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Female Representation in Hard Times by Charles Dickens

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تمثيل المرأة في رواية الأوقات الصعبة للكاتب تشارلز ديكنز

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المستخلص

إن الكفاح من أجل تحرير المرأة قائم منذ قرون ، وهو خامد في الحقبة السابقة. ومع ذلك ، فإن تنامي النشاط الراديكالي في الحركة النسائية جمع الزخم وبلغ ذروته في أواخر العصر الفيكتوري. كان التحريض النسوي في ذلك العصر سمة ملحوظة صدمت المحافظ الفيكتوري. حيث تم استخدام المصطلح لأول مرة من قبل الكاتب المسرحي الفرنسي ألكسندر دوما في عام ١٨٧٢. من الكتاب المقدس العبري والفلسفة اليونانية حتى الوقت الحاضر ، تميل الأنثى إلى تعريفها بمرجع سلبي - ضعيف ، سهل الانقياد ، رجولي ، وحسي. تعتبر دراسة النسويات الفيكتوريات مصدر اهتمام لمدى النسوية الحديثة. لذا يمكن تمييز الصلة بين الروائين والنسويات في نيتهم إجراء الإصلاحات. شهدت الحقبة الانتقالية تغييراً في صورة المرأة ذاتها ؛ كان الملاك في المنزل يتحول ببطء إلى امرأة حازمة ، امرأة تجد صوتها الذي أثار الارتباك في فهم المرأة الجديدة. تشير الأدبيات التي حفزت مثل هذا الارتباك إلى قيمة قابليتها للقراءة. أبدت النسوية اهتماماً بإعادة صياغة الأدب الماضي ، وهي علامة إيجابية لإعادة النظر فيها.

Abstract

The fight for women's emancipation has existed for centuries, dormant in the previous era. Still, the sprouting of radical activity in the women's movement gathered impetus and peaked in the late Victorian era. The feminist agitation of the era was a noticeable feature that shocked the Victorian conservative. The term was first used by French dramatist Alexander Dumas in 1872. From the Hebrew Bible and Greek philosophy to the present, the female tends to be defined by negative reference-weak, docile, virile, and sensual. The study of Victorian feminists is a source of interest to the extent of modern feminism. The link between novelists and feminists can be discerned in their intention to bring reforms. The transition era saw a change in the very image of women; the angel in the house was slowly transforming into an assertive woman, a woman finding her voice which stimulated confusion in the very understanding of the new woman. The literature that stimulated such confusion signals their readability value. Feminism has shown interest in re-fashioning the past literature, which is a positive sign to revisit.

The Works and Life of Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) was a nineteenth century English writer who wrote such classics as: A Christmas Carol, Oliver Twist, David Copperfield, A Tale Of Two Cities, Great Expectations, and many others. He was born into a middle class family, but when he came home from boarding school at the age of ten he found his family living in poverty. He was unable to return to school in order to help out at home. When he was twelve, his father was sent to prison for his debts. While the rest of the family lived in Marshalsea prison Charles was forced to work long hours in order to support himself. This left a powerful lifelong wound, social humiliation, and defeat. This was an extremely formative experience in young Charles's life.

Charles Dickens was a very well known and loved author for his time. Though his stories contained complex language and include many adult points and key ideas. Most of his works assume the view of a young person growing up. His novels contain many key insights which can only be fully appreciated by those who have already grown up, or those who are in the process of growth. "In his enormous body of works, Dickens combined masterly storytelling, humor, pathos, and irony with sharp social criticism and an acute observation of people and places, both real and imagined" (Sundell). Most of Dickens' works have the main character as a young boy facing the hardships of growing up in a poor family or having the life of a pauper in a big city. In these tales, though at times fictional, Dickens seems to portray his life as a child through his books. The time period about which Dickens' books were written is the mid nineteenth century. They were written as if through the eyes of a child no more than twelve years old. The response that the reader may have to this situation is that of a warm and understanding feeling. The joy and bliss of

the main character is rarely showed; the main attitude is the overwhelming complexity of situations that a boy of that age must face.

