered face.
Reverence the hope whose vital anxiousness 170
Gives the last human interest to his heart.
May never HOUSE, misnamed of INDUSTRY!
Make him a captive! for that pent-up din,
Those life-consuming sounds that clog the air,
Be his the natural silence of old age!
Let him be free of mountain solitudes;

And have around him, whether heard or not,
The pleasant melody of woodland birds.
Few are his pleasures: if his eyes have now
Have been so long familiar with the earth 180
No more behold the horizontal sun
Rising or setting, let the light at least
Find a free entrance to their languid orbs.
And let him, *where* and *when* he will, sit down
Beneath the trees, or by the grassy bank
Of highway side, and with the little birds
Share his chance-gathered meal; and, finally,
As in the eye of Nature he has lived,
So in the eye of Nature let him die!
(1798)

Exercise

Who is the narrating persona?
What is his relation to the poem's protagonist?
Who helps the beggar?
Who is the poem aimed at?
How does it engage politically?

Week 1 – Handout 4

Text 6

Barnes, William, *Poems of Rural Life in the Dorset Dialect*, 1844

For recording, see:

<http://media.adelaide.edu.au/press/barnesy/008-the-milkmaid.mp3>

The milk-mâid o' the farm

I be the milk-mâid o' the farm:

I be so happy out in groun',	<i>field</i>
Wi' my white milk-pâil in my yarm,	<i>arm</i>
As ef I wore a goolden crown.	<i>if</i>

An' I don't zit up hafe the night,	<i>half</i>
Nar lie var hafe the day a-bed:	<i>nor, for</i>
An' that's how 'tis my eyes be bright,	
An' why my cheäks be älwiz red.	<i>always</i>

In zummer marnens, when the lark	<i>mornings</i>
Da rouse the yerly lad an' lass	<i>do, early</i>
To work, I be the vust to mark	<i>first</i>
My steps upon the dewy grass.	

An' in the evemen, when the zun	<i>evening</i>
Da sheen upon the western brows	<i>shine,</i>
O' hills, wher bubblèn brooks da run	
Ther I da zing an' milk my cows.	

An' ev'ry cow da stan' wi' I,	
An' never mōve, nar kick my pail,	
Nar bliare at t'other cows, nar try	<i>bellow</i>
To hook, ar swīтч me wi' her tail.	<i>or</i>

Noo liady, wi' her muff an' vâil,	<i>veil</i>
Da wā'ke wi' sich a stiately tread	<i>walk</i>
As I do wi' my milkèn pail,	
A-balanc'd up upon my head.	

An I at marnen an' at night	
Da skim the yaller cream, an' mould	<i>yellow</i>
An' press my cheeses red an' white,	
An' zee the butter vetch'd an' roll'd.	<i>fetched (turned solid)</i>

An' Tommas shon't be cäll'd the wust	<i>worst</i>
Young man alive, var he da try	<i>for</i>
To milk roun' al his own cows vust,	<i>first</i>
An' then to come an' milk var I.	

I be the milk-mâid o' the farm:
I be so happy out in groun',
Wi' my white milk-pâil in my yarm,
As ef I wore a goolden crown.

Week 1 – Handout 3

Text 7

Wordsworth, William, *Lyrical Ballads* (Harlow: Pearson, 2007) [With Samuel Taylor Coleridge. First published 1798, but revised 1800, 1802, 1805]

The Old Cumberland Beggar

I saw an aged beggar in my walk,
And he was seated, by the highway side,
On a low structure of rude masonry
Built at the foot of a huge hill, that they
Who lead their horses down the steep rough road
May thence remount at ease. The aged Man
Had placed his staff across the broad smooth stone
That overlays the pile, and, from a bag
All white with flour, the dole of village dames,
He drew his scraps and fragments, one by one, 10
And scanned them with a fixed and serious look
Of idle computation. In the sun,
Upon the second step of that small pile,
Surrounded by those wild unpeopled hills,
He sat, and ate his food in solitude:
And ever, scattered from his palsied hand,
That, still attempting to prevent the waste,
Was baffled still, the crumbs in little showers

Fell on the ground; and the small mountain birds,
Not venturing yet to peck their destined meal, 20
Approached within the length of half his staff.

Him from my childhood have I known; and then
He was so old, he seems not older now;
He travels on, a solitary Man,
So helpless in appearance, that for him
The sauntering horseman-traveller does not throw
With careless hand his alms upon the ground,
But stops, that he may safely lodge the coin
Within the old Man's hat; nor quits him so,
But still, when he has given his horse the rein, 30
Towards the aged beggar with a look
Sidelong, and half-reverted. She who tends
The toll-gate, when in summer at her door
She turns her wheel, if on the road she sees
The aged beggar coming, quits her work,
And lifts the latch for him that he may pass.
The post-boy, when his rattling wheels o'ertake
The aged beggar in the woody lane,
Shouts to him from behind, and if, perchance
The old man does not change his course, the boy 40
Turns with less noisy wheels to the roadside,
And passes gently by, without a curse
Upon his lips, or anger at his heart.
He travels on, a solitary Man;

His age has no companion. On the ground
His eyes are turned, and, as he moves along
They move along the ground; and, evermore,
Instead of common and habitual sight
Of fields with rural works, of hill and dale,
And the blue sky, one little span of earth 50
Is all his prospect. Thus, from day to day,
Bow-bent, his eyes for ever on the ground,
He plies his weary journey; seeing still,
And never knowing that he sees, some straw,
Some scattered leaf, or marks which, in one track,
The nails of cart or chariot-wheel have left
Impressed on the white road, in the same line,
At distance still the same. Poor Traveller!
His staff trails with him; scarcely do his feet
Disturb the summer dust; he is so still 60
In look and motion, that the cottage curs,
Ere he has passed the door, will turn away,
Weary of barking at him. Boys and girls,
The vacant and the busy, maids and youths,
And urchins newly breeched all pass him by:
Him even the slow-paced waggon leaves behind.

But deem not this Man useless. – Statesmen! ye
Who are so restless in your wisdom, ye
Who have a broom still ready in your hands
To rid the world of nuisances; ye proud, 70

Heart-swoln, while in your pride ye contemplate
Your talents, power, or wisdom, deem him not
A burthen of the earth! 'Tis Nature's law
That none, the meanest of created things,
Of forms created the most vile and brute,
The dullest or most noxious, should exist
Divorced from good – a spirit and pulse of good,
A life and soul, to every mode of being
Inseparably linked. While thus he creeps
From door to door, the villagers in him 80
Behold a record which together binds
Past deeds and offices of charity
Else unremembered, and so keeps alive
The kindly mood in hearts which lapse of years,
And that half-wisdom half-experience gives,
Make slow to feel, and by sure steps resign
To selfishness and cold oblivious cares.
Among the farms and solitary huts,
Hamlets and thinly-scattered villages,
Where'er the aged beggar takes his rounds 90
The mild necessity of use compels
To acts of love; and habit does the work
Of reason; yet prepares that after joy
Which reason cherishes. And thus the soul,
By that sweet taste of pleasure unpursued,
Doth find herself insensibly disposed
To virtue and true goodness. Some there are,

By their good works exalted, lofty minds
And meditative, authors of delight
And happiness, which to the end of time 100
Will live, and spread, and kindle; minds like these
In childhood, from this solitary being,
This helpless wanderer, have perchance received
(A thing more precious far than all that books
Or the solitudes of love can do!)

That first mild touch of sympathy and thought,
In which they found their kindred with a world
Where want and sorrow were. The easy man
Who sits at his own door, and, like the pear
That overhangs his head from the green wall, 110
Feeds in the sunshine; the robust and young,
The prosperous and unthinking, they who live
Sheltered, and flourish in a little grove
Of their own kindred, all behold in him
A silent monitor, which on their minds
Must needs impress a transitory thought
Of self-congratulation, to the heart
Of each recalling his peculiar boons,
His charters and exemptions; and, perchance,
Though he to no one give the fortitude 120
And circumspection needful to preserve
His present blessings, and to husband up
The respite of the season, he, at least,
And 'tis no vulgar service, makes them felt.

Yet further. – Many, I believe, there are
Who live a life of virtuous decency,
Men who can hear the Decalogue and feel
No self-reproach; who of the moral law
Established in the land where they abide
Are strict observers; and not negligent, 130
Meanwhile, in any tenderness of heart
Or act of love to those with whom they dwell,
Their kindred, and the children of their blood.
Praise be to such, and to their slumbers peace! –
But of the poor man ask, the abject poor,
Go, and demand of him, if there be here
In this cold abstinence from evil deeds,
And these inevitable charities,
Wherewith to satisfy the human soul?
No – Man is dear to Man; the poorest poor 140
Long for some moments in a weary life
When they can know and feel that they have been
Themselves the fathers and the dealers out
Of some small blessings, have been kind to such
As needed kindness, for this single cause,
That we have all of us one human heart. – --
Such pleasure is to one kind Being known,
My neighbour, when with punctual care, each week
Duly as Friday comes, though pressed herself
By her own wants, she from her chest of meal 150

Takes one unsparing handful for the scrip
Of this old Mendicant, and, from her door
Returning with exhilarated heart,
Sits by her fire, and builds her hope in heaven.

Then let him pass, a blessing on his head!
And while in that vast solitude to which
The tide of things has borne him, he appears
To breathe and live but for himself alone,
Unblamed, uninjured, let him bear about
The good which the benignant law of Heaven
Has hung around him: and, while life is his,
Still let him prompt the unlettered villagers
To tender offices and pensive thoughts.
Then let him pass, a blessing on his head!
And, long as he can wander, let him breathe
The freshness of the valleys; let his blood
Struggle with frosty air and winter snows;
And let the chartered wind that sweeps the heath
Beat his grey locks against his withered face.
Reverence the hope whose vital anxiousness 170
Gives the last human interest to his heart.
May never HOUSE, misnamed of INDUSTRY!
Make him a captive! for that pent-up din,
Those life-consuming sounds that clog the air,
Be his the natural silence of old age!
Let him be free of mountain solitudes;

And have around him, whether heard or not,
The pleasant melody of woodland birds.
Few are his pleasures: if his eyes have now
Have been so long familiar with the earth 180
No more behold the horizontal sun
Rising or setting, let the light at least
Find a free entrance to their languid orbs.
And let him, *where* and *when* he will, sit down
Beneath the trees, or by the grassy bank
Of highway side, and with the little birds
Share his chance-gathered meal; and, finally,
As in the eye of Nature he has lived,
So in the eye of Nature let him die!
(1798)

Exercise

Who is the narrating persona?
What is his relation to the poem's protagonist?
Who helps the beggar?
Who is the poem aimed at?
How does it engage politically?

A Tale of Two Countries: Voicing the Poor in 19th-Century Britain and Italy

Week 2 – Handout 1

Text 8

Manzoni, Alessandro, *I promessi sposi* [*Fermo e Lucia* 1823, not published; 1827; definitive version 1840]

Introduzione

*L'Historia si può veramente deffinire una guerra illustre contro il Tempo, perché togliendoli di mano gl'anni suoi prigionieri, anzi già fatti cadaueri, li richiama in vita, li passa in rassegna, e li schiera di nuovo in battaglia. Ma gl'illustri Campioni che in tal Arringo fanno messe di Palme e d'Allori, rapiscono solo che le sole spoglie più sfarzose e brillanti, **imbalsamando co' loro inchiostri le Imprese de Prencipi e Potentati, e qualificati Personaggj**, e trapontando coll'ago finissimo dell'ingegno i fili d'oro e di seta, che formano un perpetuo ricamo di **Attioni gloriose**. Però alla mia debolezza non è lecito solleuarsi a tal'argomenti, e sublimità pericolose, con aggirarsi tra Labirinti de' Politici maneggj, et il rimbombo de' bellici Oricolchi: solo che hauendo hauuto notitia di fatti memorabili, se ben capitorno a **gente meccaniche, e di piccol affare**, mi accingo di **lasciarne memoria** a Posterì, con far di **tutto schietta e genuinamente** il Racconto, ouuero sia Relatione. Nella quale si vedrà in angusto Teatro luttuose Traggedie d'horrori, e Scene di malvagità grandiosa, con intermezzi **d'Imprese virtuose e buontà angeliche, opposte alle operationi diaboliche**.*

[...]

«Ma, quando io avrò durata l'eroica fatica di **trascriver** questa **storia** da questo **dilavato e graffiato autografo**, e l'avrò data, come si suol dire, alla luce, **si troverà poi chi duri la fatica di leggerla?**»

[...]

ma com'è dozzinale! com'è **sguaiato**! com'è scorretto! **Idiotismi lombardi a iosa, frasi della lingua adoperate a sproposito, grammatica arbitraria, periodi sgangherati**. E poi, qualche eleganza spagnola seminata qua e là;

[...]

Ecco qui: declamazioni ampollose, composte a forza di solecismi pedestri, e da per tutto quella goffaggine ambiziosa, ch'è il proprio carattere degli scritti **di quel secolo, in questo paese**. In vero, **non è cosa da presentare a lettori d'oggiorno**: son troppo ammaliziati, troppo disgustati di questo genere di stravaganze.

[...]

Nell'atto però di chiudere lo **scartafaccio**, per riporlo, mi sapeva male che una **storia** così bella dovesse rimanersi tuttavia sconosciuta; perché, in quanto **storia**, può essere che al lettore ne paia altrimenti, ma a me era parsa bella, come dico; molto bella. «Perché non si potrebbe, pensai, prender la serie de' fatti da questo manoscritto, e **rifarne la dicitura?**»

Text 9

Belli, Giuseppe Gioachino, *Tutti i sonetti romaneschi* (Rome: Newton, 1998, 2 vols) [Sonnets not published by author, first published in full 1886-89; Introduction (not published) first drafted 1831, revised 1832, 1839, 1843, this version 1847]

Introduzione [not Belli's title; applied retrospectively by editors]

Io ho deliberato di lasciare un **monumento** di quello che oggi è **la plebe di Roma**. In lei sta certo un tipo di **originalità**: e la sua **lingua**, i suoi concetti, l'indole, il costume, gli usi, le

pratiche, i lumi, la credenza, i pregiudizi, le superstizioni, tuttociò insomma che la riguarda, ritiene un'impronta che assai per avventura **si distingue da qualunque altro carattere di popolo**. Né Roma è tale, che la plebe di lei non faccia parte di un gran tutto, di una città cioè di sempre solenne ricordanza. Oltre a ciò, mi sembra la mia idea non iscompagnarsi da **novità**. Questo disegno così colorito, checché ne sia del soggetto, **non trova lavoro da confronto che lo abbiano preceduto**.

I nostri popolani non hanno arte alcuna, non di oratoria, non di poetica: come niuna plebe n'ebbe mai. Tutto esce spontaneo dalla **natura** loro, viva sempre ed energica perché lasciata libera nello sviluppo di qualità non fattizie. Direi delle loro idee ed abitudini, direi del parlare loro ciò che non può vedersi nelle fisionomie. **Perché tanto queste diverse nel volgo di una città da quelle degl'individui di ordini superiori?** Perché non frenati i muscoli del volto alla immobilità comandata dalla civile educazione, si lasciano alle contrazioni della passione che domina e dall'affetto che stimola; e prendono quindi un diverso sviluppo, corrispondente per solito alla natura dello spirito che que' corpi informa e determina. Così i volti diventano specchio dell'anima. Che se fra i cittadini, subordinati a positive discipline, non risulta una completa uniformità di fisionomia, ciò dipende da **differenze essenzialmente organiche** e fondamentali, e dal non aver mai la natura formato due oggetti di matematica identità.

Vero però sempre mi par rimanere che la educazione che accompagna la parte dell'incivilimento, fa ogni sforzo per ridurre gli uomini alla uniformità: e se non vi riesce quanto vorrebbe, è forse questo uno de' beneficii della creazione. **Il popolo quindi mancante di arte, manca di poesia**. Se mai cedendo all'impeto della rozza e potente sua fantasia, una pure ne cerca, lo fa sforzandosi di **imitare la illustre**. Allora il plebeo non è più lui, ma **un fantoccio male e goffamente ricoperto di vesti non attagliate al suo dosso**. Poesia propria non ha: e in ciò errarono quanti il dir romanesco vollero sin qui presentare in versi che tutta palesarono la lotta dell'arte colla natura e la vittoria della natura sull'arte.

Esporre le frasi del romano quali dalla bocca del romano escono tuttora, senza ornamento, senza alterazione veruna, senza pure inversioni di sintassi o troncamenti di licenza, eccetto quelli che il parlator romanesco usi egli stesso: insomma cavare una regola dal caso e una grammatica dall'uso, ecco il mio scopo. Io non vo' già presentare nelle mie carte la poesia popolare, ma i popolari discorsi svolti nella mia poesia. Il numero poetico e la rima debbono uscire come accidente dall'accozzamento, in apparenza casuale, di libere frasi e correnti parole non scomposte giammai, non corrette, né modellate, né acconciate con modo differente da quello che ci manda **il testimonio delle orecchie**: attalché i versi gettati con simigliante artificio non paiano quasi suscitare impressioni ma risvegliare reminiscenze. E dove con tal corredo di **colori nativi** io giunga a dipingere la morale, la civile e la religiosa vita del nostro popolo di Roma, avrò, credo, offerto un quadro di genere non al tutto spregevole da chi non guardi le cose attraverso **la lente del pregiudizio**. Non casta, non pia talvolta, sebbene devota e superstiziosa, apparirà la materia e la forma: ma il popolo è questo; e questo io **ricopio**, non per proporre un modello, ma sì per dare **una immagine fedele di cosa già esistente e, più abbandonata senza miglioramento**.

Nulladimeno io non m'illudo circa alle disposizioni d'animo colle quali sarebbe accolto questo mio lavoro, quando dal suo nascondiglio uscisse mai al cospetto degli uomini. Bene io preveggo quante timorate e pudiche anime, quanti zelosi e pazienti sudditi griderebber la croce contro **lo spirito insubordinato e licenzioso** che qua e là ne traspare, quasiché nascondendomi perfidamente dietro la maschera del popolano abbia io voluto prestare a lui le mie massime e i principii miei, onde esaltare il mio proprio veleno sotto l'egida della calunnia.

[...]

Facile però è la censura, siccome è comune la probità di parole. Quindi, perdonate io di buon grado le smaniose vociferazioni a quanti *Curios simulant et bacchanalia vivunt*, mi rivolgerò invece ai pochi sinceri virtuosi fra le cui mani potessero un giorno capitare i miei scritti, e dirò loro: **Io ritrassi la verità. Omne aevum Clodios fert, sed non omne tempus Catones producit.** Del resto, alle gratuite incolpazioni delle quali io divenissi oggetto replicherò il tenor della mia vita e il testimonio di chi la vide scorrere e terminare tanto ignuda di gloria quanto monda d'ogni nota di vituperio.

Molti altri scrittori ne' dialetti o ne' patrii vernacoli abbian noi veduti sorgere in Italia, e vari di questi meritar laude anche fra i posteri. Però un più assai vasto campo che a me non si presenta era loro aperto da parlare non esclusivamente appartenenti a tale o tal plebe o frazione di popolo, ma usate da tutte insieme le classi di una peculiare popolazione: donde nascono **le lingue municipali**. Quindi la facoltà delle figure, le inversioni della sintassi, le risorse della cultura e dell'arte. Non così a me si concede dalla mia circostanza. Io qui ritraggo le idee di **una plebe ignorante**, comunque in gran parte concettosa ed arguta, e le ritraggo, dirò, col soccorso di **un idiotismo continuo, di una favella tutta guasta e corrotta, di una lingua infine non italiana e neppur romana, ma romanesca**. Questi idioti o nulla sanno o quasi nulla: e quel pochissimo che imparano per tradizione serve appunto a rilevare la ignoranza loro: in tanto buio di fallacie si ravvolge. Sterili pertanto d'idee, limitate ne sono le forme del dire e scarsi i vocaboli.