The reader's reaction to this may be to feel depressed because Dickens' has not showed more blissful times in the lives of his main characters. In the ending, however, Dickens' always seems to leave the reader with a warm feeling since the last scenes are usually happy. The personal life that Dickens had when growing up must have been tough due to the harsh tone used in describing the growing up of his characters.

Dickens' life was that of a well respected author and novelist. Growing up with a childhood of poverty, Dickens became one of the most famous and best loved authors of his time. Dickens was born on February 7, 1812 in Portsmouth, yet spent most of his childhood in London and Kent. He started school at the age of nine, but his education was soon halted when his father was incarcerated for debt in 1824. Feeling utterly humiliated, Dickens was forced to support himself working in a shoe-polish factory. Later, Charles described his youth in the novel David Copperfield with little change from what had occurred in his own life. Between the years of 1824 and 1826, Dickens again attended school, though he was for the most part self-educated.

In the year of 1827, Dickens took a job as a legal clerk. Soon, learning short-hand, Dickens began to interview the courts of parliament where he adapted the technique of quickly describing situations in great detail which lead to his creative writing later in his life

Feminism: Concept and Theory

The term feminism can describe a political, cultural, or economic movement to establish equal rights and legal protection for women. Feminism involves political and sociological theories and philosophies concerned with issues of gender difference, as well as a movement that advocates gender equality for women and campaigns for women's rights and interests. Although the terms "feminism" and "feminist" did not gain widespread use until the 1970s, they were already being used in public parlance much earlier; for instance, Katherine Hepburn speaks of the "feminist movement" in the 1942 film *Woman of the Year*.

According to Maggie Humm and Rebecca Walker, the history of feminism can be divided into three waves. The first feminist wave was in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the second was in the 1960s and 1970s, and the third extends from the 1990s to the present. Feminist theory emerged from these feminist movements. It manifests in various disciplines, such as feminist geography, feminist history, and feminist literary criticism.

Feminism has altered predominant perspectives in various areas within Western society, ranging from culture to law. Feminist activists have campaigned for women's legal rights (rights of contract, property rights, voting rights); women's right to bodily integrity and autonomy, abortion rights, and reproductive rights (including access to contraception and quality prenatal care); for protection of women and girls from domestic violence, sexual harassment, and rape; for workplace rights, including maternity leave and equal pay; against misogyny; and other forms of gender-specific discrimination against women. During much of its history, most feminist movements and theories had leaders who were predominantly middle-class white women from Western Europe

and North America. However, since Sojourner Truth's 1851 speech to American feminists, women of other races have proposed alternative feminisms. This trend accelerated in the 1960s with the Civil Rights movement in the United States and the collapse of European colonialism in Africa, the Caribbean, parts of Latin America, and Southeast Asia. Since then, women in former European colonies and the Third World have proposed "Postcolonial" and "Third World" feminisms. Some Postcolonial Feminists, such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty, are critical of Western feminism for being ethnocentric. Black feminists like Angela Davis and Alice Walker share this view. History Simone de Beauvoir wrote that "the first time we see a woman take up her pen in defense of her sex" was Christine de Pizan, who wrote *Epitre au Dieu d'Amour* (Epistle to the God of Love) in the 15th century. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa and Modesta di Pozzo di Forzi worked in the 16th century. Marie Le Jars de Gournay, Anne Bradstreet, and Francois Poullain de la Barre wrote during the 17th.

Waves of Feminism

The first wave refers mainly to women's suffrage movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (mainly concerned with women's right to vote). The second wave refers to the ideas and actions associated with the women's liberation movement beginning in the 1960s (which campaigned for legal and social rights for women). The third wave refers to a continuation of, and a reaction to, the perceived failures of second-wave feminism, beginning in the 1990s.