[...]

Ogni quartiere di Roma, ogni individuo fra' suoi cittadini dal **ceto medio in giù**, mi ha somministrato episodii pel mio dramma: dove comparirà sì il bottegaio che il servo, e il nudo pitocco farà di sé mostra fra la credula femminetta e il fiero guidatore di carra. Così, accozzando insieme le vari classi dell'intero popolo, e facendo dire a ciascun popolano quanto sa, quanto pensa e quanto opera, ho io compendiato il cumulo del costume e delle opinioni di questo volgo, presso il quale spiccano le più strane contraddizioni. Dati i popolani nostri per indole al sarcasmo, all'epigramma, al dir proverbiale e conciso, ai risolti modi di un genio manesco, non parlano a lungo in discorso regolare ed espositivo. Un dialogo inciso, pronto ed energico: un metodo di esporre vibrato ed efficace: una frequenza di equivoci ed anfibologie, risponde ai loro bisogni e alle loro abitudini, siccome conviene alla loro inclinazione e capacità.

Di qui la inopportunità nel mio libro di filastrocche poetiche. **Distinti quadretti**, e non fra loro congiunti fuorché dal filo occulto della macchina, aggiungeranno assai meglio al fine principale, salvando insieme i lettori dal tedio di una lettura troppo unita e monotona. Il mio è un volume da prendersi e lasciarsi, come si fa de' sollazzi, senza bisogno di progressivo riordinamento d'idee. Ogni pagina è il principio del libro, ogni pagina la fine.

L'ortoepia ne' Romaneschi non cede in vizio alla grammatica: il suono della voce cupo e gutturale: la cantilena molto sensibile e varia. Tradotta la prima nella ortografia de' miei versi, mostrerà **sommo abuso di lettere**.

Nel mio lavoro io non presento la scrittura de' popolani. Questa lor manca; né in essi io la cerco, benché pur la desidero come essenziale principio d'incivilimento. **La scrittura è mia, e con essa tento d'imitare la loro parola.** Perciò del valore de' **segni cogniti io mi valgo ad esprimere incogniti suoni.**

[...]

Week 2 – Handout 2

Text 10

Belli, Giuseppe, *Tutti i sonetti romaneschi*. Full text available at
http://www.intratext.com/ixt/ita1554/_INDEX.HTM

288. La bbona famijja

Mi' nonna a un'or de notte che vviè Ttata
se¹ leva da filà, ppovera vecchia,
attizza un carboncello, sciapparecchia,²
e mmaggnamo du' fronne d'inzalata.

Quarce vvorta se fâmo³ una frittata,
che ssi⁴ la metti ar lume sce se specchia^{4a}
come fussi^{4b} a ttraverto d'un'orecchia:
quattro nosce,⁵ e la scena⁶ è tterminata.

Poi ner mentre ch'io, Tata^{6a} e Ccrementina
seguitamo un par d'ora de sgocchetto,⁷
lei sparecchia e arissetta^{7a} la cuscina.

E appena visto er fonno ar bucaletto,
'na pissciatina, 'na sarvereggina,
e, in zanta pasce, sce n'annamo a letto.

¹ Se. ² Ci apparecchia. ³ Ci facciamo. ⁴ Se. ^{4a} È
trasparente. ^{4b} Fosse. ⁵ Noci. ⁶ Cena. ^{6a} Mio padre. ⁷ Lo
sgocchetto, lo *sgocettare* è quel «seguire a sbevazzare
alcun tempo». ^{7a} Rassetta.

914. La madre poverella

Fijja, nun ce¹ sperà: ffatte² capasce
che cqua li ricchi sò ttutti un riduno,³
e un goccio d'acqua nun lo dà ggnisuno,
si tte vedessi⁴ immezzo a una fornascè.

Tu bbussa a li palazzi a uno a uno;
ma ppòì bbussà cquanto te pare e ppiasce:
tutti: «Iddio ve provedi: annate in pasce».
Eh! ppanza piena nun crede ar diggiuno.

Fidete,⁵ fijja: io parlo pe sperienza.
Ricchezza e ccarità ssò ddu' perzone
che nnun potranno mai fà cconoscenza.

Se⁶ chiede er pane, e sse trova er bastone!
Offerímolo⁷ a Ddio: ché la pascenza
è un conforto che ddà la riliggione.

¹ Ci. ² Fatti. ³ Tutti una massa: tutti uguali.
⁴ Se ti vedesse. ⁵ Fidati. ⁶ Sì. ⁷ Offeriamolo.

781. La vita dell'Omo

Nove mesi a la puzza: poi in fassciola¹
tra sbasciucchi,² lattime e llagrimoni:
poi p'er laccio,³ in ner crino,⁴ e in vesticciola,
cor torcolo⁵ e l'imbraghe pe ccarzoni.

Poi comincia er tormento de la scola,
l'abbeccè, le frustate, li ggeloni,
la rosalia, la cacca a la ssediola,
e un po' de scarlattina e vvormijjoni.⁶

Poi viè ll'arte, er diggiuno,⁷ la fatica,
la piggione, le carcere, er governo,
lo spedale, li debbiti, la fica,

er zol d'istate, la neve d'inverno...
E pper urtimo, Iddio sce⁸ bbenedica,
viè la Morte, e ffinisce co l'inferno.

¹ Il bambino in fasce dicesi sempre *cratura in fassciola*.
² Baci dati con insistenza. ³ Cinghia attaccata dietro le spalle de'
bambini per sorreggerli ne' loro primi mesi di cammino. Può presso a
poco paragonarsi al tormento della corda. ⁴ Canestro in forma di
campana, aperto in alto e nella base, entro cui si pongono i bambini, che
lo spingono col petto e tengonsi ritti in esso nel camminare. ⁵ Salva-capo
contro le cadute. ⁶ *Vormiglioni*: vaiuolo. ⁷ Digiuno ecclesiastico che
principia all'anno ventunesimo. ⁸ Ci.

1170. Li du' ggener'umani

Noi, se sa,¹ ar Monno² semo ussciti fori
impastati de mmerda e dde monnezza.³
Er merito, er decoro e la grannezza
sò ttutta marcanzia⁴ de li Siggiori.

A su' Eccellenza, a ssu' Maestà, a ssu' Artezza
fumi, patacche, titoli e sprennori;
e a nnoantri⁵ artigiani e sservitori
er bastone, l'imbasto e la capezza.

Cristo creò le case e li palazzi
p'er prencipe, er marchese e 'r cavajjere,
e la terra pe nnoi facce de cazzi.

E cquanno morze⁶ in crosce, ebbe er penziere
de sparge,⁷ bbontà ssua, fra ttanti strazzi,⁸
pe cquelli er zangue e ppe nnoantri(5) er ziere.⁹

¹ Si sa. ² Mondo. ³ Immondezza. ⁴ Mercanzia.
⁵ Noi altri. ⁶ Morì. ⁷ Spargere. ⁸ Strazi. ⁹ Siero.

Week 2 – Handout 3

Text 11 Belli as socio-politically engaged?

Le classi sociali

È un albergo la umana società
In tre piani distinto e forse più,
Dove gli uomini stan chi su e chi giù,
E chi, fra questi e quelli, a la metà.

Ma nessuno è contento dove sta,
E tutti anelan di salir più su;
E ciascun dice all'altro: scendi tu;
E quel vorria salire anche di là.

Meno i più alti che poi restan lì
Gridando che salir più non si può,
Tutti gli altri rispondono di sì.

Intanto, fra quei sì e fra quei no,
Quando il su non discese e il giù salì,
Chi al pianterren più rimarrà non so.

Belli italiano, ed. by Roberto Vighi, 3 vols (Rome: Carlo Colombo, 1975), III, p. 622.

[Compare to Li du' ggener'umani]

362. Li soprani der Monno vecchio

C'era una vorta un Re¹ cche ddar palazzo
mannò ffora a li popoli st'editto:
«lo sò io, e vvoi nun zete² un cazzo,
sori vassalli bbuggiaroni, e zritto.

lo fo dritto lo storto e storto er dritto:
pòzzo vénneve³ a tutti a un tant'er mazzo:
lo, si vve fo impiccà nun ve strapazzo,
ché la vita e la robba lo ve l'affitto.

Chi abbita a sto monno senza er titolo
o dde Papa, o dde Re, o dd'Imperatore,
quello nun pò avé mmai vosce in capitolo».

Co st'editto annò er Boja pe ccurierio,
interroganno tutti in zur tenore;
e arisposeno tutti: «È vvero, è vvero».

¹ C'era una volta un Re, c'era una volta una Regina, è il princip
generale di ogni favola che dal popolo si racconta.

² Non siete. ³ Posso vendervi.

2121. La vita da cane

Ah sse chiam'ozzio er zuo, bbrutte marmotte?
Nun fa mmai ggnente er Papa, eh?, nun fa ggnente?
Accusí vve pijjassi un accidente
come lui se strapazza e ggiorn'e nnotte.

Chi pparla co Ddio padr'onnipotente?
Chi assorve tanti fijji de mignotte?
Chi mmanna in giro l'innurgenze a bbotte?¹
Chi vva in carrozza a bbinidì la ggente?

Chi jje li conta li quadrini sui?
Chi l'ajjuta a ccreà li cardinali?
Le gabbelle, pe ddio, nnu le fa llui?

Sortanto la fatica da facchino
de strappà ttutto l'anno momoriali
e bbuttalli a ppezzetti in ner cestino!

¹ A botti: i plebei di Roma dicono *le botte* invece di *le botti*.

541. Er custituto

«Chi ssiete?» «Un omo». «Come vi chiamate?»
«Biascio Chiafò». «Di qual paese siete?»
«Romano com'e llei». «Quanti anni avete?»
«Sò entrato in ventidua». «Dove abitate?»

«Dietr'a Ccampo-Carleo».¹ «Che arte fate?»
«Gnisuna, che ssapp'io». «Come vivete?»
«De cuer che Ddio me manna». «Lo sapete
perché siete voi qui?» «Pe ttre pposate».

«Rubate?» «Ggià». «Vi accusa?» «Er Presidente».²
«Ma le rubaste voi?» «Nun zò stat'io».
«Dunque chi le rubò?» «Nu ne so ggnente».

«E voi da chi le aveste?» «Da un giudio».
«Tutto vi mostra reo». «Ma ssò innoscente».
«E se andaste in galera?» «È er gusto mio».

¹ Chiesetta e contrada al Foro Traiano.

² Presidente regionario di polizia.

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Week 2 – Handout 3

Text 12

'Them & [uz]' by Harrison, Tony, *Selected Poems* (London: Penguin, 1984), pp. 122-123.

I

αἰᾱί, ay, ay! ... stutterer Demosthenes
gob full of pebbles outshouting seas –

4 words only of *mi 'art aches* and ... 'Mine's broken,
you barbarian, T.W.!' *He* was nicely spoken.
'Can't have our glorious heritage done to death!'

I played the Drunken Porter in *Macbeth*.

'Poetry's the speech of kings. You're one of those
Shakespeare gives the comic bits to: prose!
All poetry (even Cockney Keats?) you see
's been dubbed by [ʌs] into RP,
Received Pronunciation, please believe [ʌs]
your speech is in the hands of the Receivers.'

'We say [ʌs] not [uz], T.W.!' That shut my trap.
I doffed my flat a's (as in 'flat cap')
my mouth all stuffed with glottals, great
lumps to hawk up and spit out ... *E-nun-ci-ate!*

II

So right, yer buggers, then! We'll occupy
your lousy leasehold Poetry.

I chewed up Littererchewer and spat the bones
into the lap of dozing Daniel Jones,
dropped the initials I'd been harried as
and used my *name* and own voice: [uz] [uz] [uz],
ended sentences with by, with, from,
and spoke the language that I spoke at home.
RIP RP, RIP T.W.

I'm *Tony* Harrison no longer you!

You can tell the Receivers where to go
(and not aspirate it) once you know
Wordsworth's *matter/water* are full rhymes,
[uz] can be loving as well as funny.

My first mention in the *Times*
automatically made Tony Anthony!

Exercise

How does Harrison use language to create a sense of identity? Compare with Belli.

Week 2 – Handout 4

Text 13

Strong female voices, or patriarchal portrayals?

418. Er Logotenente

Come intese¹ a cciarlà der cavalletto,²
presto io curze(1) dar zor Logotenente.³
«Mi' marito..., Eccellenza, è un poveretto...
pe ccarità... cche nun ha ffatto ggnente».

Disce: «Mèttet'a ssede». Io me sce metto.
Lui cor un zenno⁴ manna via la ggente:
po' me s'accosta: «Dimme un po' ggrugnetto,⁵
tu' marito lo vòì reo o innoscente?»

«Innoscente», dich'io; e llui: «Sciò⁶ ggusto»;
e detto-fatto cuer faccia d'abbreo
me schiaffa⁷ la man-dritta drent'ar busto.

Io sbarzo in piede, e strillo: «Eh, sor cazeo. ..».
E llui: «Fijjola, cuer ch'è ggiusto è ggiusto:
annate via: vostro marito è rreo».

¹ Intesi, corsi. ² Supplizio di colpi sull'ano.
³ Luogotenente criminale del Governatore.
⁴ Cenno. ⁵ Visetto. ⁶ Ci ho.
⁷ *Schiaffare*: introdurre con vivacità.

595. Er confessore

«Padre...». «Dite il confiteor». «L'ho ddetto».
«L'atto di contrizione?» «Ggià l'ho ffatto».
«Avanti dunque». «Ho ddetto cazzo-matto
a mmi' marito, e jj'ho arzato¹ un grossetto».²

«Poi?» «Pe una pila che mme róppe³ er gatto
je disse for de mé: "Ssi' mmaledetto";
e è ccratura de Ddio!». «C'è altro?» «Tratto
un giuvenotto e cce sò ita a lletto.

«E llí ccosa è ssuccesso?» «Un po' de tutto.
«Cioè? Sempre, m'immagino, pel dritto».
«Puro a rriverzo...». «Oh che peccato brutto!

Dunque, in causa di questo giovanotto,
tornate, figlia, cor cuore trafitto,
domani, a casa mia, verso le otto».

¹ *Alzare*, per «rubare». ² Mezzo *paolo* d'argento.
³ *Ruppe*.

1260. L'omo e la donna

«Sí», strillava, «è ggiustizzia da galerra¹
che nnoi povere donne disgraziate
sempre avemo da èsse soverchiate
come fússimo statüe de terra.

Voiantri purcinelli de la Scerra
date fora l'editti, predicate,
dite messa, assorvete, ggiustizzate,
e, ppe gionta de ppiú, ffate la guerra.

Cos'ha, ppiú de la donna, un galeotto
d'omaccio, pe pprotenne² in ogni caso
de stà llui sopra e dde tiené³ llei sotto?

Cos'ha dde ppiú? una mano, un piede, un stinco,
una bbocca, un'orecchia, un occhio, un naso?».
Allora io: «Nu lo sapete? un pinco». ⁴

¹ Dalla massima parte del popolo *galera* è pronunciata *galerra*.

² Pretendere. ³ Di tenere.

⁴ Vedi il Sonetto..., al quale questo vocabolo può servire di appendice.

Exercise

Who has the most power, the man or the woman?
How is power assigned linguistically?

Exercise for next week

Compare Belli's female voices to Porta's Ninetta.

Full text available at:

https://it.wikisource.org/wiki/Poesie_%28Porta%29/34_-_LA_NINETTA_DEL_VERZEE

Full dramatization of La Ninetta del Verzee available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mKp2-j-p4FM>

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Week 3 – Handout 1

Text 14

Porta, Carlo, *Poesie*, ed. Dante Isella (Milan: Mondadori, 1975).

LA NINETTA DEL VERZEE [1814]

Bravo el mè Baldissar! bravo el mè nan!
l'eva poeu vora de vegnì a trovamm...
T'el seet mattascion porch che maneman
l'è on mes che no te vegnet a ciollamm?
Ah Cristo! Cristo! com'hin frecc sti man!
Bell bell... speccia on freguj... te voeu geramm,
bolgirossa! che giaz! aja i mee tett!
che bell cojon, sont minga on scoldalett.

Pover tett nê?... te sentet com'hin froll?
Ma, gh'hoo avuu ona passion, varda, in sti di
che l'è stada, per brio! el mè tracoll.
L'è quaj cossa ancamò se sont insci.
Ven scià... settet giò on poo... già l'è anmò moll,
e poeu coss'èet de fà? l'è venerdì,
gh'è minga d'opra: descorremm on poo,
ché subet che l'è all'orden te la doo.

Varda el mè Baldissar se se pò dà
on mond pussee carogna, on mond pù infamm!
Te se regordet d'avemm vist per cà
quell gioven magher, longh come on salamm,
ch'el me vegneva a toeu de andà a ballà?
Che di voeult te l'ee vist a peccenamm?

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Ben: sent adess, sto roffianon strozzaa
che tir fioeul d'ona negra el m'ha giugaa.

Prima de tutt tee de savè che fina
de vint agn fa, quand sont restada indree
della povera mamm, la mia medina,
che adess, jesuss! l'è al Gentilin anca lee,
per no invodamm a santa Catarina,
o lassamm andà in cà don quaj mestee,
la m'ha tiraa in cà sova e tegnuu inguala
d'ona soa tosa vera e naturala.

Sta mia medina l'eva ona tetton,
matta, allegra quell mai che se pò dà:
ghe piaseva a paccià del bell e bon
e andà dent per i boeucc e boccalà:
ma sora tutt poeu la soa gran passion
l'eva quella de fassela fregà:
oh intutù de quest gh'è nient de noeu,
desdott in fira e fresca come on oeuv.

In quell temp la gh'aveva per gimacch
on gioven d'offellee, fort, traccagnott,
ch'el stava lì in la porta e in l'uss attacch.
Costuu, me cunten ch'el gh'avess de sott
on peston de pirotta masiacch,
ma basta, fussel mò per sto bescott,
o per quij del mestee ch'el ghe portava,
l'offellee l'eva lu ch'el le ciavava.

S'ha mò de dà l'inconter che costuu
el gh'ha giusta d'avegh anch lu on bagaj,
che l'è nient alter che quell porch fottuu

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che m'è costaa in sti di tanto travaj.
Insci, cont el stà insemma tutt e duu,
col giugà insemma e fà quij cattanaj
che fan tucc i fioeu, semm rivaa a quell
de trovass cott tutt duu senza savell.

Intrattanta, per via della via
dell'intrigh insci faa della medina,
ne faven dormì nun bardassaria
foeura di pee de lor in la cusina;
là ne saraven sù all'ave maria
de sira fina a quella de mattina,
e là nun de per nun tutta la nocc
sevem patron de fà onia sort de locc.

Fin però che semm staa duu cisquittitt,
ciovè a di de des, vundes, dodes agn,
se semm faa quaj carezz e quaj basitt,
e poeu voltavem là come lasagn;
ma quand emm comenzaa a senti i gallit
vers la part che comenzen i cavagn,
se semm accort d'avegh di olter besogn
on poo pussee gajard de quij del sogn.

Ma sì! per dilla giusta, in quant a mì,
sto besogn savarev minga spiegall...
soo che sentiva el sangu come a bui,
che gh'aveva ona voeuja de tentall
e in l'istess temp vergogna a comparì.
Soo anch che andava in broeuda in del basall
e soo che quand el me toccava i tett
trepillava del gust come on gallett.

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Soo de giunta che, quand alla mattina me toccava de andà a tend in Verzee alla banca del pess della medina, ogni bott che passass on perrucchee o quajghedun con bianca la marsina, me sentiva a rugà fina in di pee: me andava insemma i onz della stadera e el coeur l'andava a vella e el coo a stondera.		da bravo perucchee el s'è miss a rid e a saramel pù strenc in mezz ai did.		mi, bona a dagh a trà, fermegh el brasc, e prepotenta e franca come on sbir, Cossa farisset mai, dighi, pajasc?... Cossa vuj fà, el respond... mazzamm... mori... forni sta vitta... contentatt anch ti...	140
Mì el mè Pepp el vedeva de per tutt, e semper ghe l'aveva de denanz: mì el vedeva in di tèmol, in di trutt, in di micch, in la suppa, in di pittanz, no gh'eva giovenott, né bell né brutt, che se podess ris'cià de famme di avanz: rispondeva pesciad, desgarb e slepp, e tutt sti coss in grazia del mè Pepp.	85	Cristo! che sgarbiada de cervell l'è staa per mì quell cioll in ardion. Poss dì ch'el m'ha daa in man minga on usell, ma el manegh de tucc quanc i cognizion: allora subet hoo capii tutt quell che se daven d'intend paricc smorbion quand li alla banca me diseven milla cinad sulla panscietta e sulla inguilla.	115	Sanguanon! che dianzer de paroll! m'è calaa i forz de sbalz, m'è vegnuu frecc. Me sont pondada a lu coj brasc al coll, e lu borlonem là a travers al lecc, e li in terra el cortell, in aria el cioll, lecchem, basem, stroffignem, brascem strecc, Ninin... tas... lassem fà... pensa nagotta... sto fioeul d'ona vacca el me l'ha rotta.	145
Né l'è minga de dì che fin d'allora el m'avess missa alla comunion. On cazz! Me poden dà on cortell in gora se mì pensava mai che in di colzon ghe fudess dent de quella sort de bora! A vedè come el mond l'è mai cojon! Tucc me credeven ona gran canonega, e seva fatta pesc che né ona monega.	90	Lì emm comenzaa tutt duu de sto moment a lavorass intorna de fadiga, lu a fà onia possa per sonamel dent e mi olter tant per stoppagh sù la figa. Fors anca el sarà staa on presentiment, ma l'ha avuu pari a sbatt, l'hoo faa stà in riga, ghe l'hoo basaa, menaa, gh'hoo daa de tetta, ma de pondamel?... voj! ciappa sta fetta.	120	Ona voeulta poeù rotta che l'è stada no gh'è staa pù resguard né pù rispett. Via ona ciavada on'altra gran ciavada, no se fava olter facc che quel giughett, e se con tant piccià nol m'ha impregnada l'è proppi robba de fà fà on quadrett, tanto pù che sti usij già hin certi ordegn che fornissen el gioeugh con lassà pregn.	150
Anzi gh'hoo anmò in la ment la gran paura che hoo avuu, quand de lì a on pezz me l'ha daa in man, l'hoo creduu on boll, ona besiadura, on bugnon (soeuja mì), on quaj maa de can, e soo che m'è soltaa ai oeucc addrittura come on s'cioppon de piang, ma lu, el giavan,	95	Sent mò che macciavella de birbon l'è riva a tira a man per mettem sott. L'ha comenzaa a fà el trist, el lumagon, a fass vedè a mangià pocch o nagott. Lu el me schivava, el fava repetton, el sospirava come on mantes rott, e con pù mì ghe andava per el vers con pussee el fava el pregn, el gnucch, l'invers.	125	L'eva trii agn pocch manca che st'istoria l'andava quietament semper insci, quand la medina, che Dio l'abbia in gloria, l'ha tolt sù ona fevrascia de morì. I dottor l'han creduda infiammatoria e gh'han faa vint solass in tredes dì, ma el dì adree, giust in quella che han dezis de faghen pù, l'è andada in paradìs.	155
	100	Infin quand l'ha creduu de vess a tir vedi ch'el mett a volta on cortellasc e ch'el sbassa i cannij incontra al fir:	130		160
	105		135		165

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Morta lee, bona nocc ai sonador,
s'è barattaa la scenna in d'on moment;
mì sont andada in cà del cogitor
e el Pepp l'è andaa in cà anch lu d'un sò parent
e lì, via de vedess e de descor
quaj voeulta per el di denter per dent,
resguardo sia alla prozion de mezz,
sant March! gh'è sta sù el gatt per on bell pezz.

Ma mi, tra che a trovamm inscì ligada
in cà del pret moriva de passion,
e tra che el Pepp el m'eva sueffada
de bon'ora a saggià certi boccon,
assa brutta on bell di ciappi la strada
e pienti el cogitor come on fuston
ressolutta de tend al fatto mè
senza tance seccad de barolè.

Deffatt per quant sto pover religios
l'abba faa, l'abba ditt per famm capì
ch'el pass che fava l'eva on pass ris'cios
e che la purgarev forsi on quaj di,
l'ha traa via el sò fiaa e la soa vos,
anzi el gh'ha avuu de grazia a mondamm lì
de circa milla lir, che la medina
la m'ha lassaa tra pillà e robba fina.

Con cà pientada, e con quij pocch danee,
fresca, giovena e grassa come sera,
gh'aveva semper gent innanz indree
alla mia banca mej che né a ona fera;
de coeugh poeù gh'en vegneva di vivee,
e a quist basta domà che ghe fass ciera,

170 se gh'avess anch venduu merda per pess
sti facc de porca even content l'istess.

175 E che fior de partii ch'hoo possuu fà!
(Inscì magari avess vorsuu dattamm)
fioretton de marcant, de famm marcià
inguala di primm sciori, di primm damm;
e se fuss stada tosa de trattà
soo che on fraa Geromin l'ha vorsuu damm
del pelter assossenn, famm desmett banca,
mandamm in fiacca, e lu comparì nanca.

180 Ma mi ciocca, imbriga, incarognada
de sto razza de can d'on tajapieucc,
tant e quant ghe n'è staa che m'han cercada
olter tant n'hoo cascias foeura di oeucc;
e sì che giamò on pezz m'en seva dada
ch'el me fava scusà de stoppaboeucc,
185 ma già nun vacch de donn semm tucc inscì,
se al mond gh'è on crist el vemm proppi a sciarni!

190 E dininguarda e non poeù a fass toeù via,
en fan toninna, en fan de sott e doss.
Pur tropp l'è inscì: mi ch'hoo provaa la mia,
soo cossa gh'è de noeuv con sti balloss.
Pur tropp sont dada denter in la stria,
e el cogitor l'ha induvinaa tutt coss.
Ah roffianon d'on Pepp!... Varda el mè nan
se gh'è on cristo compagn in tutt Milan!

195 Minga content sto faccia de figon
de vess staa lu el strozzaa che el me l'ha rotta,
d'avemm traa i mej partii tucc a monton,

200 d'avemm drovada pesc d'ona pirotta,
d'avemm semper goduu i pù bon boccon
che gh'aveva alla banca, e per nagotta,
230 sagg de mè, del mè ton, della mia inguilla
l'ha comenzaa a miramm anca alla pillà.

205 In prenzipi col sloffi de dovè
comprà ona cossa o l'oltra a ona quaj posta
el me cercava in prestet per piasè;
235 ma in seguet poeù, quand el m'ha vist desposta
a lassagh god in pas el fatto mè,
l'andava al cantarà lu de soa posta,
e lì servo umelisse sur baslott,
210 ogni freguj, allon, giò on scopellott. 240

215 Ma se! impiastaa de vizzi come l'era,
lallela! gh'en voreva olter che inscì:
l'avarav traa in setton la cà Mellerà,
l'Archint, el Greppi, el Melz, staghela lì.
245 Dì cojon! Lu ostarij, trissett, primera,
la scènn, lu palch, lu donn de mantegni;
e mi ciollatononna de massee
compramm i corna cont i mee danee!

220 Olter che corna! l'ha tentaa per fina
de taccamm ona pesta bolgironna;
250 e se no sont allesta ona mattina
a tira i ciapp, indree t'el me le sonna.
Per fortuna del ciel che intanta fina
che hoo faa per compagnamel in la monna
225 hoo miss i did in mezz a on masarott 255
de filapper consciaa cont el scirott.

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Eppur: coss'eel?... l'eva inscì tant vergnon,
tant marcadett e tanto fin d'ingegn,
che hoo avuu de grazia a fagh la remission;
anzi l'ha tiraa i coss finna a quel segn,
de pacciamm (direv squas) anca i mincion,
perché a furia de vend e de fà pegn
el m'ha sbiottada e el m'ha redutt in pocch
come on oss spuvaa foeura d'on pitocch.

No gh'aveva olter pù che el lecc, i scagn,
la cros de perla e quatter strasciarj,
inscì tra robba dora e quij pocch pagn,
quand besognos de vendem anca quij
on dì el m'è vegnuu in cà, torber compagn
de quand el s'è vorsuu tajà i cannij,
e piovend giò daj oeucc acqua a monton
press a pocch el me parla de sto ton.

Sent Ninetta, el me dis, i creditor
m'hin taccaa al cuu come tanc can mastin;
se no i paghi in sti pocch vintiquatt'or
gh'è già in pront la fameja e i manezzin:
donca on fioeu par mè! on fioeu d'onor
l'avarà de reduss a fà sta fin?...
Ah nò Ninetta!... innanz de famm grani
già l'è on moment... faroo quell che soo mì.

Mì dolza come l'uga, appena senti
dove van a fornì sti ultem paroll,
deventi smorta, tremi, me spaventi,
e poeù al solet ghe metti i brasc al coll;
infin voo al cantarà: lì me resenti
della cros, di peritt, del tornacoll,

e ghe dighi, piangend, Ciappa antecrist,
degià ch'èet mangiaa el rest, mangia anca quist.

260 Redutta che son stada ona pitocca
senza credet, né robba, né danee,
s'hoo avuu de pagà el ficc, de mett in bocca,
hoo proppi dovuti mettem al mestee.
Ma fina che gh'hoo avuu taccaa alla socca
sto sanguetta fottuu d'on perucchee,
265 on quattrin che on quattrin, nanca a pagamel
sont mai stada patronna de vanzamel.

Infin per compì l'opra adess mò sent
cossa ghe solta in coo a sto porch infamm!
270 Giust on mes fa el ven chì, el me sara dent,
e el me dis ch'el gh'ha voeuja de ciavamm;
voo sul lecc: me le mett lì inscì on poo arent,
e poeù, paffeta, el fa per inculamm;
mì allora streng el ghicc, dagh on button,
e dighi... Ovej!... coss'hin sti pretension!

275 Nanca el cuu poss salvamm sangua de di!
Malarbetto ludron, brutto pendizzi!
el cuu l'è mè, vuj fann quell che vuj mì
né hoo besogn de cavatt de sti caprizzi.
280 S'avess vorsuu dall via, a st'ora chì
sarev fors maridada a vun d'offizzi.
Figuret mò se sont inscì cojonna
de mettem sott a ti a fà seggionna!

Infin vedend che dura come on sass
285 no dava a scolt pù al piang né al sospirà,
né al solet sloffi de vorè mazzass,

el s'è ressolt de fammela pagà;
né savend toeù oltra straa de vendicass
l'è andaa a cercà on poetta e el m'ha faa fa
ona dianzer d'ona bosinada
290 de famm fà la minee perfinna in strada. 320

Ecco el mè Baldissar, ecco on trattin
la reson bolgironna di passion
che me deslenguen come on candirin.
295 Ma el pussee pesc anmò di mee magon
l'è a vedè che sta birba d'on bosin 325
tra i lapp ch'el dis per mettem in canzon
el ghe ne infira voeuna, el mè car nan,
che tend nient manca che a famm perd el pan.

300 L'è rivaa fina a dì che gh'hoo in di oss
on morbo vecc de brusà via l'ussell! 330
Ma se pò dà on trattà pussee balloss,
on'azion pussee infamma e de cortell?
Pacciamm tutt, godemm tutt, e de maross
taccamm anca in l'onor, toeuemm, anca quell?
305 Questa per cristo no la poss capì: 335
mì impestada?... Buffon!... dighel mò ti.

Dighel mò ti, per brio! se gh'è ona donna
pussee sana de mì in tutt quant Milan!
310 Te le taccherà ben lì alla Coronna
la Mora del sciall giald, ma mì, doman! 340
Ma ovej!... varda che aria bolgironna
l'ha ciappaa sto tò cioll!... scià... scià el mè nan...
dammel car... toeù... l'è tova... ah dio!... ciccin...!
Vegni... ve... gni... ghe sont... Cecca?... el cadin.
315

A Tale of Two Countries: Voicing the Poor in 19th-Century Britain and Italy

Week 3 – Handout 2

Text 15

Dickens, Charles, *The Pickwick Papers* [first published in serial form, in monthly parts, 1836-7]

Extract from Chapter 12 – Sam Weller hired by Mr Pickwick

Mr. Snodgrass did as he was desired; and Mr. Samuel Weller forthwith presented himself.

'Oh — you remember me, I suppose?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'I should think so,' replied Sam, with a patronising wink. 'Queer start that 'ere, but he was one too many for you, warn't he? Up to snuff and a pinch or two over — eh?'

'Never mind that matter now,' said Mr. Pickwick hastily; 'I want to speak to you about something else. Sit down.'

'Thank'ee, sir,' said Sam. And down he sat without further bidding, having previously deposited his old white hat on the landing outside the door. 'Tain't a very good 'un to look at,' said Sam, 'but it's an astonishin' 'un to wear; and afore the brim went, it was a very handsome tile. Hows'ever it's lighter without it, that's one thing, and every hole lets in some air, that's another — ventilation gossamer I calls it.' On the delivery of this sentiment, Mr. Weller smiled agreeably upon the assembled Pickwickians.

'Now with regard to the matter on which I, with the concurrence of these gentlemen, sent for you,' said Mr. Pickwick.

'That's the pint, sir,' interposed Sam; 'out with it, as the father said to his child, when he swallowed a farden.'

'We want to know, in the first place,' said Mr. Pickwick, 'whether you have any reason to be discontented with your present situation.'

'Afore I answers that 'ere question, gen'l'm'n,' replied Mr. Weller, 'I should like to know, in the first place, whether you're a-goin' to purvide me with a better?'

A sunbeam of placid benevolence played on Mr. Pickwick's features as he said, 'I have half made up my mind to engage you myself.'

'Have you, though?' said Sam.

Mr. Pickwick nodded in the affirmative.

'Wages?' inquired Sam.

'Twelve pounds a year,' replied Mr. Pickwick.

'Clothes?'

'Two suits.'

'Work?'

'To attend upon me; and travel about with me and these gentlemen here.' 'Take the bill down,' said Sam emphatically. 'I'm let to a single gentleman, and the terms is agreed upon.'

'You accept the situation?' inquired Mr. Pickwick. 'Cert'nly,' replied Sam. 'If the clothes fits me half as well as the place, they'll do.'

'You can get a character of course?' said Mr. Pickwick.

'Ask the landlady o' the White Hart about that, Sir,' replied Sam.

'Can you come this evening?'

'I'll get into the clothes this minute, if they're here,' said Sam, with great alacrity.

'Call at eight this evening,' said Mr. Pickwick; 'and if the inquiries are satisfactory, they shall be provided.'

Text 16

Dickens, Charles, *The Pickwick Papers*

Extract from Chapter 13 – Sam Weller's first extended speech

'Why, he drove a coach down here once,' said Sam; 'Lection time came on, and he was engaged by vun party to bring down woters from London. Night afore he was going to drive up, committee on t' other side sends for him quietly, and away he goes vith the messenger, who shows him in; —large room—lots of gen'l'm'n—heaps of papers, pens and ink, and all that 'ere. "Ah, Mr. Weller," says the gen'l'm'n in the chair, "glad to see you, sir; how are you?"—"Wery well, thank 'ee, Sir," says my father; "I hope *you're* pretty middlin," says he.—"Pretty well, thank'ee, Sir," says the gen'l'm'n; "sit down, Mr. Weller—pray sit down, sir." So my father sits down, and he and the gen'l'm'n looks wery hard at each other. "You don't remember me?" said the gen'l'm'n. —"Can't say I do," says my father. —"Oh, I know you," says the gen'l'm'n: "know'd you when you was a boy," says he. —"Well, I don't remember you," says my father. —"That's wery odd," says the gen'l'm'n." —"Wery," says my father. —"You must have a bad mem'ry, Mr. Weller," says the gen'l'm'n. —"Well, it is a wery bad 'un," says my father. —"I thought so," says the gen'l'm'n. So then they pours him out a glass o' wine, and gammons him about his driving, and gets him into a reg'lar good humour, and at last shoves a twenty-pound note into his hand. "It's a wery bad road between this and London," says the gen'l'm'n.—"Here and there it *is* a heavy road," says my father.—"Specially near the canal, I think," says the gen'l'm'n.—"Nasty bit that 'ere," says my father.—"Well, Mr. Weller," says the gen'l'm'n, "you're a wery good whip, and can do what you like with your horses, we know. We're all wery fond o' you, Mr. Weller, so in case you *should* have an accident when you're bringing these here woters down, and *should* tip 'em over into the canal vithout hurtin' of 'em, this is for yourself," says he.—"Gen'l'm'n, you're wery kind," says my father, "and I'll drink your health in another glass of wine," says he; vich he did, and then buttons up the money, and bows himself out. You wouldn't believe, Sir,' continued Sam, with a look of inexpressible impudence at his master, 'that on the wery day as he came down with them woters, his coach was upset on that 'ere wery spot, and ev'ry man on 'em was turned into the canal.'

A Tale of Two Countries: Voicing the Poor in 19th-Century Britain and Italy

Week 3 – Handout 3

Text 17

Wellerisms

1. 'There's nothin' so refreshen' as sleep, sir, as the servant girl said afore she drank the egg-cupful of laudanum'
2. 'Now, gen'l'm'n, "fall on," as the English said to the French when they fixed bagginets'
3. 'How are you, ma'am?' said Mr. Weller. 'Wery glad to see you, indeed, and hope our acquaintance may be a long 'un, as the gen'l'm'n said to the fi' pun' note'
4. 'There; now we look compact and comfortable, as the father said ven he cut his little boy's head off, to cure him o' squintin''
5. 'Hooroar for the principle, as the money-lender said ven he wouldn't renew the bill'
6. 'Vich I call addin' insult to injury, as the parrot said ven they not only took him from his native land, but made him talk the English langwidge arterwards'
7. 'Avay vith melincholly, as the little boy said ven his schoolmissus died'
8. 'If you know'd who was near, sir, I rather think you'd change your note; as the hawk remarked to himself vith a cheerful laugh, ven he heerd the robin-redbreast a-singin' round the corner'
9. 'I only assisted natur, ma'am; as the doctor said to the boy's mother, after he'd bled him to death'
10. 'Sorry to do anythin' as may cause an interruption to such wery pleasant proceedin's, as the king said wen he dissolved the parliament'

Text 18

Cockney renderings

George Bernard Shaw, *Captain Brassbound's Conversion*, 1900

Ahrs is a Free Trade nition. It gows agin us as Hinglishmen to see these bloomin furriners settin up their Castoms Ashes and spheres o hinfluence and sich lawk hall owver Arfricar. Daownt Harfricar belong as much to huz as to them? thets wot we say.