A.First-wave feminism refers to an extended period of feminist activity during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the United Kingdom and the United States. Originally

it focused on the promotion of equal contract and property rights for women and the opposition to chattel marriage and ownership of married women (and their children) by their husbands. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, activism focused primarily on gaining political power, particularly the right of women's suffrage. However, feminists such as Voltairine de Cleyre and Margaret Sanger were still active in campaigning for women's sexual, reproductive, and economic rights at this time. In 1854, Florence Nightingale established female nurses as adjuncts to the military.

In Britain, the Suffragettes and, possibly more effectively, the Suffragists campaigned for the women's vote. In 1918 the Representation of the People Act 1918 was passed, granting the vote to women over 30 who owned houses. In 1928 this was extended to all women over twenty-one. In the United States, leaders of this movement included Lucretia Mott, Lucy Stone, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony, who each campaigned for the abolition of slavery before championing women's right to vote; all were strongly influenced by Quaker's thought. American first-wave feminism involved a wide range of women. Some, such as Frances Willard, belonged to conservative Christian groups such as the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. Others, such as Matilda Joselyn Gage, were more radical and expressed themselves within the National Woman Suffrage Association or individually. American first-wave feminism is considered to have ended with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution (1919), granting women the right to vote in all states. The term first wave was coined retrospectively after second-wave feminism began to

describe a newer feminist movement that focused as much on fighting social and cultural inequalities as political inequalities.

B. Second-wave feminism refers to the period of activity in the early 1960s and lasting through the late 1980s. The scholar Imelda Whelehan suggests that the second wave was a continuation of the earlier phase of feminism involving the suffragettes in the UK and USA. Second-wave feminism has continued to exist since then and coexists with third-wave feminism. The scholar Estelle Freedman compares first and second-wave feminism saying that the first wave focused on rights such as voting, whereas the second wave was largely concerned with other equality issues, such as ending discrimination. The feminist activist and author Carol Hanisch coined the slogan "The Personal is Political," which became synonymous with the second wave. Second-wave feminists saw women's cultural and political inequalities as inextricably linked. They encouraged women to understand aspects of their personal lives as deeply politicized and reflecting sexist power structures.

C.Third-wave feminism began in the early 1990s, arising as a response to perceived failures of the second wave and also as a response to the backlash against initiatives and movements created by the second wave. Third-wave feminism seeks to challenge or avoid what it deems the second wave's essentialist definitions of femininity, which (according to them) over-emphasize the experiences of upper-middle-class white women. A post-structuralist interpretation of gender and sexuality is central to much of the third wave's ideology. Third-wave feminists often focus on "micro-politics" and challenge the second wave's paradigm as to what is, or is not, good for females. The third wave has its origins in the mid-1980s. Feminist leaders rooted in the second wave, like Gloria Anzaldua, bell hooks, Chela Sandoval,

Cherrie Moraga, Audre Lorde, Maxine Hong Kingston, and many other black feminists, sought to negotiate a space within feminist thought for consideration of race-related subjectivities. Third-wave feminism also contains internal debates between different feminists, such as the psychologist Carol Gilligan (who believes that there are important differences between the sexes) and those who believe that there are no inherent differences between the sexes and contend that gender roles are due to social conditioning

Feminism and Dicken's Fiction

In the introduction to Lizbeth Goodman's *Literature and Gender*, feminism is defined as the movement against women's cultural and historical subordination and the struggle for economic, political, and social emancipation. Feminism was an aesthetic that attained prominence and significance in the early twentieth century, which resulted in the rise of many female writers such as George Elliot, Virginia Woolf, Charlotte Bronte, and Elizabeth Gaskell (Travers 900). However, before the term feminism became a literary aesthetic, early Victorian writers like Jane Austen had already written works that were later recognized as feminist literature. Feminism is the women's quest for recognition, power, and authority, and it attempts to relocate women beyond the confines of their patriarchal society (901). Women fight for emancipation because "they are treated as a kind of subordinate beings, and not as a part of the human species" (Mary Wollstonecraft).