Andrew Tuer, *Thanks Awf'ly*, 1890

It wuz afore mah tahm, bet I dess-sy you reckerlec' we'en the 'Owben Viadeck wuz owpin'd? In the middle uv the Viadeck, yer'now, there's a steps a-leadin' daown inter Ferrind'n Rowd enderneath. W'en you've bin a-walkin' in Ferrind'n Rowd, 'ev y'ivver trahd a-kemmin' ep them there steps? The mowst pezzlin' steps in Lendin' I calls 'em...

Exercise

Translate into standard English, and compare to Sam Weller's speech

Text 19

Dickens, Charles, *The Pickwick Papers* [first published in serial form, in monthly parts, 1836-7]

Extract from Chapter 32 – Sam Weller's valentine to Mary the housemaid

'But wot's that, you're a-doin' of? Pursuit of knowledge under difficulties, Sammy?'

'I've done now,' said Sam, with slight embarrassment; 'I've been a-writin'.'

'So I see,' replied Mr. Weller. 'Not to any young 'ooman, I hope, Sammy?'

'Why, it's no use a-sayin' it ain't,' replied Sam; 'it's a valentine.'

'A what!' exclaimed Mr. Weller, apparently horror-stricken by the word.

'A valentine,' replied Sam. 'Samivel, Samivel,' said Mr. Weller, in reproachful accents, 'I didn't think you'd ha' done it. Arter the warnin' you've had o' your father's wicious propensities; arter all I've said to you upon this here wery subject; arter actiwallly seein' and bein' in the company o' your own mother-in-law, vich I should ha' thought wos a moral lesson as no man could never ha' forgotten to his dyin' day! I didn't think you'd ha' done it, Sammy, I didn't think you'd ha' done it!' These reflections were too much for the good old man. He raised Sam's tumbler to his lips and drank off its contents.

[...]

Sam dipped his pen into the ink to be ready for any corrections, and began with a very theatrical air—

""Lovely—""

'Stop,' said Mr. Weller, ringing the bell. 'A double glass o' the invariable, my dear.'

'Very well, Sir,' replied the girl; who with great quickness appeared, vanished, returned, and disappeared.

'They seem to know your ways here,' observed Sam.

'Yes,' replied his father, 'I've been here before, in my time. Go on, Sammy.'

"'Lovely creetur,'" repeated Sam.

"'Tain't in poetry, is it?" interposed his father.

'No, no,' replied Sam.

'Wery glad to hear it,' said Mr. Weller. 'Poetry's unnat'ral; no man ever talked poetry 'cept a beadle on boxin'-day, or Warren's blackin', or Rowland's oil, or some of them low fellows; never you let yourself down to talk poetry, my boy. Begin agin, Sammy.'

Mr. Weller resumed his pipe with critical solemnity, and Sam once more commenced, and read as follows:

"'Lovely creetur I feel myself a damned——'" 'That ain't proper,' said Mr. Weller, taking his pipe from his mouth.

'No; it ain't "damned,"' observed Sam, holding the letter up to the light, 'it's "shamed," there's a blot there—"I feel myself ashamed."'

'Wery good,' said Mr. Weller. 'Go on.'

'Feel myself ashamed, and completely cir—I forget what this here word is,' said Sam, scratching his head with the pen, in vain attempts to remember.

'Why don't you look at it, then?' inquired Mr. Weller.

'So I am a-lookin' at it,' replied Sam, 'but there's another blot. Here's a "c," and a "i," and a "d."'

'Circumwented, p'raps,' suggested Mr. Weller.

'No, it ain't that,' said Sam, "'circumscribed"; that's it.'

'That ain't as good a word as "circumwented," Sammy,' said Mr. Weller gravely.

'Think not?' said Sam.

'Nothin' like it,' replied his father.

'But don't you think it means more?' inquired Sam.

'Vell p'raps it's a more tenderer word,' said Mr. Weller, after a few moments' reflection. 'Go on, Sammy.'

"'Feel myself ashamed and completely circumscribed in a-dressin' of you, for you are a nice gal and nothin' but it.'"

'That's a wery pretty sentiment,' said the elder Mr. Weller, removing his pipe to make way for the remark.

'Yes, I think it is rayther good,' observed Sam, highly flattered.

'Wot I like in that 'ere style of writin',' said the elder Mr. Weller, 'is, that there ain't no callin' names in it—no Wenuses, nor nothin' o' that kind. Wot's the good o' callin' a young 'ooman a Wenus or a angel, Sammy?'

Exercise

What is the Wellers' attitude to the written word?

A Tale of Two Countries: Voicing the Poor in 19th-Century Britain and Italy

Week 4 – Handout 1

Text 20

Cockney renderings

Mayhew, Henry, *The London Labour and the London Poor* [first published in serial form, in weekly parts, 1850-2; first collected together 1861]

LANGUAGE OF COSTERMONGERS.

The **slang** language of the costermongers is not very remarkable for originality of construction; it possesses no humour: but they boast that it is **known only to themselves**; it is far beyond the Irish, they say, and puzzles the Jews. The root of the costermonger tongue, so to speak, is to give the **words spelt backward**, or rather pronounced rudely backward, -for in my present chapter the language has, I believe, been **reduced to orthography for the first time**. With this backward pronunciation, which is very arbitrary, are mixed words reducible to no rule and seldom referable to any origin, thus complicating the mystery of this **unwritten** tongue; while any syllable is added to a proper slang word, at the discretion of the speaker.

Slang is acquired very rapidly, and some costermongers will converse in it by the hour. The women use it sparingly; the girls more than the women; the men more than the girls; and the boys most of all. The **most ignorant** of all these classes deal most in slang and boast of their cleverness and proficiency in it. In their conversations among themselves, the following are invariably the terms used in money matters. A rude **back-spelling** may generally be traced:

Flatch – Halfpenny; Yenep – Penny;

Owt-yenep - Twopence.

Erth-yenep - Threepence.

Rouf-yenep- Fourpence.

Ewif-yenep - Fivepence.

[...]

Speaking of this language, a costermonger said to me: "The Irish can't tumble to it anyhow; the Jews can tumble better, but we're their masters. Some of the young salesmen at Billingsgate understand us, -but only at Billingsgate; and they think they're uncommon clever, but they're not quite up to the mark. The police don't understand us at all. It would be a pity if they did."

I give a few more phrases:

1. A doogheno or dabhenno?
2. A regular trosseno
3. On
4. Say
5. Tumble to your barrikin

6. Top o' reeb
7. Doing dab
8. Cool him

Exercise

Work out the meaning of the above phrases, 1-8

[Mayhew continued]

The latter phrase is used when one costermonger warns another of the approach of a policeman "who might order him to move on, or be otherwise unpleasant." "Cool" (look) is exclaimed, or "Cool him" (look at him). One costermonger told me as a great joke that a very stout policeman, who was then new to the duty, was when in a violent state of perspiration, much offended by a costermonger saying "Cool him."

Cool the esclop - Look at the police.

Cool the namesclop - Look at the policeman.

Cool ta the dillo nemo - Look at the old woman;

said of any woman, young or old, who, according to costermonger notions, is "giving herself airs."

This language seems confined, in its general use, to the immediate objects of the costermonger's care; but is, among the more acute members of the fraternity, greatly extended, and is capable of indefinite extension.

The costermongers oaths, I may conclude, are all in the vernacular; nor are any of the common salutes, such as "How d'you do?" or "Good-night" known to their slang.

Kennetseeno - Stinking;

(applied principally to the quality of fish.)

Flatch kanurd - Half-drunk.

Flash it - Show it;

(in cases of bargains offered.)

On doog - No good.

Cross chap - A thief.

Showfulls - Bad money;

(seldom in the hands of costermongers.)

I'm on to the deb - I'm going to bed.

Do the tightner - Go to dinner.

Nommus - Be off

Tol - Lot, Stock, or Share.

Text 21

Dickens, Charles, *Oliver Twist* [first published in serial form, 1837-9]

Extract from Chapter 5.

Oliver was awakened in the morning, by a loud kicking at the outside of the shop-door: which before he could huddle on his clothes, was repeated, in an angry and impetuous manner, about twenty-five times. When he began to undo the chain, the legs desisted, and a voice began.

"Open the door, will yer?" cried the voice which belonged to the legs which had kicked at the door.

"I will, directly, sir," replied Oliver: undoing the chain, and turning the key.

"I suppose yer the new boy, ain't yer?" said the voice through the keyhole.

"Yes, sir," replied Oliver.

"How old are yer?" inquired the voice.

"Ten, sir," replied Oliver.

"Then I'll whop yer when I get in," said the voice; "you just see if I don't, that's all, my work'us brat!" and having made this obliging promise, the voice began to whistle.

Oliver had been too often subjected to the process to which the very expressive monosyllable just recorded bears reference, to entertain the smallest doubt that the owner of the voice, whoever he might be, would redeem his pledge, most honourably. He drew back the bolts with a trembling hand, and opened the door.

For a second or two, Oliver glanced up the street, and down the street, and over the way: impressed with the belief that the unknown, who had addressed him through the keyhole, had walked a few paces off, to warm himself; for nobody did he see but a big charity-boy, sitting on a post in front of the house, eating a slice of bread and butter: which he cut into wedges, the size of his mouth, with a clasp knife, and then consumed with great dexterity.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Oliver at length: seeing that no other visitor made his appearance; "did you knock?"

"I kicked," replied the charity-boy.

"Did you want a coffin, sir?" inquired Oliver, innocently.

At this the charity-boy looked monstrous fierce; and said that Oliver would want one before long, if he cut jokes with his superiors in that way.

"Yer don't know who I am, I suppose, Work'us?" said the charity-boy, in continuation: descending from the top of the post, meanwhile, with edifying gravity.

"No, sir," rejoined Oliver.

"I'm Mister Noah Claypole," said the charity-boy, "and you're under me. Take down the shutters, yer idle young ruffian!" With this, Mr. Claypole administered a kick to Oliver, and entered the shop with a dignified air, which did him great credit. It is difficult for a large-headed, small-eyed youth, of lumbering make and heavy countenance, to look dignified under

any circumstances; but it is more especially so, when superadded to these personal attractions are a red nose and yellow smalls.

Oliver, having taken down the shutters, and broken a pane of glass in his efforts to stagger away beneath the weight of the first one to a small court at the side of the house in which they were kept during the day, was graciously assisted by Noah: who having consoled him with the assurance that "he'd catch it," condescended to help him. Mr. Sowerberry came down soon after. Shortly afterwards, Mrs. Sowerberry appeared. Oliver having "caught it," in fulfilment of Noah's prediction, followed that young gentleman down the stairs to breakfast.

"Come near the fire, Noah," said Charlotte. "I saved a nice little bit of bacon for you from master's breakfast. Oliver, shut that door at Mister Noah's back, and take them bits that I've put out on the cover of the bread-pan. There's your tea; take it away to that box, and drink it there, and make haste, for they'll want you to mind the shop. D'ye hear?"

"D'ye hear, Work'us?" said Noah Claypole.

"Lor, Noah!" said Charlotte, "what a rum creature you are! Why don't you let the boy alone?"

"Let him alone!" said Noah. "Why everybody lets him alone enough, for the matter of that.

Neither his father nor his mother will ever interfere with him. All his relations let him have his own way pretty well. Eh, Charlotte? He! he! he!"

"Oh, you queer soul!" said Charlotte, bursting into a hearty laugh, in which she was joined by Noah; after which they both looked scornfully at poor Oliver Twist, as he sat shivering on the box in the coldest corner of the room, and ate the stale pieces which had been specially reserved for him.

Noah was a charity-boy, but not a workhouse orphan. No chance-child was he, for he could trace his genealogy all the way back to his parents, who lived hard by; his mother being a washerwoman, and his father a drunken soldier, discharged with a wooden leg, and a diurnal pension of twopence-halfpenny and an unstateable fraction. The shop-boys in the neighbourhood had long been in the habit of branding Noah, in the public streets, with the ignominious epithets of "leathers," "charity," and the like; and Noah had borne them without reply. But, now that fortune had cast in his way a nameless orphan, at whom even the meanest could point the finger of scorn, he retorted on him with interest. This affords charming food for contemplation. It shows us what a beautiful thing human nature may be made to be; and how impartially the same amiable qualities are developed in the finest lord and the dirtiest charity-boy.

Exercise

Compare the voicing of Oliver with that of Noah Claypole

Text 22

Dickens, Charles, *Oliver Twist* [first published in serial form, 1837-9]

Extract from Chapter 13.

"I'm afraid," said the Jew, "that he may say something which will get us into trouble."

"That's very likely," returned Sikes with a malicious grin. "You're blowed upon, Fagin."

"And I'm afraid, you see," added the Jew, speaking as if he had not noticed the interruption; and regarding the other closely as he did so, - "I'm afraid that, if the game was up with us, it might be up with a good many more, and that it would come out rather worse for you than it would for me, my dear."

The man started, and turned round upon the Jew. But the old gentleman's shoulders were shrugged up to his ears; and his eyes were vacantly staring on the opposite wall.

There was a long pause. Every member of the respectable coterie appeared plunged in his own reflections; not excepting the dog, who by a certain malicious licking of his lips seemed to be meditating an attack upon the legs of the first gentleman or lady he might encounter in the streets when he went out.

"Somebody must find out wot's been done at the office," said Mr. Sikes in a much lower tone than he had taken since he came in.

The Jew nodded assent.

"If he hasn't peached, and is committed, there's no fear till he comes out again," said Mr.

Sikes, "and then he must be taken care on. You must get hold of him somehow."

Again the Jew nodded.

The prudence of this line of action, indeed, was obvious; but, unfortunately, there was one very strong objection to its being adopted. This was, that the Dodger, and Charley Bates, and Fagin, and Mr. William Sikes, happened, one and all, to entertain a violent and deeply-rooted antipathy to going near a police-office on any ground or pretext whatever.

How long they might have sat and looked at each other, in a state of uncertainty not the most pleasant of its kind, it is difficult to guess. It is not necessary to make any guesses on the subject, however; for the sudden entrance of the two young ladies whom Oliver had seen on a former occasion, caused the conversation to flow afresh.

"The very thing!" said the Jew. "Bet will go; won't you, my dear?"

"Wheres?" inquired the young lady.

"Only just up to the office, my dear," said the Jew coaxingly.

It is due to the young lady to say that she did not positively affirm that she would not, but that she merely expressed an emphatic and earnest desire to be "blessed" if she would; a polite and delicate evasion of the request, which shows the young lady to have been possessed of that natural good breeding which cannot bear to inflict upon a fellow-creature the pain of a direct and pointed refusal.

The Jew's countenance fell. He turned from this young lady, who was gaily, not to say gorgeously attired, in a red gown, green boots, and yellow curl-papers, to the other female.

"Nancy, my dear," said the Jew in a soothing manner, what do you say?"

"That it won't do; so it's no use a-trying it on, Fagin," replied Nancy.

"What do you mean by that?" said Mr. Sikes, looking up in a surly manner.

"What I say, Bill," replied the lady collectedly.

"Why, you're just the very person for it," reasoned Mr. Sikes: "nobody about here knows anything of you."

"And as I don't want 'em to, neither," replied Nancy in the same composed manner, "it's rather more no than yes with me, Bill."

"She'll go, Fagin," said Sikes.

"No, she won't, Fagin," said Nancy.

"Yes, she will, Fagin," said Sikes.

Exercise

Analyse the voicing of Bill Sikes, Fagin, and Nancy

A Tale of Two Countries: Voicing the Poor in 19th-Century Britain and Italy

Week 4 – Handout 2

Text 23

Mayhew, Henry, *The London Labour and the London Poor* [first published in serial form, in weekly parts, 1850-2; first collected together 1861]

Compare with the description of Jo in *Bleak House*

Boy Crossing-Sweepers and Tumblers

A remarkably intelligent lad, who, on being spoken to, at once consented to give all the information in his power, told me the following story of his life.

It will be seen from this boy's account, and the one or two following, that a kind of partnership exists among some of these young sweepers. They have associated themselves together, appropriated several crossings to their use, and appointed a captain over them. They have their forms of trial, and "jury-house" for the settlement of disputes; laws have been framed, which govern their commercial proceedings, and a kind of language adopted by the society for its better protection from its arch-enemy, the policeman. I found the lad who first gave me an insight into the proceedings of the associated crossing-sweepers crouched on the stone steps of a door in Adelaide- street, Strand; and when I spoke to him he was preparing to settle down in a corner and go to sleep — his legs and body being curled round almost as closely as those of a cat on a hearth. The moment he heard my voice he was upon his feet, asking me to "give a halfpenny to poor little Jack."

[...]

"I've got no mother or father; mother has been dead for two years, and father's been gone more than that — more nigh five years — he died at Ipswich, in Suffolk. He was a perfumer by trade, and used to make hair-dye, and scent, and pomatum, and all kinds of scents. He didn't keep a shop himself, but he used to serve them as did; he didn't hawk his goods about, neether, but had regular customers, what used to send him a letter and then he'd take them what they wanted. Yes, he used to serve some good shops: there was H 's, of London Bridge, what's a large chemist's. He used to made a good deal of money, but he lost it betting; and so his brother, my uncle, did all his. He used to go up to High Park, and then go round by the Hospital, and then turn up a yard, where all the men are who play for money [Tattersall's]; and there he'd lose his money, or sometimes win, — but that wasn't often. I remember he used to come home tipsy, and say he'd lost on this or that horse, naming wot one he'd laid on; and then mother would coax him to bed, and afterwards sit down and begin to cry."

"I was not with father when he died (but I was when he was dying), for I was sent up along with eldest sister to London with a letter to uncle, who was head servant at a doctor's. In this letter, mother asked uncle to pay back some money wot he owed, and wot father let him, and she asked him if he'd like to come down and see father before he died. I recollect I went back again to mother by the Orwell steamer. I was well dressed then, and had good clothes on, and I was given to the care of the captain — Mr. King his name was. But when I got back to Ipswich, father was dead."

"Mother took on dreadful; she was ill for three months afterwards, confined to her bed. She hardly eat anything: only beafta — I think they call it — and eggs. All the while she kept on crying.

[...]

"We do it in this way: — if I was to see two gentlemen coming, I should cry out, 'Two toffs!' and then they are mine; and whether they give me anythink or not they are mine, and my mate is bound not to follow them; for if he did he would get a hiding from the whole lot of us. If we both cry out together, then we share. If it's a lady and gentleman, then we cries, 'A toff and a doll!' Sometimes we are caught out in this way. Perhaps it is a lady and gentleman and

a child; and if I was to see them, and only say, 'A toff and a doll,' and leave out the child, then my mate can add the child; and as he is right and I wrong, then it's his party."

[...]

'If there's a policeman close at hand we mustn't ask for money; but we are always on the look-out for the policemen, and if we see one, then we calls out "Phillup!" for that's our signal. One of the policemen at St Martin's Church – Bandy, we calls him – knows what Phillup means, for he's up to us; so we had to change the word. (At the request of the young crossing-sweeper the present signal is omitted.)