Victorian feminism was the women's struggle for equality in Victorian society in the political, social, and economic aspects that regimented life. Victorian feminism plays a major role in impacting the writings of Victorian writers, both male and female.

This section will provide an overview of Victorian gender constructions and Charles Dickens' writings from the perspective of Victorian feminism.

In Victorian society, the home was an important sphere, and it also outlined the relations between husband and wife in the domestic sphere and, on a larger scale, the relations between women and men. Mary Lyndon Shanley points out that "when most Victorians spoke or wrote about themselves, they testified to the importance of home and hearth in their constellation of values" (4). Therefore, domesticity was an important value in Victorian society as it was inseparable from motherhood, and it was portrayed as sufficient for women, and many middle-class women regarded motherhood and domestic life as a substitute for women's productive role (Abrams).

The ideology of the home was greatly emphasized by the Victorians, and they also believed that it was important to preserve the identity of the home even at the cost of demeaning any claim by adult women, daughters, and wives to social and legal equality, individuality, or rights independent of the men they were attached to (Ruckert). The home was also sanctified as an island of tranquillity and obedience which was a blessing to the patriarchal rule of the male head who completely controlled the spouse and barred her from the public life of politics and economy. This tyrannical order sprang from the view of the natural sex difference, which maintained that women's function in nature was childbearing and care providers; therefore, they had to be confined to private life. Liberal political theorists such as John Locke and David Wootton believed that nature was the realm out of which people evolved to become human, to form societies, governments, social contacts, and the state, which created a class and gender

distinction between men and women (263). It was such patriarchal beliefs that Victorian feminists had to challenge and overturn in order to form the fairer and more equal society that they envisioned. Therefore, Victorian feminism was a struggle against women's confinement to the private life and their yearning for belonging to the public world of politics and business.

In the Victorian society, the male figure was the symbol of authority, which shows the patriarchal nature of the society. Charles Dickens portrays this ideology in his works, as noted at the beginning of *Great Expectations* when Pip is at the graveyard looking at his family's tombstones. The authority of Pip's father is confirmed by how the inscriptions on the tombstones of his mother and siblings refer back to the fact that they are subject to him. Pip's father is the only one who is named and described as "late of this parish," while Pip's mother is described as "wife of the above" (*Great Expectations* 3-4). The tombstone text inscribes divisions of power within the family, which are registered in Pip's reading, and the interpretation of the appearance of his lost parents accords with Victorian stereotypes of masculinity and femininity (Waters 15). To speak of Victorian feminism refers to the fight against such stereotypes and to create equality between the masculine and feminine world.

Mary Wollstonecraft, one of the early British feminists, in her work *Vindication of the Rights of Women*, established that "Girls marry merely to better themselves, to borrow a significant vulgar phrase, and have such perfect power over their hearts as not to permit themselves to fall in love till a man with a superiour fortune offers." Due to the intensive industrialism, urbanization, and social change, there emerged massive competition within the new middle class, which controlled the economy, and this was a world

controlled by men to which no woman could belong (Nead). In order to acquire economic stability, women were forced to marry men of a higher economic status, as depicted by Jane Austen in her novel *Pride and Prejudice*, which satirically depicts Mrs. Bennet's pursuit of finding financially stable husbands for her daughters. However, Charlotte Bronte utterly repudiates marriages for inconveniences in *Jane Eyre* when Mr. Rochester proposes to Jane:

“Do you think I can stay to become nothing to you? Do you think I am an automation?-a machine without feelings? And can you bear to have my morsel of bread snatched from my lips and my drop of living water dashed from my cup? Do you think because I am poor, obscure, plain and little, I am soul and heartless? You think wrong!- I have as much soul as you, and full as much heart. . .” (278)

He rejection of Mr. Rochester's marriage proposal is an assertion of women's denial to marry for economic stability. Jane affirms her possession of feelings and shows that she will not marry a man who will treat her as a mere machine. Bronte's view of marriage is that of equality and mutual feelings, one of the key aspects which was being promoted by Victorian feminism.

In this way, she rejects the traditional view of marriage in which a woman should marry a financially stable man in place of love. Bronte once told her publisher that she perceives economic dependency as “the great curse of single female life” because it forces the woman to marry for economic reasons (qtd. by Zlotnick 3). In addition, the creation of an assertive character like Jane, who

rejects a marriage proposal, is a sign of a “desire to escape the oppressive social order” (qtd. by Zlotnick 3). Unfortunately, marriage did not entirely offer economic stability and independence for women since the Victorian society was very patriarchal. There were laws which forced women to be subservient to their husbands; for example, the common law doctrine of covertures, which the Victorians felt defined roles ordained by the natural and theological order, which meant that through marriage, man and woman became one person (Shanley 8). Therefore, married women could not independently sign contracts nor draft valid wills, and any married woman's property legally belonged to her husband. The struggle for women to be recognized as equal entities to men in society is further reiterated by Charlotte Bronte through the creation of the character Bertha Mason in *Jane Eyre*, who is physically strong but banished from society because she is said to be "mentally disturbed." This is an indication of the belief that middle and upper-class women were regarded as inherently sick if they tried to step beyond their prescribed roles (Flekke 28).

In Victorian society, it was difficult to step out of the female boundaries, and any woman who attempted or succeeded was immediately punished or became a social outcast. Charles Dickens also depicts this phenomenon in *Great Expectations* through the character of Mrs. Joe Gargery, who is aggressive and authoritative, but she is immediately brought to her place through her attack by Orlick and becomes submissive and dependent. The Industrial Revolution brought about a change in focus on women's labor. Women had the opportunity to explore prospects outside the family establishment or even earn money (Beddoe 92). However, the Victorian society maintained the view that a working woman

would make a potentially irresponsible wife and mother. Writers like Charles Dickens also portray this ideology in the novel *Bleak House* through the creation of Mrs. Jellyby, who is preoccupied with the colonization in Africa. However, she is portrayed as an incompetent mother who is unable to manage her children and her household. Victorian feminism was largely concerned with emancipating women from the private world of domesticity and gaining equal rights and recognition in the public world dominated by men. In the Victorian society, a woman who attempted to step beyond her female boundaries was immediately punished and could also be ostracized from society. This idea was largely prominent before most laws that protected women's rights were passed. Most Victorian writers, both male and female, were greatly aware of feminism, but some male writers supported the patriarchal ideology that women were to be subservient to men. On the other hand, most female Victorian writers were in support of women's emancipation. Thus, their novels depicted heroines who were either independent or could step out of the man-made female boundaries.

Sherry Ortner notes that in every society: “the psychic mode associated with women seems to stand at both the bottom and at the top of the scale of human modes of relating” (qtd. by Gilbert and Gubar 814). Ortner further explains that “both the subversive feminine symbols (witches, evil eye, menstrual pollution, castrating mothers) and the feminine symbols of transcendence (mother, goddesses, merciful dispensers of salvation, female symbols of justice) can appear from certain points of view to stand both under and over the sphere of culture’s hegemony”(814). Thus, male writers like Charles Dickens create two types of women in their novels, the “subversive feminine symbols” and

“the feminine symbols of transcendence” (814). Therefore, “the woman is denied the autonomy, the subjectivity that the pen represents, she is not only excluded from culture, but she also becomes herself an embodiment of just those extremes of mysteries and intransigent “otherness” which culture confronts with worship or fear, love or loathing” (814).

Likewise, Dickens also creates characters who represent the extremes of cultural hegemony, the "pure woman" or the woman who is confronted by "fear" or "loathing." The images of "angel" and "monster" have been so ubiquitous throughout literature by men, and much preference is always given to the "ideal" woman, who is usually an embodiment of true femininity as shaped by patriarchy (Gilbert and Gubar 812). The "monstrous" female characters are women who are searching for liberty, but Dickens kills the rebellious nature in them and creates vulnerable women, as seen in Mrs. Joe Gargery and even the murderer Molly. However, John Ruskin affirmed that the woman's "power" is not for rule, nor for battle, and her intellect is not for invention or creation, but for "sweet orderings" of "domesticity" (qtd. by Gilbert and Gubar 816). Even though Dickens is a male writer who conforms to the Victorian ideology of women, he strikes the reader as an author who is aware of the women's plight and their yearning for significance and belonging in a patriarchal society which abuses and marginalizes them.