[...]

'When we gets home at half-past three in the morning, whoever cries out "first wash" has it. First of all we washes our feet, and we all uses the same water. Then we washes our faces and hands, and necks, and whoever fetches the fresh water up has first wash; and if the second don't like to go and get fresh, why he uses the dirty. Whenever we come in the landlady makes us wash our feet. Very often the stones cuts our feet and makes them bleed; then we bind a bit of rag round them. [...]

'When we are talking together we always talk in a kind of slang. Each policeman we gives a regular name – there's "Bull's Head", "Bandy Shanks", and "Old Cherry Legs", and "Dot-and-carry-one"; they all knows their names as well as us. We never talks of crossings, but "fakes". We don't make no slang of our own, but uses the regular one.'

'A broom doesn't last us more than a week in wet weather, and they costs us twopence halfpenny each; but in dry weather they are good for a fortnight.'

Text 24

Dickens, Charles, *Bleak House* [first published in serial form, 1852-3]

Jo's speech

Extract from Chapter 19.

"Now, I know where you live," says the constable, then, to Jo.

"You live down in Tom-All-Alone's. That's a nice innocent place to live in, ain't it?"

"I can't go and live in no nicer place, sir," replies Jo. "They wouldn't have nothink to say to me if I was to go to a nice innocent place fur to live. Who ud go and let a nice innocent lodging to such a reg'lar one as me!"

"You are very poor, ain't you?" says the constable.

"Yes, I am indeed, sir, very poor in gin'ral," replies Jo.

"I leave you to judge now! I shook these two half-crowns out of him," says the constable producing them to the company, "in only putting my hand upon him!"

"They're wot's left, Mr. Sangsby," says Jo, "out of a sov'ring as was give me by a lady in a wale as sed she was a servant and as come to my crossin one night and asked to be showd this 'ere ouse and the ouse wot him as you giv the writin to died at, and the berrin ground wot he's berrid in. She ses to me she ses 'are you the boy at the Inkwhich?' she ses. I ses 'yes' I

ses. She ses to me she ses ‘can you show me all them places?’ I ses ‘yes I can’ I ses. And she ses to me ‘do it’ and I dun it and she giv me a sov’ring and hooked it. And I an’t had much of the sov’ring neither,” says Jo, with dirty tears, “ fur I had to pay five bob, down in Tom-All-Alone’s, afore they’d square it fur to giv me change, and then a young man he thieved another five while I was asleep and another boy he thieved ninepence and the landlord he stood drains round with a lot more on it.”

“ You don’t expect anybody to believe this, about the lady and the sovereign, do you?” says the constable, eyeing him aside with ineffable disdain.

“I don’t know as I do, sir,” replies Jo. “I don’t expect nothink at all, sir, much, but that’s the true hist’ry on it.”

“ You see what he is!” the constable observes to the audience. “Well, Mr. Snagsby, if I don’t lock him up this time, will you engage for his moving on?”

“No !” cries Mrs. Snagsby from the stairs.

“My little woman!” pleads her husband. “Constable, I have no doubt he’ll move on. You know you really must do it,” says Mr. Snagsby.

“I’m everyways agreeable, sir,” says the hapless Jo.

“ Do it, then,” observes the constable, “ You know what you have got to do. Do it! And recollect you won’t get off so easy next time. Catch hold of your money. Now, the sooner you’re five mile off, the better for all parties.”

With this farewell hint, and pointing generally to the setting sun, as a likely place to move on to, the constable bids his auditors good afternoon [...]

Exercise

1. Translate the isolated paragraph into Standard English.
2. How does Dickens capture Jo’s illiteracy, beyond the merely lexical?

A Tale of Two Countries: Voicing the Poor in 19th-Century Britain and Italy

Week 4 – Handout 3

Text 25

Lancashire renderings

Dickens, Charles, *Hard Times* [first published in serial form, 1854]

Stephen Blackpool's speech

Extract from Chapter 11.

'I ha' coom,' Stephen began, raising his eyes from the floor, after a moment's consideration, 'to ask yo yor advice. I need't overmuch. I were married on Eas'r Monday nineteen year sin, long and dree. She were a young lass – pretty enow – wi' good accounts of herseln. Well! She went bad – soon. Not along of me. Gonnows I were not a unkind husband to her.'

'I have heard all this before,' said Mr Bounderby. 'She took to drinking, left off working, sold the furniture, pawned the clothes, and played old Gooseberry.'

'I were patient wi' her.'

('The more fool you, I think,' said Mr Bounderby, in confidence to his wine-glass.)

'I were very patient wi' her. I tried to wean her fra't ower and ower agen. I tried this, I tried that, I tried t'other. I ha' gone home, many's the time, and found all vanished as I had in the world, and her without a sense left to bless herseln lying on bare ground. I ha' dun 't not once, not twice – twenty time!'

Every line in his face deepened as he said it, and put in its affecting evidence of the suffering he had undergone.

'From bad to worse, from worse to worsen. She left me. She disgraced herseln everyways, bitter and bad. She coom back, she coom back, she coom back. What could I do t' hinder her? I ha' walked the streets nights long, ere ever I'd go home. I ha' gone t' th' brigg, minded to fling myseln ower, and ha' no more on't. I ha' bore that much, that I were owd when I were young.'

Exercise

1. Translate the first and last paragraphs into Standard English.
2. How is Stephen Blackpool's language different from the Cockney voices we have already seen?
3. What marks Stephen's speech as particularly Northern?

Text 26

Yorkshire renderings

Brontë, Emily, *Wuthering Heights* [first published 1847]

The speech of Joseph the servant

1. "Und hah isn't that nowt comed in frough th' field, be this time? What is he abaht? Girt eedle seeght!" demanded the old man, looking round for Heathcliff. [Chapter 9]
2. "Noa!" said Joseph, giving a thud with his prop on the floor, and assuming an authoritative air. "Noa! that manes nowt – Hathecliff maks noa 'cahnt uh t'mother, nur yah norther – bud he'll hev his lad; und Aw mun tak him – soa nah yah know!" [Ch. 19]

Brontë, Emily, *Wuthering Heights* [edited by Charlotte Brontë after Emily's death in 1848, first published 1850]

1. "And how isn't that nowt comed in fro' th' field, be this time? What is he about? girt idle seeght!" demanded the old man, looking round for Heathcliff. [Chapter 9]
2. "Noa!" said Joseph, giving a thud with his prop on the floor, and assuming an authoritative air. "Noa! that means naught. Hathecliff maks noa 'count o' t'mother, nor ye norther – bud he'll hev his lad; und I mun tak him – soa now ye know!" [Ch. 19]

Exercise

1. Translate each extract into Standard English.
2. Compare each version. What main changes does Charlotte Brontë make? Are they effective?
3. Compare the speech of Brontë's Joseph to Dickens's Stephen Blackpool

Text 27

Lancashire renderings

Dickens, Charles, *Hard Times* [first published in serial form, 1854]

Stephen Blackpool's speech

Extract from Chapter 11.

So, I mun' be ridden o' this woman, and I want t' know how?'
'No how,' returned Mr Bounderby.
'If I do her any hurt, sir, there's a law to punish me?'
'Of course there is.'
'If I flee from her, there's a law to punish me?'
'Of course there is.'
'If I marry t'ooother dear lass, there's a law to punish me?'
'Of course there is.'

'If I was to live wi' her an' not marry her – saying such a thing could be, which it never could or would, an her so good – there's a law to punish me, in every innocent child belonging to me?'

'Of course there is.'

'Now, a' God's name,' said Stephen Blackpool, 'show me the law to help me!'

'Hem! There's a sanctity in this relation of life,' said Mr Bounderby, 'and – and – it must be kept up.'

'No no, dunnot say that, sir. 'Tan't kep' up that way. Not that way. 'Tis kep' down that way. I'm a weaver, I were in a fact'ry when a chilt, but I ha' gotten een to see wi' and eern to year wi'. I read in th' papers every 'Sizes, every Sessions – and you read too – I know it! – with dismay – how th' supposed impossibility o' ever getting unchained from one another, at any price, on any terms, brings blood upon this land, and brings many common married fok to battle, murder, and sudden death. Let us ha' this, right understood. Mine's a grievous case, and I want – if yo will be so good – t' know the law that helps me.'

'Now, I tell you what!' said Mr Bounderby, putting his hands in his pockets. 'There is such a law.'

Stephen, subsiding into his quiet manner, and never wandering in his attention, gave a nod.

'But it's not for you at all. It costs money. It costs a mint of money.'

'How much might that be?' Stephen calmly asked.

'Why, you'd have to go to Doctors' Commons with a suit, and you'd have to go to a court of Common Law with a suit, and you'd have to go to the House of Lords with a suit, and you'd have to get an Act of Parliament to enable you to marry again, and it would cost you (if it was a case of very plain sailing), I suppose from a thousand to fifteen hundred pound,' said Mr Bounderby. 'Perhaps twice the money.'

'There's no other law?'

'Certainly not.'

'Why then, sir,' said Stephen, turning white, and motioning with that right hand of his, as if he gave everything to the four winds, 'tis a muddle. 'Tis just a muddle a'together, an the sooner I'm dead, the better.'

(Mrs Sparsit again dejected by the impiety of the people.)

'Pooh, pooh! Don't you talk nonsense, my good fellow,' said Mr Bounderby, 'about things you don't understand; and don't you call the Institutions of your country a muddle, or you'll get yourself into a real muddle one of these fine mornings. The institutions of your country are not your piece-work, and the only thing you have got to do, is, to mind your piece-work. You didn't take your wife for fast and for loose; but for better for worse. If she has turned out worse – why, all we have got to say is, she might have turned out better.'

'Tis a muddle,' said Stephen, shaking his head as he moved to the door. 'Tis a' a muddle!'
[...]

Exercise

1. What is Stephen Blackpool's attitude to the law?
2. What is Dickens's attitude to the law?

A Tale of Two Countries: Voicing the Poor in 19th-Century Britain and Italy

Week 5 – Handout 1

Text 28

Satire of the law – compare Stephen Blackpool/Mr Bounderby in *Hard Times*

Manzoni, Alessandro, *I promessi sposi* [Fermo e Lucia 1823, not published; 1827; definitive version 1840]

Renzo goes to see lawyer Dottor Azzecagarbugli for help with the law

Extract from Chapter 3.

Chiuse l'uscio, e fece animo al giovine, con queste parole: "figliuolo, ditemi il vostro caso."

"Vorrei dirle una parola in confidenza."

"Son qui," rispose il dottore: "parlate." E s'accomodò sul seggiolone. Renzo, ritto davanti alla tavola, con una mano nel cocuzzolo del cappello, che faceva girar con l'altra, ricominciò: "vorrei sapere da lei che ha studiato..."

"Ditemi il fatto come sta." interruppe il dottore.

"Lei m'ha da scusare: noi altri poveri non sappiamo parlar bene. Vorrei dunque sapere..."

"Benedetta gente! siete tutti così: in vece di raccontar il fatto, volete interrogare, perché avete già i vostri disegni in testa."

"Mi scusi, signor dottore. Vorrei sapere se, a minacciare un curato, perché non faccia un matrimonio, c'è penale."

— Ho capito, — disse tra sé il dottore, che in verità non aveva capito. — Ho capito. — E subito si fece serio, ma d'una serietà mista di compassione e di premura; strinse fortemente le labbra, facendone uscire un suono inarticolato che accennava un sentimento, espresso poi più chiaramente nelle sue prime parole. "Caso serio, figliuolo; caso contemplato. Avete fatto bene a venir da me. È un caso chiaro, contemplato in cento gride, e... appunto, in una dell'anno scorso, dell'attuale signor governatore. Ora vi fo vedere, e toccar con mano."

Così dicendo, s'alzò dal suo seggiolone, e cacciò le mani in quel caos di carte, rimescolandole dal sotto in su, come se mettesse grano in uno staio.

"Dov'è ora? Vieni fuori, vieni fuori. Bisogna aver tante cose alle mani! Ma la dev'esser qui sicuro, perché è una grida d'importanza. Ah! ecco, ecco." La prese, la spiegò, guardò alla data, e, fatto un viso ancor più serio, esclamò: "il 15 d'ottobre 1627! Sicuro; è dell'anno passato: grida fresca; son quelle che fanno più paura. Sapete leggere, figliuolo?"

"Un pochino, signor dottore."

"Bene, venitemi dietro con l'occhio, e vedrete."

E, tenendo la grida sciorinata in aria, cominciò a leggere, borbottando a precipizio in alcuni passi, e fermandosi distintamente, con grand'espressione, sopra alcuni altri, secondo il bisogno:

"Se bene, per la grida pubblicata d'ordine del signor Duca di Fera ai 14 di dicembre 1620, et confermata dall'Illustriss. et Eccellentiss. Signore il Signor Gonzalo Fernandez de Cordova, eccetera. fu con rimedii straordinarii e rigorosi provvisto alle oppressioni, concussioni et atti tirannici che alcuni ardiscono di commettere contra questi Vassalli tanto divoti di S. M., ad ogni modo la frequenza degli eccessi, e la malitia, eccetera, è cresciuta a segno, che ha posto in necessità l'Eccell. Sua, eccetera.

[...]

"Sentite, sentite, c'è ben altro; e poi vedremo la pena. Si testifichi, o non si testifichi; che uno si parta dal luogo dove abita, eccetera; che quello paghi un debito; quell'altro non lo molesti, quello vada al suo molino: tutto questo non ha che far con noi. Ah ci siamo: quel prete non faccia quello che è obbligato per l'ufficio suo, o faccia cose che non gli toccano. Eh?"

"Pare che abbian fatta la grida apposta per me."

[...]

Mentre il dottore leggeva, Renzo gli andava dietro lentamente con l'occhio, cercando di cavar il costrutto chiaro, e di mirar proprio quelle sacrosante parole, che gli parevano dover esser il suo aiuto. Il dottore, vedendo il nuovo cliente più attento che atterrito, si maravigliava. — Che sia matricolato costui, — pensava tra sé. “Ah! ah!” gli disse poi: — “vi siete però fatto tagliare il ciuffo. Avete avuto prudenza: però, volendo mettervi nelle mie mani, non faceva bisogno. Il caso è serio; ma voi non sapete quel che mi basti l'animo di fare, in un'occasione.”

[...]

“In verità, da povero figliuolo,” rispose Renzo, “io non ho mai portato ciuffo in vita mia.”

“Non facciam niente,” rispose il dottore, scotendo il capo, con un sorriso, tra malizioso e impaziente. “Se non avete fede in me, non facciam niente. Chi dice le bugie al dottore, vedete figliuolo, è uno sciocco che dirà la verità al giudice. All'avvocato bisogna raccontar le cose chiare: a noi tocca poi a imbrogliarle. Se volete ch'io v'aiuti, bisogna dirmi tutto, dall'a fino alla zeta, col cuore in mano, come al confessore. Dovete nominarmi la persona da cui avete avuto il mandato: sarà naturalmente persona di riguardo; e, in questo caso, io anderò da lui, a fare un atto di dovere. Non gli dirò, vedete, ch'io sappia da voi, che v'ha mandato lui: fidatevi. Gli dirò che vengo ad implorar la sua protezione, per un povero giovine calunniato. E con lui prenderò i concerti opportuni, per finir l'affare lodevolmente. Capite bene che, salvando sé, salverà anche voi. Se poi la scappata fosse tutta vostra, via, non mi ritiro: ho cavato altri da peggio imbrogli... Purché non abbiate offeso persona di riguardo, intendiamoci, m'impegno a togliervi d'impiccio: con un po' di spesa, intendiamoci. Dovete dirmi chi sia l'offeso, come si dice: e, secondo la condizione, la qualità e l'umore dell'amico, si vedrà se convenga più di tenerlo a segno con le protezioni, o trovar qualche modo d'attaccarlo noi in criminale, e mettergli una pulce nell'orecchio; perché, vedete, a saper ben maneggiare le gride, nessuno è reo, e nessuno è innocente. In quanto al curato, se è persona di giudizio, se ne starà zitto; se fosse una testolina, c'è rimedio anche per quelle. D'ogni intrigo si può uscire; ma ci vuole un uomo: e il vostro caso è serio; serio, vi dico, serio: la grida canta chiaro; e se la cosa si deve decider tra la giustizia e voi, così a quattr'occhi, state fresco. Io vi parlo da amico: le scappate bisogna pagarle: se volete passarvela liscia, danari e sincerità, fidarvi di chi vi vuol bene, ubbidire, far tutto quello che vi sarà suggerito.”

Mentre il dottore mandava fuori tutte queste parole, Renzo lo stava guardando con un'attenzione estatica, come un materialone sta sulla piazza guardando al giocator di bussolotti, che, dopo essersi cacciata in bocca stoppa e stoppa e stoppa, ne cava nastro e nastro e nastro, che non finisce mai. Quand'ebbe però capito bene cosa il dottore volesse dire, e quale equivoco avesse preso, gli troncò il nastro in bocca, dicendo: “oh! signor dottore, come l'ha intesa? l'è proprio tutta al rovescio. Io non ho minacciato nessuno; io non fo di queste cose, io: e domandi pure a tutto il mio comune, che sentirà che non ho mai avuto che fare con la giustizia. La bricconeria l'hanno fatta a me; e vengo da lei per sapere come ho da fare per ottener giustizia; e son ben contento d'aver visto quella grida.”

“Diavolo!” esclamò il dottore, spalancando gli occhi. “Che pasticci mi fate? Tant'è; siete tutti così: possibile che non sappiate dirle chiare le cose?”

“Ma mi scusi; lei non m'ha dato tempo: ora le racconterò la cosa, com'è. Sappia dunque ch'io dovevo sposare oggi,” e qui la voce di Renzo si commosse, “dovevo sposare oggi una giovine, alla quale discorrevo, fin da quest'estate; e oggi, come le dico, era il giorno stabilito col signor curato, e s'era disposto ogni cosa. Ecco che il signor curato comincia a cavar fuori certe scuse... basta, per non tediare, io l'ho fatto parlar chiaro, com'era giusto; e lui m'ha confessato che gli era stato proibito, pena la vita, di far questo matrimonio. Quel prepotente di don Rodrigo...”

“Eh via!” interruppe subito il dottore, aggrottando le ciglia, aggrinzando il naso rosso, e storcendo la bocca, “eh via! Che mi venite a rompere il capo con queste fandonie? Fate di questi discorsi tra voi altri, che non sapete misurar le parole; e non venite a farli con un galantuomo che sa quanto valgono. Andate, andate; non sapete quel che vi dite: io non m'impiccio con ragazzi; non voglio sentir discorsi di questa sorte, discorsi in aria.”

“Le giuro...”

“Andate, vi dico: che volete ch'io faccia de' vostri giuramenti? Io non c'entro: me ne lavo le mani.” E se le andava stropicciando, come se le lavasse davvero. “Imparate a parlare: non si viene a sorprendere così un galantuomo.”

Exercise

1. How is Renzo excluded from the law, and how does the exclusion relate to his class?
2. How is it similar to the Dickens scene with Stephen Blackpool/Mr Bounderby? How is it different?

Text 29

Lancashire renderings

Dickens, Charles, *Hard Times* [first published in serial form, 1854]

Stephen Blackpool's final words

Extract from Chapter 34.

'Thou'rt in great pain, my own dear Stephen?'

'I ha' been, but not now. I ha' been — dreadful, and dree, and long, my dear — but 'tis ower now. Ah, Rachael, aw a muddle! Fro' first to last, a muddle!'

The spectre of his old look seemed to pass as he said the word.

'I ha' fell into th' pit, my dear, as have cost wi'in the knowledge o' old fok now livin, hundreds and hundreds o' men's lives — fathers, sons, brothers, dear to thousands an thousands, an keeping 'em fro' want and hunger. I ha' fell into a pit that ha' been wi' th' Fire-damp crueller than battle. I ha' read on 't in the public petition, as onny one may read, fro' the men that works in pits, in which they ha' pray'n and pray'n the lawmakers for Christ's sake not to let their work be murder to 'em, but to spare 'em for th' wives and children that they loves as well as gentlefok loves theirs. When it were in work, it killed wi'out need; when 'tis let alone, it kills wi'out need. See how we die an no need, one way an another — in a muddle — every day!'

He faintly said it, without any anger against any one. Merely as the truth.

'Thy little sister, Rachael, thou hast not forgot her. Thou'rt not like to forget her now, and me so nigh her. Thou know'st — poor, patient, suff'rin, dear — how thou didst work for her, seet'n all day long in her little chair at thy winder, and how she died, young and misshapen, awlung o' sickly air as had'n no need to be, an awlung o' working people's miserable homes. A muddle! Aw a muddle!'

Exercise

1. How does Dickens make Stephen the spokesman for his class?
2. Is it Stephen speaking, or Dickens through Stephen?
3. How does Stephen use the word 'muddle' here? Is it the same as in the scene with Mr Bounderby where divorce is discussed?

Text 30

Lancashire renderings
Gaskell, Elizabeth, *Mary Barton* [first published 1848]
John Barton as class spokesman

Extract from Chapter 6.

"Eh, John! donna talk so; sure there's many and many a master as good or better nor us."

"If you think so, tell me this. How comes it they're rich, and we're poor? I'd like to know that. Han they done as they'd be done by for us?"

But Wilson was no arguer; no speechifier, as he would have called it. So Barton, seeing he was likely to have it his own way, went on.

"You'll say (at least many a one does), they'n getten capital an' we'n getten none. I say, our labour's our capital, and we ought to draw interest on that. They get interest on their capital somehow a' this time, while ourn is lying idle, else how could they all live as they do? Besides, there's many on 'em has had nought to begin wi'; there's Carsons, and Duncombes, and Mengies, and many another, as comed into Manchester with clothes to their back, and that were all, and now they're worth their tens of thousands, a' getten out of our labour; why, the very land as fetched but sixty pound twenty year ago is now worth six hundred, and that, too, is owing to our labour; but look at yo, and see me, and poor Davenport yonder; whatten better are we? They'n screwed us down to the lowest peg, in order to make their great big fortunes, and build their great big houses, and we, why we're just clemming, many and many of us. Can you say there's nought wrong in this?"

Exercise

1. Translate the final paragraph into Standard English
2. How does John Barton's voicing compare to that of Stephen Blackpool?

A Tale of Two Countries: Voicing the Poor in 19th-Century Britain and Italy

Week 5 – Handout 2

Text 31

Orwell questioning Dickens's poor voices

Orwell, George, 'Charles Dickens', in *Essays* (London: Penguin, 2000) [Dickens essay available online at http://www.online-literature.com/orwell/orwell_dickens]

Extract from Chapter 3.

Dickens had grown up near enough to poverty to be terrified of it, and in spite of his generosity of mind, he is not free from the special prejudices of the shabby-genteel. It is usual to claim him as a "popular" writer, a champion of the "oppressed masses." So he is, so long as he thinks of them as oppressed; but there are two things that condition his attitude. In the first place, he is a south-of-England man, and a Cockney at that, and therefore out of touch with the bulk of the real oppressed masses, the industrial and agricultural labourers. It is interesting to see how Chesterton, another Cockney, always presents Dickens as the spokesman of "the poor", without showing much awareness of who "the poor" really are. To Chesterton "the poor" means small shopkeepers and servants. Sam Weller, he says, "is the great symbol in English literature of the populace peculiar to England"; and Sam Weller is a valet! The other point is that Dickens's early experiences have given him a horror of proletarian roughness. He shows this unmistakably whenever he writes of the very poorest of the poor, the slum-dwellers. His descriptions of the London slums are always full of undisguised repulsion:

The ways were foul and narrow; the shops and houses wretched; and people half naked, drunken, slipshod and ugly. Alleys and archways, like so many cesspools, disgorged their offences of smell, and dirt, and life, upon the straggling streets; and the whole quarter reeked with crime, and filth, and misery, etc. etc.

There are many similar passages in Dickens. From them one gets the impression of whole submerged populations whom he regards as being beyond the pale. In rather the same way the modern doctrinaire Socialist contemptuously writes off a large block of the population as "lumpenproletariat".

Exercise

1. What does Orwell mean by the expression 'beyond the pale'?
2. From the Dickens texts we have seen so far, is it true that Dickens regards vast swathes of submerged populations as beyond the pale?

Text 32

Orwell on inconsistencies in Dickens continued...

Extract from Chapter 3.

[...]

However much Dickens may admire the working classes, he does not wish to resemble them. Given his origins, and the time he lived in, it could hardly be otherwise. In the early nineteenth century class animosities may have been no sharper than they are now, but the surface differences between class and class were enormously greater. The "gentleman" and the "common man" must have seemed like different species of animal. Dickens is quite genuinely on the side of the poor against the rich, but it would be next door to impossible for him not to think of a

working-class exterior as a stigma. In one of Tolstoy's fables the peasants of a certain village judge every stranger who arrives from the state of his hands. If his palms are hard from work, they let him in; if his palms are soft, out he goes. This would be hardly intelligible to Dickens; all his heroes have soft hands. His younger heroes — Nicholas Nickleby, Martin Chuzzlewit, Edward Chester, David Copperfield, John Harmon — are usually of the type known as "walking gentlemen." He likes a bourgeois exterior and a bourgeois (not aristocratic) accent. **One curious symptom of this is that he will not allow anyone who is to play a heroic part to speak like a working man. A comic hero like Sam Weller, or a merely pathetic figure like Stephen Blackpool, can speak with a broad accent, but the jeune premier always speaks the equivalent of B.B.C. This is so, even when it involves absurdities.** Little Pip, for instance, is brought up by people speaking broad Essex, but talks upper-class English from his earliest childhood; actually he would have talked the same dialect as Joe [sic], or at least as Mrs. Gargery. So also with Biddy Wopsle, Lizzie Hexam, Sissie Jupe, Oliver Twist — one ought perhaps to add Little Dorrit. Even Rachel in *Hard Times* has barely a trace of Lancashire accent, an impossibility in her case.

Exercise

1. Do you agree with Orwell's stance on Dickens?
2. Is it true that no hero is allowed to speak like a working man?

Text 33

More Mary Barton. Narrative technique.
The masters and workers meet over the strike.

Extract from Chapter 16.

The day arrived on which the masters were to have an interview with a deputation of the work-people. The meeting was to take place in a public room, at an hotel; and there, about eleven o'clock, the mill-owners, who had received the foreign orders, began to collect.

[...]

In going from group to group in the room, you caught such a medley of sentences as the following—"Poor devils! they're near enough to starving, I'm afraid. Mrs. Aldred makes two cows' heads into soup every week, and people come many miles to fetch it; and if these times last, we must try and do more. But we must not be bullied into anything!"

"A rise of a shilling or so won't make much difference, and they will go away thinking they've gained their point."

"That's the very thing I object to. They'll think so, and whenever they've a point to gain, no matter how unreasonable, they'll strike work."

"It really injures them more than us."

"I don't see how our interests can be separated."

"The d--d brute had thrown vitriol on the poor fellow's ankles, and you know what a bad part that is to heal. He had to stand still with the pain, and that left him at the mercy of the cruel wretch, who beat him about the head till you'd hardly have known he was a man. They doubt if he'll live."

"If it were only for that, I'll stand out against them, even if it is the cause of my ruin."

"Ay, I for one won't yield one farthing to the cruel brutes; they're more like wild beasts than human beings."

(Well, who might have made them different?)

[...]

Then up sprang Mr. Henry Carson, the head and voice of the violent party among the masters, and addressing the chairman, even before the scowling operatives, he proposed some resolutions, which he, and those who agreed with him, had been concocting during this last absence of the deputation.

They were, firstly, withdrawing the proposal just made, and declaring all communication between the masters and that particular Trades' Union at an end; secondly, declaring that no master would employ any workman in future, unless he signed a declaration that he did not belong to any Trades' Union, and pledged himself not to assist or subscribe to any society, having for its object interference with the masters' powers; and, thirdly, that the masters should pledge themselves to protect and encourage all workmen willing to accept employment on those conditions, and at the rate of wages first offered. Considering that the men who now stood listening with lowering brows of defiance were all of them leading members of the Union, such resolutions were in themselves sufficiently provocative of animosity: but not content with simply stating them, Harry Carson went on to characterise the conduct of the workmen in no measured terms; every word he spoke rendering their looks more livid, their glaring eyes more fierce. One among them would have spoken, but checked himself, in obedience to the stern glance and pressure on his arm, received from the leader. Mr. Carson sat down, and a friend instantly got up to second the motion. It was carried, but far from unanimously. The chairman announced it to the delegates (who had been once more turned out of the room for a division). They received it with deep brooding silence, but spake never a word, and left the room without even a bow.

[...]

This proceeding was closely observed by one of the men.

He watched the masters as they left the hotel (laughing, some of them were, at passing jokes), and when all had gone, he re-entered. He went to the waiter, who recognised him.

"There's a bit on a picture up yonder, as one o' the gentlemen threw away; I've a little lad at home as dearly loves a picture; by your leave I'll go up for it."

Exercise

1. How are the masters portrayed?
2. How does Barton undermine the voice of the masters?
3. From whose point of view do we see the proceedings?

Suggestions for further reading:

Dickens, Charles, 'A Walk in a Workhouse', originally published in *Household Words* (1850), now in *Charles Dickens on Poverty* (Hesperus, 2013). Available online at:

<http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/poorlaw.html>

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Ferguson, Susan, 'Drawing Fictional Lines: Dialect and Narrative in the Victorian Novel' in *Style*, No. 32:1 (Spring, 1998), 1-17.

Peled Ginsburg, Michal, 'Truth and Persuasion: The Language of Realism and of Ideology in "Oliver Twist"', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, No. 20: 3, (Spring, 1987), 220-236.

Sampson, David, 'Wordsworth and the Poor: The Poetry of Survival' in *Studies in Romanticism*, No. 23:1 (Spring, 1984), 31-59.

Wiltshire, Irene, 'Speech in Wuthering Heights: Joseph's Dialect and Charlotte's Emendations', *Brontë Studies*, 30:1 (2005), 19-29

A Tale of Two Countries: Voicing the Poor in 19th-Century Britain and Italy

Week 6 – Handout 1

Text 39

Serao, Matilde, *Il ventre di Napoli* [first published as journalistic pieces in Rome 1884]

Chapter entitled 'Il lotto'

Ebbene, a questo popolo eccezionalmente meridionale, nel cui sangue s'incrociano e si fondono tante gentili, poetiche, ardenti eredità etrusche, arabe, saracene, normanne, spagnuole, per cui questo ricco sangue napoletano si arroventa nell'odio, brucia nell'amore e si consuma nel sogno: a questa gente in cui l'immaginazione è la potenza dell'anima più alta, più alacre, inesauribile, una grande fantasticheria deve essere concessa.

È gente umile, bonaria, che sarebbe felice per poco e invece non ha nulla per essere felice; che, sopporta con dolcezza, con pazienza, la miseria, la fame quotidiana, l'indifferenza di coloro che dovrebbero amarla, l'abbandono di coloro che dovrebbero sollevarla.

Felice per l'esistenza all'aria aperta, eredità orientale, non ha aria; innamorata del sole, non ha sole; appassionata di colori gai, vive nella tetraggine; per la memoria della bella civiltà anteriore, greca, essa ama i bianchi portici che si disegnano sull'azzurro, e invece le tane dove abita questa gente, non sembrano fatte per gli umani, e dei frutti della terra, essa ha i peggiori, quelli che in campagna si danno ai maiali; e vi sono vivande che non assaggia mai.

Ebbene, il popolo napoletano rifà ogni settimana il suo grande sogno di felicità, vive per sei giorni in una speranza crescente, invadente, che si allarga, si allarga, esce dai confini della vita reale: per sei giorni, il popolo napoletano sogna il suo grande sogno, dove sono tutte le cose di cui è privato, una casa pulita, dell'aria salubre e fresca, un bel raggio di sole caldo per terra, un letto bianco e alto, un *comò* lucido, i maccheroni e la carne ogni giorno, e il litro di vino, e la culla pel bimbo e la biancheria per la moglie e il cappello nuovo per il marito.

Tutte queste cose che la vita reale non gli può dare, che non gli darà mai, esso le ha, nella sua immaginazione, dalla domenica al sabato seguente; e ne parla e ne è sicuro, e i progetti si sviluppano, diventano quasi quasi una realtà, e per essi marito e moglie litigano o si abbracciano.

Alle quattro del pomeriggio, nel sabato, la delusione è profonda, la desolazione non ha limiti: ma alla domenica mattina, la fantasia si rialza, rinfrancata, il sogno settimanale ricomincia. Il lotto, il lotto è il largo sogno, che consola la fantasia napoletana: è l'idea fissa di quei cervelli infuocati; è la grande visione felice che appaga la gente oppressa; è la vasta allucinazione che si prende le anime.

Ed è contagiosa questa malattia dello spirito: un contagio sottile e infallibile, inevitabile, la cui forza di diffusione non si può calcolare. Dal portinaio ciabattino che sta seduto al suo banchetto innanzi al portoncino, il contagio del lotto si comunica alla povera cucitrice che viene a portargli le scarpe vecchie da risuolare; da costei passa al suo innamorato, un garzone di cantina; costui lo porta all'oste che lo dà a tutti gli avventori, i quali lo seminano nelle case, nelle officine, nelle altre osterie, fino nelle chiese.

La serva del quinto piano, a destra, giuoca, sperando di non far più la serva; ma tutte le serve, di tutti i piani, giuocano, tanto la cameriera del primo che ha le trenta lire al mese, quanto la *vajassa* del sesto, che ne prende otto, con la dolce speranza di uscir dal servizio, così duro; e si comunicano i loro numeri, fanno combriccola sui pianerottoli, se li dicono dalle finestre, se li telegrafano a segni. La venditrice di frutta, che sta sotto il sole e sotto la pioggia, giuoca, e dal suo angolo di strada, in giù, la moglie del sarto, che cuce sulla porta, la moglie dello stagnino affogata dal fetore del piombo, la lavandaia che sta tutto il giorno con le mani nella saponata, la venditrice di castagne che si brucia la faccia e le mani al vapore e al calore

del fornello, la venditrice di noci che ha le mani nere sino ai polsi per l'acido gallico, tutte queste donne credono nel lotto, giuocano fedelmente, ardentemente, al lotto.

Nella stanza stretta, dove otto o dieci ragazze lavorano da sarte, e il bimbo della sarta dorme nella culla e in un angolo frigge il lardo nel tegame sul focolare, una dà i numeri, una seconda ne ha degli altri, la *maesta* sa i veri, tutte costoro giuocano. Le pettinatrici del popolo, le cosiddette *capere*, dal grembiule arrotolato attorno alla cintura, dalla testa scapigliata, dalle mani unte, che pettinano per un soldo al giorno, portano in giro i numeri alle loro clienti, ne ricevono in cambio degli altri, sono il gran portavoce dei numeri. In tutte le officine dove gli operai napoletani sono riuniti a un lavoro lunghissimo, così male retribuito, il lotto mette radici profonde; in tutte le scuole popolari giuocano le maestre e giuocano le alunne grandicelle, in comitiva, riunendo i soldi della colazione. Dove sono riunite, a vivere di peccato, le disgraziate donne di cui Napoli ha così grande copia, il lotto è una delle più grandi speranze: speranza di redenzione.

Ma non credete che il male rimanga nelle classi popolari. No, no, esso ascende, assale le classi medie, s'intromette in tutte le borghesie, in tutti i commerci, arriva sino all'aristocrazia. Dove vi è un vero bisogno tenuto segreto, dove vi è uno spostamento che nulla vale a riequilibrare, dove vi è una rovina finanziaria celata ma imminente, dove vi è un desiderio che ha tutte le condizioni dell'impossibilità, dove la durezza nascosta della vita più si fa sentire, e dove solo il danaro può esser rimedio, ivi il giuoco del lotto prende possesso, domina.

Segretamente, giuocano tutte le ragazze da marito che non hanno un soldo di dote; giuocano tutti i numerosi impiegati al Municipio, alle Banche, all'Intendenza, al Dazio Consumo; tutti i pensionati che non possono vivere con la pensione e che non avendo nulla da fare fanno la *cabala*, studiano la scienza negromantica del lotto, giuocano disperatamente e hanno sempre il libretto in pegno; tutti i commessi di negozio, che guadagnano quaranta lire al mese, sanno i numeri *certi* e li giuocano ogni settimana. Grande reddito, al lotto, lo danno i magistrati: pagati miserevolmente, essi che rappresentano la più grande equità morale, esposti a tentazioni che respingono con una inflessibilità degna di maggior premio, provvisti di molti figli, rovinati dai traslocamenti, la loro debolezza, la loro speranza consiste nel lotto.

I piccoli commercianti che si dibattono continuamente con le cambiali e fanno una lotta quotidiana col fallimento, finiscono per aggrapparsi a questa tavola così incerta del lotto; i grandi giuocatori di borsa, che vivono sopra il taglio di un rasoio e son capaci di ballarvi sopra un *waltzer*, a furia di febbre del giuoco, assaggiano volentieri la speranza del lotto. Tutti questi sintomi del male saliente alle classi dirigenti, mi constano, per aver visto, udito, compreso e intuito.

Le signore dell'aristocrazia giuocano, un po' per burletta, un po' con la speranza di un nuovo braccialetto, un po' per l'oppressione di una nota di sarta che il marito non salderà mai. Anche quelli che dovrebbero esserne salvi, perchè abituati al male, perchè ci stanno sempre in mezzo, gli impiegati dei banchi-lotto, i *postieri*, non possono resistere alla tentazione. Onde, alle quattro del sabato, tutti quelli che sono più ammalati, non possono più aspettare, e si recano all'Impresa, in una stretta strada fra la via Pignatelli e la via di Santa Chiara, per assistere alla estrazione dei numeri. Ma tutte le serve, le venditrici, le operaie e gli operai, le ragazze e gl'impiegati non possono muoversi di dove sono. E allora un monello parte, va al più vicino *posto* del lotto e prende i numeri: tutti aspettano. Le persone più franche si fanno sulla porta e alle finestre, le vergognose restano dentro, tendendo l'orecchio. Il ragazzo torna correndo, affannato, si pianta alla bocca del vicolo e grida i numeri, con voce stentorea:

"Vintiquattro!"

"Sissantanove!"

"Quarantanoie!"

"Otto!"

"Sittantacinche!"

Silenzio universale: tutti impallidiscono.

Ma come tutti i sogni troppo pronunziati, il lotto conduce alla inazione ed all'ozio: come tutte le visioni, esso porta alla falsità e alla menzogna; come tutte le allucinazioni, esso conduce alla crudeltà e alla ferocia; come tutti i rimedi fittizi che nascono dalla miseria, esso produce miseria, degradazione, delitto.