However, Dickens does not depict female characters who have economic liberty as those expressed by later feminist writers. His female characters are women who are yearning for financial freedom, unlike the modern women who are independent and self-sufficient, as declared by Virginia Woolf that "The ordinary woman depends on the ordinary woman" (qtd. in Showalter 9).

Victorian women were economically dependent on men as a means of survival, as noted in most Victorian novels, particularly those by Jane Austen, whose female characters are usually in search of propertied men.

The Victorian society denied any forms of sexual feelings in women and restricted the role of sex to a procreative one (Seidman 47). Women were supposed to suppress their sexual desires because the society valued purity in a woman. Victorian women were also supposed to maintain their virginity until marriage. However, characters like Nancy in *Oliver Twist* become a prostitute and break the Victorian ideology of the woman as an angel or virgin because she has multiple sexual partners. On the other hand, Lady Dedlock also subverts the ideology of female purity by conceiving out of wedlock. Both characters are depictions of women in a quest for sexual freedom in a society which forces them to suppress their sexuality

An Introduction to Hard Times: its structure

Charles Dickens' novel, *Hard Times*, is a story of two struggles--the struggle of fact versus imagination and the struggle between two classes. It takes place in Coketown, an industrial-age English city. The novel is divided into two sections. One deals with the struggle of upper class members of society and their struggle to learn the value of imagination. The other involves a working class man who is trapped by those in that upper class who trap him in a dreary existence.

Thomas Gradgrind, the father of Louisa, Tom, and June not only stresses facts in the classroom in which he teaches, but also at home to his family. Thomas has brought up his children to know nothing but facts. Everything is black and white, right or wrong--nothing in between. He discourages such fanciful notions as

going to the circus or having flowered carpet. Everyone knows, one cannot have flowered carpet. One would trample all over them and they would end up dying. In *Hard Times*, two classes are relevant in Coketown. The upper class, which were few in numbers, are dominant over the middle class, which is larger in numbers. Stephen Blackpool represents the working class. He is a warm-hearted man trapped in the run down society. He feels he deserves this mediocre lifestyle. Blackpool was originally employed under Bounderby, but is fired for standing up for his beliefs.

This type of behavior was totally unacceptable during the period of time as it involved imagination and independence. Bounderby portrayed himself as a self-made man, when in fact, he had everything handed to him with a silver spoon. His mother gave him the very best of everything, including a wonderful education. This demonstrates that the upper and middle classes were not just two different classes, but two different worlds.

The novel is divided into three sections, "Sowing," "Reaping," and "Garnering"—are a reference to the Biblical saying: 'for whatsoever a man soweth [sowed], that shall he also reap'. Besides, these agricultural titles are ironic alongside the industrial focus of the novel. In the first section, the seeds are planted for the rest of the novel—Sissy comes to live with the Gradgrinds, Louisa is married to Bounderby, and Tom is apprenticed at the bank. In the second section, the characters reap the results of those seeds—Louisa's collapse, Tom's robbery, and Stephen's exile. In the third section, whose title, "Garnering," literally means collecting or picking up the pieces of the harvest that were missed, the characters attempt to restore equilibrium (a state of balance) to their lives, and they face their futures with new emotional resources at their disposal:

The titles of the sections, however, refer not only to the harvesting of events, but also to the harvesting of ideas. In the first chapter of *Hard Times*, Gradgrind declares his intention to "plant" only facts in his children's minds, and to "root out everything else," such as feelings and fancies. This metaphor returns to haunt him when, just before her collapse, Louisa points to the place where her heart should be and asks her father, "[W]hat have you done with the garden that should have bloomed once, in this great wilderness here?" Louisa implies that by concentrating all his efforts on planting facts in his children's minds, Gradgrind has neglected to plant any sentiments in their hearts, leaving her emotionally barren.