Il popolo napoletano, che è sobrio, non si corrompe per l'acquavite, non muore di *delirium tremens*; esso si corrompe e muore pel lotto. Il lotto è l'acquavite di Napoli.

Exercise

1. What has changed in the 40 years since the Dickens description of the lottery in Naples?
2. How does Serao's voice compare with that of Dickens?
3. How does she voice the poor?

Text 40

Serao, Matilde, *Il ventre di Napoli*

Extract from opening 'Bisogna sventrare Napoli'

Efficace la frase. Voi non lo conoscevate, onorevole Depretis, il ventre di Napoli. Avevate torto, perchè voi siete il Governo e il Governo deve saper tutto. Non sono fatte pel Governo, certamente, le descrizioncelle colorite di cronisti con intenzioni letterarie, che parlano della via Caracciolo, del mare glauco, del cielo di cobalto, delle signore incantevoli e dei vapori violetti del tramonto: tutta questa rettorichetta a base di golfo e di colline fiorite, di cui noi abbiamo già fatto e oggi continuiamo a fare ammenda onorevole, inginocchiati umilmente innanzi alla patria che soffre; tutta questa minuta e facile letteratura frammentaria, serve per quella parte di pubblico che non vuole essere seccata per racconti di miserie. Ma il governo doveva sapere l'altra parte; il governo a cui arriva la statistica della mortalità e quella dei delitti; il governo a cui arrivano i rapporti dei prefetti, dei questori, degli ispettori di polizia, dei delegati; il governo a cui arrivano i rapporti dei direttori delle carceri; il governo che sa tutto: quanta carne si consuma in un giorno e quanto vino si beve in un anno, in un paese; quante femmine disgraziate, diciamo così, vi esistano, e quanti ammoniti siano i loro amanti di cuore, quanti mendichi non possano entrare nelle opere pie e quanti vagabondi dormano in istrada, la notte; quanti nullatenenti e quanti commercianti vi sieno; quanto renda il dazio consumo, quanto la fondiaria, per quanto s'impegni al Monte di Pietà e quanto renda il lotto.

Quest'altra parte, questo ventre di Napoli, se non lo conosce il Governo, chi lo deve conoscere? E se non servono a dirvi tutto, a che sono buoni tutti questi impiegati alti e bassi, a che questo immenso ingranaggio burocratico che ci costa tanto? E, se voi non siete la intelligenza suprema del paese che tutto conosce e a tutto provvede, perchè siete ministro?

Vi avranno fatto vedere una, due, tre strade dei quartieri bassi e ne avrete avuto orrore. Ma non avete visto tutto; i napoletani istessi che vi conducevano, non conoscono tutti i quartieri bassi. La via dei Mercanti, l'avete percorsa tutta?

Exercise

1. Who is Serao's audience?
2. How does her view of the picturesque compare to that of Dickens?
3. What is Serao's rhetorical strategy?

Text 41

Serao, Matilde, *Il ventre di Napoli*

Extract from opening 'Bisogna sventrare Napoli'

Sventrare Napoli? Credete che basterà? Vi lusingate che basteranno tre, quattro strade, attraverso i quartieri popolari, per salvarli? Vedrete, vedrete, quando gli studi, per questa santa opera di redenzione, saranno compiuti, quale verità fulgidissima risulterà: *bisogna rifare*.

Voi non potrete sicuramente lasciare in piedi le case che sono lesionate dalla umidità, dove al pianterreno vi è il fango e all'ultimo piano si brucia nell'estate e si gela nell'inverno; dove le scale sono ricettacoli d'immondizie; nei cui pozzi, da cui si attinge acqua così penosamente, vanno a cadere tutti i rifiuti umani e tutti gli animali morti; e che hanno tutto un *pot-bouille*, una *cosidetta vinella*, una corticina interna in cui le serve buttano tutto; il cui sistema di latrine, quando ci sono, resiste a qualunque disinfezione.

Voi non potrete lasciare in piedi le case, nelle cui piccole stanze sono agglomerate mai meno di quattro persone, dove vi sono galline e piccioni, gatti sfiancati e cani lebbrosi; case in cui si cucina in uno stambugio, si mangia nella stanza da letto e si muore nella medesima stanza, dove altri dormono e mangiano, case, i cui sottoscala, pure abitati da gente umana, rassomigliano agli antichi, ora aboliti, carceri *criminali* della Vicaria, sotto il livello del suolo.

Voi non potrete sicuramente lasciare in piedi i cavalcavia che congiungono le case; nè quelle ignobili costruzioni di legno che si sospendono a certe muraglie di case, nè quei portoncini angusti, nè vicoli ciechi, nè quegli angiporti, nè quei supportici; voi non potrete lasciare in piedi i *fondaci*.

Voi non potrete lasciare in piedi certe case dove al primo piano è un'agenzia di pegni, al secondo si affittano camere a studenti, al terzo si fabbricano i fuochi artificiali: certe altre dove al pianterreno vi è un bigliardo, al primo piano un albergo dove si pagano tre soldi per notte, al secondo una raccolta di poverette, al terzo un deposito di cenci.

Per distruggere la corruzione materiale e quella morale, per rifare la salute e la coscienza a quella povera gente, per insegnare loro come si vive - essi sanno morire, come avete visto! - per dir loro che essi sono fratelli nostri, che noi li amiamo efficacemente, che vogliamo salvarli, non basta sventrare Napoli: bisogna quasi tutta rifarla.

Exercise

1. Identify the common themes with previous literary descriptions of poverty we have seen.

A Tale of Two Countries: Voicing the Poor in 19th-Century Britain and Italy

Week 6 – Handout 2

Text 42

Verga, Giovanni, *Vita dei campi*, 1880

Extract from 'Fantasticheria' [first published as journalistic piece in Rome 1879]

Una volta, mentre il treno passava vicino ad Aci-Trezza, voi, affacciandovi allo sportello del vagone, esclamaste: - Vorrei starci un mese laggiù! –

Noi vi ritornammo, e vi passammo non un mese, ma quarantott'ore; i terrazzani che spalancavano gli occhi vedendo i vostri grossi bauli avranno creduto che ci sareste rimasta un par d'anni. La mattina del terzo giorno, stanca di vedere eternamente del verde e dell'azzurro, e di contare i carri che passavano per via, eravate alla stazione, e gingillandovi impaziente colla catenella della vostra boccettina da odore, allungavate il collo per scorgere un convoglio che non spuntava mai. In quelle quarantott'ore facemmo tutto ciò che si può fare ad Aci-Trezza: passeggiammo nella polvere della strada, e ci arrampicammo sugli scogli; col pretesto di imparare a remare vi faceste sotto il guanto delle bollicine che rubavano i baci; passammo sul mare una notte romanticissima, gettando le reti tanto per far qualche cosa che a' barcaioli potesse parer meritevole di buscarsi dei reumatismi, e l'alba ci sorprese in cima al *fariglione* - un'alba modesta e pallida, che ho ancora dinanzi agli occhi, striata di larghi riflessi violetti, sul mare di un verde cupo, raccolta come una carezza su quel gruppetto di casucce che dormivano quasi raggomitolate sulla riva, mentre in cima allo scoglio, sul cielo trasparente e limpido, si stampava netta la vostra figurina, colle linee sapienti che vi metteva la vostra sarta, e il profilo fine ed elegante che ci mettevate voi. - Avevate un vestitino grigio che sembrava fatto apposta per intonare coi colori dell'alba. - Un bel quadretto davvero! e si indovinava che lo sapeste anche voi, dal modo in cui vi modellaste nel vostro scialletto, e sorrideste coi grandi occhioni sbarrati e stanchi a quello strano spettacolo, e a quell'altra stranezza di trovarvi anche voi presente. Che cosa avveniva nella vostra testolina allora, di faccia al sole nascente? Gli domandaste forse in qual altro emisfero vi avrebbe ritrovata fra un mese? Diceste soltanto ingenuamente: - Non capisco come si possa vivere qui tutta la vita -.

Eppure, vedete, la cosa è più facile che non sembri: basta non possedere centomila lire di entrata, prima di tutto; e in compenso patire un po' di tutti gli stenti fra quegli scogli giganteschi, incastonati nell'azzurro, che vi facevano batter le mani per ammirazione. Così poco basta, perché quei poveri diavoli che ci aspettavano sonnecchiando nella barca, trovino fra quelle loro casipole sgangherate e pittoresche, che viste da lontano vi sembravano avessero il mal di mare anch'esse, tutto ciò che vi affannate a cercare a Parigi, a Nizza ed a Napoli.

È una cosa singolare; ma forse non è male che sia così - per voi, e per tutti gli altri come voi. Quel mucchio di casipole è abitato da pescatori, «gente di mare», dicono essi, come altri direbbe «gente di toga», i quali hanno la pelle più dura del pane che mangiano - quando ne mangiano - giacché il mare non è sempre gentile, come allora che baciava i vostri guanti... Nelle sue giornate nere, in cui brontola e sbuffa, bisogna contentarsi di stare a guardarlo dalla riva, colle mani in mano, o sdraiati bocconi, il che è meglio per chi non ha desinato. In quei giorni c'è folla sull'uscio dell'osteria, ma suonano pochi soldoni sulla latta del banco, e i monelli che pullulano nel paese, come se la miseria fosse un buon ingrasso, strillano e si graffiano quasi abbiano il diavolo in corpo.

Di tanto in tanto il tifo, il colera, la malannata, la burrasca, vengono a dare una buona spazzata in quel brulicame, che davvero si crederebbe non dovesse desiderar di meglio che esser spazzato, e scomparire; eppure ripullula sempre nello stesso luogo; non so dirvi come, né perché.

Vi siete mai trovata, dopo una pioggia di autunno, a sbaragliare un esercito di formiche, tracciando sbadatamente il nome del vostro ultimo ballerino sulla sabbia del viale? Qualcuna di quelle povere bestioline sarà rimasta attaccata alla ghiera del vostro ombrellino, torcendosi di spasimo; ma tutte le altre, dopo cinque minuti di pánico e di viavai, saranno tornate ad aggrapparsi disperatamente al loro monticello bruno. - Voi non ci tornereste davvero, e

nemmen io; - ma per poter comprendere siffatta caparbieta', che e' per certi aspetti eroica, bisogna farci piccini anche noi, chiudere tutto l'orizzonte fra due zolle, e guardare col microscopio le piccole cause che fanno battere i piccoli cuori. Volete metterci un occhio anche voi, a cotesta lente? voi che guardate la vita dall'altro lato del cannocchiale? Lo spettacolo vi parra' strano, e percio' forse vi divertira'.

[...]

Quando scrivero' il libro, forse non ci penserete piu'; intanto i ricordi che vi mando, cosi' lontani da voi, in ogni senso, da voi inebbriata di feste e di fiori, vi faranno l'effetto di una brezza deliziosa, in mezzo alle veglie ardenti del vostro eterno carnevale. Il giorno in cui ritornerete laggiu', se pur vi ritornerete, e siederemo accanto un'altra volta, a spinger sassi col piede, e fantasie col pensiero, parleremo forse di quelle altre ebbrezze che ha la vita altrove. Potete anche immaginare che il mio pensiero siasi raccolto in quel cantuccio ignorato del mondo, perche' il vostro piede vi si e' posato, - o per distogliere i miei occhi dal luccichio che vi segue dappertutto, sia di gemme o di febbri - oppure perche' vi ho cercata inutilmente per tutti i luoghi che la moda fa lieti. Vedete quindi che siete sempre al primo posto, qui come al teatro!

[...]

Ora rimangono quei monellucci che vi scortavano come sciacalli e assediavano le arance; rimangono a ronzare attorno alla mendica, e brancicarle le vesti come se ci avesse sotto del pane, a raccattar torsi di cavolo, bucce d'arance e mozziconi di sigari, tutte quelle cose che si lasciano cadere per via, ma che pure devono avere ancora qualche valore, poiche' c'e' della povera gente che ci campa su; ci campa anzi cosi' bene, che quei pezzentelli paffuti e affamati cresceranno in mezzo al fango e alla polvere della strada, e si faranno grandi e grossi come il loro babbo e come il loro nonno, e popoleranno Aci-Trezza di altri pezzentelli, i quali tireranno allegramente la vita coi denti piu' a lungo che potranno, come il vecchio nonno, senza desiderare altro, solo pregando Iddio di chiudere gli occhi la' dove li hanno aperti, in mano del medico del paese che viene tutti i giorni sull'asinello, come Gesu', ad aiutare la buona gente che se ne va.

- Insomma l'ideale dell'ostrica! - direte voi. - Proprio l'ideale dell'ostrica! e noi non abbiamo altro motivo di trovarlo ridicolo, che quello di non esser nati ostriche anche noi -.

Per altro il tenace attaccamento di quella povera gente allo scoglio sul quale la fortuna li ha lasciati cadere, mentre seminava principi di qua e duchesse di la', questa rassegnazione coraggiosa ad una vita di stenti, questa religione della famiglia, che si riverbera sul mestiere, sulla casa, e sui sassi che la circondano, mi sembrano - forse pel quarto d'ora - cose serissime e rispettabilissime anch'esse.

Sembrami che le irrequietudini del pensiero vagabondo s'addormenterebbero dolcemente nella pace serena di quei sentimenti miti, semplici, che si succedono calmi e inalterati di generazione in generazione. - Sembrami che potrei vedervi passare, al gran trotto dei vostri cavalli, col tintinnio allegro dei loro finimenti e salutarvi tranquillamente.

Forse perche' ho troppo cercato di scorgere entro al turbine che vi circonda e vi segue, mi e' parso ora di leggere una fatale necessita' nelle tenaci affezioni dei deboli, nell'istinto che hanno i piccoli di stringersi fra loro per resistere alle tempeste della vita, e ho cercato di decifrare il dramma modesto e ignoto che deve aver sgominati gli attori plebei che conoscemmo insieme. Un dramma che qualche volta forse vi racconterò, e di cui parmi tutto il nodo debba consistere in cio': - che allorquando uno di quei piccoli, o piu' debole, o piu' incauto, o piu' egoista degli altri, volle staccarsi dai suoi per vaghezza dell'ignoto, o per brama di meglio, o per curiosita' di conoscere il mondo; il mondo, da pesce vorace ch'egli e', se lo ingoiò, e i suoi piu' prossimi con lui. - E sotto questo aspetto vedrete che il dramma non manca d'interesse. Per le ostriche l'argomento piu' interessante deve esser quello che tratta delle insidie del gambero, o del coltello del palombaro che le stacca dallo scoglio.

Exercise

1. What is Verga's attitude to the "picturesque" here?
2. Who is the narrator? Who is the addressee?
3. How does the narrating persona fit with the 'us' and 'them' groupings?
4. How does Verga voice the poor?

Text 43

Verga, Giovanni, *I Malavoglia*, 1881

Extract from preface

Questo racconto è lo studio sincero e spassionato del come probabilmente devono nascere e svilupparsi nelle più umili condizioni le prime irrequietudini pel benessere; e quale perturbazione debba arrecare in una famigliuola, vissuta sino allora relativamente felice, la vaga bramosia dell'ignoto, l'accorgersi che non si sta bene, o che si potrebbe star meglio. Il movente dell'attività umana che produce la fiumana del progresso è preso qui alle sue sorgenti, nelle proporzioni più modeste e materiali. Il meccanismo delle passioni che la determinano in quelle basse sfere è meno complicato, e potrà quindi osservarsi con maggior precisione. Basta lasciare al quadro le sue tinte schiette e tranquille, e il suo disegno semplice. Man mano che cotesta ricerca del meglio di cui l'uomo è travagliato cresce e si dilata, tende anche ad elevarsi e segue il suo moto ascendente nelle classi sociali. Nei *Malavoglia* non è ancora che la lotta pei bisogni materiali. Soddisfatti questi, la ricerca diviene avidità di ricchezze, e si incarna in un tipo borghese, *Mastro don Gesualdo*, incorniciato nel quadro ancora ristretto di una piccola città di provincia, ma del quale i colori cominceranno ad essere più vivaci, e il disegno a farsi più ampio e variato.

[...]

I *Malavoglia*, *Mastro-don Gesualdo*, la *Duchessa de Leyra*, l'*Onorevole Scipioni*, l'*Uomo di lusso* sono altrettanti vinti che la corrente ha deposti sulla riva, dopo averli travolti e annegati, ciascuno colle stimate del suo peccato, che avrebbero dovuto essere lo sfolgorare della sua virtù. Ciascuno, dal più umile al più elevato, ha avuta la sua parte nella lotta per l'esistenza, pel benessere, per l'ambizione - dall'umile pescatore al nuovo arricchito - alla intrusa nelle alte classi - all'uomo dall'ingegno e dalle volontà robuste, il quale si sente la forza di dominare gli altri uomini, di prendersi da sé quella parte di considerazione pubblica che il pregiudizio sociale gli nega per la sua nascita illegale; di fare la legge, lui nato fuori della legge - all'artista che crede di seguire il suo ideale seguendo un'altra forma dell'ambizione. Chi osserva questo spettacolo non ha il diritto di giudicarlo; è già molto se riesce a trarsi un'istante fuori del campo della lotta per studiarla senza passione, e rendere la scena nettamente, coi colori adatti, tale da dare la rappresentazione della realtà com'è stata, o come avrebbe dovuto essere.

Exercise

1. What is the didactic purpose of Verga's novel cycle?

Text 44

Verga, Giovanni, *I Malavoglia*, 1881

Extract from beginning of Ch. 1

Un tempo i *Malavoglia* erano stati numerosi come i sassi della strada vecchia di Trezza; ce n'erano persino ad Ognina, e ad Aci Castello, tutti buona e brava gente di mare, proprio all'opposto di quel che sembrava dal nomignolo, come dev'essere. Veramente nel libro della parrocchia si chiamavano Toscano, ma questo non voleva dir nulla, poiché da che il mondo era mondo, all'Ognina, a Trezza e ad Aci Castello, li avevano sempre conosciuti per *Malavoglia*, di padre in figlio, che avevano sempre avuto delle barche sull'acqua, e delle tegole al sole. Adesso a Trezza non rimanevano che i *Malavoglia* di padron 'Ntoni, quelli della casa del nespolo, e della *Provvidenza* ch'era ammarrata sul greto, sotto il lavatoio, accanto alla *Concetta* dello zio Cola, e alla paranza di padron Fortunato *Cipolla*.

Le burrasche che avevano disperso di qua e di là gli altri *Malavoglia*, erano passate senza far gran danno sulla casa del nespolo e sulla barca ammarrata sotto il lavatoio; e padron 'Ntoni, per spiegare il miracolo, solea dire, mostrando il pugno chiuso - un pugno che sembrava fatto di legno di noce - Per menare il remo bisogna che le cinque dita s'aiutino l'un l'altro. Diceva pure, - Gli uomini son fatti come le dita della mano: il dito grosso deve far da dito grosso, e il dito piccolo deve far da dito piccolo.

E la famigliuola di padron 'Ntoni era realmente diposta come le dita della mano. Prima veniva lui, il dito grosso, che comandava le feste e le quarant'ore; poi suo figlio Bastiano, *Bastianazzo*, perché era grande e grosso quanto il San Cristoforo che c'era dipinto sotto l'arco della pescheria della città; e così grande e grosso com'era filava diritto alla manovra comandata, e non si sarebbe soffiato il naso se suo padre non gli avesse detto «sòffiati il naso» tanto che s'era tolta in moglie *la Longa* quando gli avevano detto «pigliatela». Poi veniva la Longa, una piccina che badava a tessere, salare le acciughe, e far figliuoli, da buona massaia; infine i nipoti, in ordine di anzianità: 'Ntoni, il maggiore, un bighellone di vent'anni, che si buscava tutt'ora qualche scappellotto dal nonno, e qualche pedata più giù per rimettere l'equilibrio, quando lo scappellotto era stato troppo forte; Luca, «che aveva più giudizio del grande» ripeteva il nonno; Mena (Filomena) soprannominata «Sant'Agata» perché stava sempre al telaio, e si suol dire «donna di telaio, gallina di pollaio, e triglia di gennaio»; Alessi (Alessio) un moccioso tutto suo nonno colui!; e Lia (Rosalia) ancora né carne né pesce. - Alla domenica, quando entravano in chiesa, l'uno dietro l'altro, pareva una processione.

Padron 'Ntoni sapeva anche certi *motti* e proverbi che aveva sentito dagli *antichi*, «perché il motto degli antichi mai menti»: - «Senza pilota barca non cammina» - «Per far da papa bisogna saper far da sagrestano» - oppure - «Fa' il mestiere che sai, che se non arricchisci camperai» - «Contentati di quel che t'ha fatto tuo padre; se non altro non sarai un birbante» ed altre sentenze giudiziose.

Ecco perché la casa del nespolo prosperava, e padron 'Ntoni passava per testa quadra, al punto che a Trezza l'avrebbero fatto consigliere comunale, se don Silvestro, il segretario, il quale la sapeva lunga, non avesse predicato che era un codino marcio, un reazionario di quelli che proteggono i Borboni, e che cospirava pel ritorno di Franceschello, onde poter spadroneggiare nel villaggio, come spadroneggiava in casa propria.

Padron 'Ntoni invece non lo conosceva neanche di vista Franceschello, e badava agli affari suoi, e solea dire: «Chi ha carico di casa non può dormire quando vuole» perché «chi comanda ha da dar conto».

Nel dicembre 1863, 'Ntoni, il maggiore dei nipoti, era stato chiamato per la leva di mare. Padron 'Ntoni allora era corso dai pezzi grossi del paese, che son quelli che possono aiutarci. Ma don Giammaria, il vicario, gli avea risposto che gli stava bene, e questo era il frutto di quella rivoluzione di satanasso che avevano fatto collo sciorinare il fazzoletto tricolore dal campanile.

Exercise

1. What has changed from the novella 'Fantasticheria'?
2. Who is the narrator?
3. How does Verga now voice the poor?
4. How would you describe the language?

A Tale of Two Countries: Voicing the Poor in 19th-Century Britain and Italy

Week 6 – Handout 3 (Revision materials – possible sources)

Sample examination question:

Discuss the portrayal of children in relation to poverty in the works you have studied across the two literatures, with particular attention to voice.

Text 45

Wordsworth, William, *Lyrical Ballads*, c.1800

‘We are Seven’

A simple child, dear brother Jim,
That lightly draws its breath,
And feels its life in every limb,
What should it know of death?

I met a little cottage Girl:
She was eight years old, she said;
Her hair was thick with many a curl
That clustered round her head.

She had a rustic, woodland air,
And she was wildly clad:
Her eyes were fair, and very fair;
Her beauty made me glad.

“Sisters and brothers, little Maid,
How many may you be?”
“How many? Seven in all,” she said,
And wondering looked at me.

“And where are they? I pray you tell.”
She answered, “Seven are we;
And two of us at Conway dwell,
And two are gone to sea.

“Two of us in the church-yard lie,
My sister and my brother;
And, in the church-yard cottage, I
Dwell near them with my mother.”

“You say that two at Conway dwell,
And two are gone to sea,
Yet ye are seven! I pray you tell,
Sweet Maid, how this may be.”

Then did the little Maid reply,
“Seven boys and girls are we;
Two of us in the church-yard lie,
Beneath the church-yard tree.”

“You run about, my little Maid,
Your limbs they are alive;
If two are in the church-yard laid,
Then ye are only five.”

“Their graves are green, they may be seen,”
The little Maid replied,
“Twelve steps or more from my mother’s door,
And they are side by side.

“My stockings there I often knit,
My kerchief there I hem;
And there upon the ground I sit,
And sing a song to them.

“And often after sun-set, Sir,
When it is light and fair,
I take my little porringer,
And eat my supper there.

“The first that died was sister Jane;
In bed she moaning lay,
Till God released her of her pain;
And then she went away.

“So in the church-yard she was laid;
And, when the grass was dry,
Together round her grave we played,
My brother John and I.

“And when the ground was white with snow,
And I could run and slide,
My brother John was forced to go,
And he lies by her side.”

“How many are you, then,” said I,
“If they two are in heaven?”
Quick was the little Maid’s reply,
“O Master! we are seven.”

“But they are dead; those two are dead!
Their spirits are in heaven!”
’Twas throwing words away; for still
The little Maid would have her will,
And said, “Nay, we are seven!”

Text 46

Belli, Giuseppe Gioachino, *Sonetti*, 1830s

57. L'aducazzione [1830]

Fijjo, nun ribbartà¹ mmai Tata tua:²
abbada a tté, nnun te fà mmette sotto.³
Si cquarchiduno te viè a ddà un cazzotto,^{3a}
lì ccallo callo⁴ tu ddàjjene dua.

Si ppoi quarcento porcaccio da ua⁵
te sce fascessi⁶ un po' de predicotto,
dijje: «De ste raggione io me ne fotto;
iggnuno penzi a li fattacci sua».⁷

Quanno ggiuchi un bucale a mmora, o a bboccia,⁸
bbevi fijjo; e a sta ggente bbuggiarona
nu ggnene fà rrestà⁹ mmanco una goccia.

D'esse¹⁰ cristiano è ppuro¹¹ cosa bbona:
pe' cquesto¹² hai da portà ssempre in zaccoccia
er cortello arrotato e la corona.

¹ Ribaltare, in senso attivo: «ismentire, rinnegare, far torto».

² Tuo padre.

³ Non ti far soperchiare.

^{3a} Ti viene a dare un pugno.

⁴ Caldo caldo: immediatamente.

⁵ Porco da uva.

⁶ Ti ci facesse.

⁷ Ognuno pensi ai fattacci tuoi.

⁸ Alla mora o a boccia.

⁹ Non fargliene restare.

¹⁰ D'essere.

¹¹ Pure.

¹² Perciò.

1679. La famijja poverella [1835]

Quiete, crature mie, stateve quiete:
sí, ffijji, zitti, ché mmommò vviè¹ Ttata.
Oh Vvergine der pianto addolorata,
provedeteme voi che lo potete.

Nò, vvisscere mie care, nun piaggnete:
nun me fate morí ccusí accorata.
Lui quarche ccosa l'averà abbuscata,
e ppijjeremo er pane, e mmaggnere.

Si ccapíssivo² er bene che vve vojjo!...
Che ddichi, Peppe? nun vòì stà a lo scuro?
Fijjo, com'ho da fà ssi nun c'è ojjo?

E ttu, Llalla, che hai? Povera Lalla,
hai freddo? Ebbè, nnun méttete³ llí ar muro:
viè⁴ in braccio a mmamma tua che tt'ariscalla⁵

¹ Or'ora viene.

² Se capiste.

³ Non metterti.

⁴ Vieni.

⁵ Ti riscalda.

Text 47

Dickens, Charles, *Oliver Twist*, 1837-9

Extract from Ch. 1

Among other public buildings in a certain town, which for many reasons it will be prudent to refrain from mentioning, and to which I will assign no fictitious name, there is one anciently common to most towns, great or small: to wit, a workhouse; and in this workhouse was born; on a day and date which I need not trouble myself to repeat, inasmuch as it can be of no possible consequence to the reader, in this stage of the business at all events; the item of mortality whose name is prefixed to the head of this chapter.

For a long time after it was ushered into this world of sorrow and trouble, by the parish surgeon, it remained a matter of considerable doubt whether the child would survive to bear any name at all; in which case it is somewhat more than probable that these memoirs would never have appeared; or, if they had, that being comprised within a couple of pages, they would have possessed the inestimable merit of being the most concise and faithful specimen of biography, extant in the literature of any age or country.

Although I am not disposed to maintain that the being born in a workhouse, is in itself the most fortunate and enviable circumstance that can possibly befall a human being, I do mean to say that in this particular instance, it was the best thing for Oliver Twist that could by possibility have occurred. The fact is, that there was considerable difficulty in inducing Oliver

to take upon himself the office of respiration,—a troublesome practice, but one which custom has rendered necessary to our easy existence; and for some time he lay gasping on a little flock mattress, rather unequally poised between this world and the next: the balance being decidedly in favour of the latter. Now, if, during this brief period, Oliver had been surrounded by careful grandmothers, anxious aunts, experienced nurses, and doctors of profound wisdom, he would most inevitably and indubitably have been killed in no time. There being nobody by, however, but a pauper old woman, who was rendered rather misty by an unwonted allowance of beer; and a parish surgeon who did such matters by contract; Oliver and Nature fought out the point between them. The result was, that, after a few struggles, Oliver breathed, sneezed, and proceeded to advertise to the inmates of the workhouse the fact of a new burden having been imposed upon the parish, by setting up as loud a cry as could reasonably have been expected from a male infant who had not been possessed of that very useful appendage, a voice, for a much longer space of time than three minutes and a quarter.

As Oliver gave this first proof of the free and proper action of his lungs, the patchwork coverlet which was carelessly flung over the iron bedstead, rustled; the pale face of a young woman was raised feebly from the pillow; and a faint voice imperfectly articulated the words, 'Let me see the child, and die.'

[...]

What an excellent example of the power of dress, young Oliver Twist was! Wrapped in the blanket which had hitherto formed his only covering, he might have been the child of a nobleman or a beggar; it would have been hard for the haughtiest stranger to have assigned him his proper station in society. But now that he was enveloped in the old calico robes which had grown yellow in the same service, he was badged and ticketed, and fell into his place at once—a parish child—the orphan of a workhouse—the humble, half-starved drudge—to be cuffed and buffeted through the world—despised by all, and pitied by none.

Oliver cried lustily. If he could have known that he was an orphan, left to the tender mercies of church-wardens and overseers, perhaps he would have cried the louder.

Text 48

Mayhew, Henry, *The London Labour and the London Poor*, 1850-2

Extract from 'Watercress Girl'

The little watercress girl who gave me the following statement, although only eight years of age, had entirely lost all childish ways, and was, indeed, in thoughts and manner, a woman. There was something cruelly pathetic in hearing this infant, so young that her features had scarcely formed themselves, talking of the bitterest struggles of life, with the calm earnestness of one who had endured them all. I did not know how to talk with her. At first I treated her as a child, speaking on childish subjects; so that I might, by being familiar with her, remove all shyness, and get her to narrate her life freely.

I asked her about her toys and her games with her companions; but the look of amazement that answered me soon put an end to any attempt at fun on my part. I then talked to her about the parks, and whether she ever went to them. "The parks!" she replied in wonder, "where are they?" I explained to her, telling her that they were large open places with green grass and tall trees, where beautiful carriages drove about, and people walked for pleasure, and children played.

Her eyes brightened up a little as I spoke; and she asked, half doubtingly, "Would they let such as me go there--just to look?" All her knowledge seemed to begin and end with watercresses, and what they fetched. She knew no more of London than that part she had

seen on her rounds, and believed that no quarter of the town was handsomer or pleasanter than it was at Farringdon-market or at Clerkenwell, where she lived.

[...]

"I go about the streets with water-creases, crying, 'Four bunches a penny, water-creases.' I am just eight years old--that's all, and I've a big sister, and a brother and a sister younger than I am. On and off, I've been very near a twelvemonth in the streets. Before that, I had to take care of a baby for my aunt. No, it wasn't heavy--it was only two months old; but I minded it for ever such a time--till it could walk. It was a very nice little baby, not a very pretty one; but, if I touched it under the chin, it would laugh. Before I had the baby, I used to help mother, who was in the fur trade; and, if there was any slits in the fur, I'd sew them up. My mother learned me to needle-work and to knit when I was about five. I used to go to school, too; but I wasn't there long. I've forgot all about it now, it's such a time ago; and mother took me away because the master whacked me, though the missus use'n't to never touch me. I didn't like him at all. What do you think? he hit me three times, ever so hard, across the face with his cane, and made me go dancing down stairs; and when mother saw the marks on my cheek, she went to blow him up, but she couldn't see him--he was afraid. That's why I left school.

Text 49

Dickens, Charles, *Bleak House*, 1852-3

Extract from Ch. 16

Then, she slightly beckons to him, and says, "Come here!"

Jo follows her, a pace or two, into a quiet court.

"Are you the boy I've read of in the papers?" she asked behind her veil.

"I don't know," says Jo, staring moodily at the veil, "nothink about no papers. I don't know nothink about nothink at all."

"Were you examined at an inquest?"

"I don't know nothink about no — where I was took by the beadle, do you mean?" says Jo.

"Was the boy's name at the inkwhich Jo?"

"Yes."

"That's me!" says Jo.

"Come farther up."

"You mean about the man?" says Jo, following. "Him as was dead?"

"Hush! Speak in a whisper! Yes. Did he look, when he was living, so very ill and poor?"

"O, jist!" says Jo.

"Did he look like — not like you?" says the woman with abhorrence.

"O, not so bad as me," says Jo. "I'm a reg'lar one I am! You didn't know him, did you?"

"How dare you ask me if I knew him?"

"No offence, my lady," says Jo with much humility; for even he has got at the suspicion of her being a lady.

"I am not a lady. I am a servant."

"You are a jolly servant!" says Jo without the least idea of saying anything offensive; merely as a tribute of admiration.

"Listen and be silent. Don't talk to me, and stand farther from me!"

Text 50

Dickens, Charles, *Hard Times*, 1854

Extract from Ch. 1

“NOW, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir!”

The scene was a plain, bare, monotonous vault of a schoolroom, and the speaker's square forefinger emphasized his observations by underscoring every sentence with a line on the schoolmaster's sleeve. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's square wall of a forehead, which had his eyebrows for its base, while his eyes found commodious cellarage in two dark caves, overshadowed by the wall. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's mouth, which was wide, thin, and hard set. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's voice, which was inflexible, dry, and dictatorial. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's hair, which bristled on the skirts of his bald head, a plantation of firs to keep the wind from its shining surface, all covered with knobs, like the crust of a plum pie, as if the head had scarcely warehouse-room for the hard facts stored inside. The speaker's obstinate carriage, square coat, square legs, square shoulders, — nay, his very neckcloth, trained to take him by the throat with an unaccommodating grasp, like a stubborn fact, as it was, — all helped the emphasis.

“In this life, we want nothing but Facts, sir; nothing but Facts!”

The speaker, and the schoolmaster, and the third grown person present, all backed a little, and swept with their eyes the inclined plane of little vessels then and there arranged in order, ready to have imperial gallons of facts poured into them until they were full to the brim.

Text 51

Verga, Giovanni, *Nedda*, 1874

Extract from ending to ‘Nedda’

Tre giorni dopo udì un gran cicaliccio per la strada. Si affacciò al muricciolo, e vide in mezzo ad un crocchio di contadini e di comari Janu disteso su di una scala a piuoli, pallido come un cencio lavato, e colla testa fasciata da un fazzoletto tutto sporco di sangue. Lungo la via dolorosa, prima di giungere al suo casolare, egli, tenendola per mano, le narrò come, trovandosi così debole per le febbri, era caduto da un'alta cima, e s'era concio in quel modo. — Il cuore te lo diceva: — mormorava con un triste sorriso. Ella l'ascoltava coi suoi grand'occhi spalancati, pallida come lui e tenendolo per mano. Il domani egli morì.

Allora Nedda, sentendo muoversi dentro di sé qualcosa che quel morto le lasciava come un triste ricordo, volle correre in chiesa a pregare per lui la Vergine Santa. Sul sacrato incontrò il prete che sapeva la sua vergogna, si nascose il viso nella mantellina e tornò indietro derelitta.

Adesso, quando cercava del lavoro, le ridevano in faccia, non per schernire la ragazza colpevole, ma perché la povera madre non poteva più lavorare come prima. Dopo i primi rifiuti, e le prime risate, ella non osò cercare più oltre, e si chiuse nella sua casipola, al pari di un uccelletto ferito che va a rannicchiarsi nel suo nido. Quei pochi soldi raccolti in fondo alla calza se ne andarono l'un dopo l'altro, e dietro ai soldi la bella veste nuova, e il bel fazzoletto di seta. Lo zio Giovanni la soccorreva per quel poco che poteva, con quella carità indulgente e riparatrice senza la quale la morale del curato è ingiusta e sterile, e le impedì così di morire di fame. Ella diede alla luce una bambina rachitica e stenta; quando le dissero che non era un

maschio pianse come aveva pianto la sera in cui aveva chiuso l'uscio del casolare dietro al cataletto che se ne andava, e s'era trovata senza la mamma; ma non volle che la buttassero alla Ruota.

— Povera bambina! Che incominci a soffrire almeno il più tardi che sia possibile! — disse.

Le comari la chiamavano sfacciata, perché non era stata ipocrita, e perché non era snaturata. Alla povera bambina mancava il latte, giacché alla madre scarseggiava il pane. Ella deperì rapidamente, e invano Nedda tentò spremere fra i labbruzzi affamati il sangue del suo seno. Una sera d'inverno, sul tramonto, mentre la neve fioccava sul tetto, e il vento scuoteva l'uscio mal chiuso, la povera bambina, tutta fredda, livida, colle manine contratte, fissò gli occhi vitrei su quelli ardenti della madre, diede un guizzo, e non si mosse più.

Nedda la scosse, se la strinse al seno con impeto selvaggio, tentò di scaldarla coll'alito e coi baci, e quando s'accorse che era proprio morta, la depose sul letto dove aveva dormito sua madre, e le s'inginocchiò davanti, cogli occhi asciutti e spalancati fuor di misura.

— Oh! benedette voi che siete morte! — esclamò. — Oh! benedetta voi, Vergine Santa! che mi avete tolto la mia creatura per non farla soffrire come me! —

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Verga, Giovanni, *Vita dei campi*, 1881

Extract from beginning of 'Rosso Malpelo'

Malpelo si chiamava così perchè aveva i capelli rossi; ed aveva i capelli rossi perchè era un ragazzo malizioso e cattivo, che prometteva di riescire un fior di birbone. Sicchè tutti alla cava della rena rossa lo chiamavano Malpelo; e persino sua madre, col sentirgli dir sempre a quel modo, aveva quasi dimenticato il suo nome di battesimo.

Del resto, ella lo vedeva soltanto il sabato sera, quando tornava a casa con quei pochi soldi della settimana; e siccome era *malpelo* c'era anche a temere che ne sottraesse un paio, di quei soldi; nel dubbio, per non sbagliare, la sorella maggiore gli faceva la ricevuta a scapaccioni.

Però il padrone della cava aveva confermato che i soldi erano tanti e non più; e in coscienza erano anche troppi per Malpelo, un monellaccio che nessuno avrebbe voluto vederselo davanti, e che tutti schivavano come un can rognoso, e lo accarezzavano coi piedi, allorchè se lo trovavano a tiro.