One of the critics summarizes the plot selectively and subjectively, focusing on the fate of Stephen Blackpool as both a social and political issue, i.e. on Stephen as working-class and on his desire to divorce his drunken wife. When he goes to see Bounderby to ask for help in divorcing his wife, Bounderby lets him know bluntly that divorce is only for the rich, and Simpson notes acerbically his and 'Mr Dickens' disgust [that] neither death nor the laws will divorce him'. The same critic reminds us of the idea of agricultural development embodied in the titles of each book of *Hard Times* (Sowing, Reaping, and Garnering) when he rehearses some aspects of the plot.

A Feminist Reading of *Hard Times*

Importance of femininity During the Victorian era, women were commonly associated with supposedly feminine traits like compassion, moral purity, and emotional sensitivity. *Hard Times* suggests that because they possess these traits, women can counteract the mechanizing effects of industrialization. For instance, when Stephen feels depressed about the monotony of his life as a factory worker, Rachael's gentle fortitude inspires him to

keep going. He sums up her virtues by referring to her as his guiding angel. Similarly, Sissy introduces love into the Gradgrind household, ultimately teaching Louisa how to recognize her emotions. Indeed, Dickens suggests that Mr. Gradgrind's philosophy of self-interest and calculating rationality has prevented Louisa from developing her natural feminine traits. Perhaps Mrs. Gradgrind's inability to exercise her femininity allows Gradgrind to overemphasize the importance of fact in the rearing of his children. On his part, Bounderby ensures that his rigidity will remain untouched since he marries the cold, emotionless product of Mr. and Mrs. Gradgrind's marriage. Through the various female characters in the novel, Dickens suggests that feminine compassion is necessary to restore social harmony

Fredric Jameson once argued that political interpretation of literary texts should not be conceived as 'an optional auxiliary to other interpretive methods,' yet it shall be considered as the 'absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation' (Jameson, *The political unconscious*, pp.17). Literary work, by and large, is to 'confront political issues' (Lucas, *Literature and Politics in the 19th century*, pp.1). It can well be said that this is also where literature overlaps with politics. Likewise, Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* will be examined under the assumption that a political message or purpose is to be arrived at. In the following essay, two themes will be analyzed, namely the dehumanization and oppression of the working class brought by the Industrial Revolution as well as Dickens's criticism of the devastating effects of education when the undue emphasis is laid on facts brought by the Enlightenment in relation to the *Hard Times*' overall theme. Before getting into the details of the literary text itself and all the

surrounding discussions and debates, it is always beneficial for us first to gain some understanding as to the author's background.

Dickens was born into the grassroots sector, and he worked as a boot-blackening factory worker for a period of six months at the age of twelve. When he described this early experience of child labor, he bewailed that "no words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sank into this companionship...the deep remembrance of the sense I had of being utterly neglected and hopeless; of the shame I felt in my position...My whole nature was penetrated with grief and humiliation" (Watkin, Dickens: In search of himself, pp.20). It is also worth noting that Dickens dedicated *Hard Times* to Thomas Carlyle, who had set out the rights of the working-class man, and was said to be influencing Dickens himself the most, which at the same time was possibly his intended political message. In *Hard Times*, the characters centered around a fictional small industrial town in England called Coketown (which shares many resemblances with Preston, a place that Dickens mentioned earlier before in an article called 'On Strike'), "a town of red brick or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but as matters stood, it was a town of machinery and tall chimneys" (Dickens, *Hard Times*, pp.22). Just as *The Pilgrim's Progress*, nearly every single name in the story, be it the name of a place or a person, suggests some underlying meaning.

For instance, the word Coketown is a coined word of 'coke' and 'town,' with coke meaning the residue of coal and all the grim pollution caused by coke, by extension, the Industrial Revolution. Alienation and fragmentation are two major recurring themes when it comes to Dickens's portrayal of the dehumanization and oppression the working class suffered. When depicting the factory, the image we have got there is 'so many hundred Hands in this Mill; so many hundred horse Steam Power (Dickens, *Hard Times*,

pp.56). The constant description of this working class as 'Hands' (i.e., the body part that the workers were in use) in Book The First: Sowing serves as an illustrative example to show how this delineation of fragmentation eventually leads to alienation of labor since the proletariat cannot enjoy the fruits of their labor themselves.

It comes therefore as no surprise that Karl Marx, a materialist philosopher contemporary of Dickens who saw and understood capitalism as 'a system of exploitation and oppression of working class which reduces all human relationships to a "cash" nexus and the laborers must sell themselves as piecemeal, a commodity' (Habib, *Socially Conscious Criticism: The Fundamental Principles of Marxism*, pp. 209) would praise Dickens as "having issued to the world more political and social truths than have been uttered by all the professional, publicists, and moralists put together... and had drawn an accurate picture of the affected, ignorant, and tyrannical bourgeoisie" (Marx, *New York Daily Tribune*). Jameson is believed to hold the same view concerning the base/superstructure model as Marx as articulated in his article 'On Interpretation', "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle... oppressor and oppressed... in restoring to the surface of the text the repressed and buried reality of the fundamental history, that the doctrine of a political unconscious finds its function and its necessity" (Jameson, *The political unconscious*, pp.20).

Dickens revealed in *Hard Times* the 'faults and failings of modern industrialism' (*Hard Time: A Norton Critical Edition* by George Ford and Sylvere Monod, pp.5), yet he would not go as far as Marx as to overthrow the bourgeoisie and have the proletariat as the ruling class. Dickens's portrayal of the working class was "all issued from an intense sympathy with the suffering of

mankind and a strong desire to ameliorate the human condition" (Pollard, 'Sooty Manchester' and the Social-Reform Novel 1854-55).

It is safe, however, to consider that Dickens would have probably stopped at this- sympathy and hope for amelioration, and he would be reserved as to exercising direct confrontation against the bourgeoisie by forming trade unions, not to mention overthrowing them. This is evident in Stephen Blackpool's unwillingness to join the trade unions albeit his good character, "I'm th' one single Hand in Bounderby's mill, o' a' the men theer as don't coom in wi'th' proposed reg'lations. I canna' coom in wi' 'em. My friends, I doubt their doin' yo onny good. Licker they'll do yo hurt" in Book 2 Ch.4 Men and Brothers (Dickens, *Hard Times*, pp.107). In the meantime, he did not bow to Mr. Bounderby in spying and betraying his fellow workmates, replying to Bounderby, "Not rebels, not yet rascals. Nowt o' th' kind, ma'am, as I know and feel... We're patient too, an' wants in general to do right. An' I canna think the fawt is aw wi'us" in Book 2 Ch.5, Men and Masters (Dickens, *Hard Times*, pp.112). In short, Dickens "attacked bourgeois capitalism while decrying its bias against the unions, taking it for a stern warning against the menace of socialism," and he was therefore celebrated for his "foresight in predicting the crippling of an economy through union power or the self-destruction of industrialism through greed" (Manning, *Hard Times: An Annotated Bibliography*, pp.19).

After analyzing at length Dickens's view of the oppressed working-class people during the Industrial Revolution, we should now turn to his critique of the detrimental effects of education when the undue emphasis is laid on facts. Plato, in discussing how to create the best guardians and educators, once argued that children should not be allowed to "readily listen to any stories

made up by anyone and form opinions" and "our first business is to supervise the production of stories, and choose only those we think suitable, and reject the rest" (Plato, *On education*, pp.69). This concept of grounding education on reason and facts is somewhat revitalized in the Age of Enlightenment (also known as the Age of Reason) and has a sweeping influence across Europe.

Dickens wrote against this Enlightenment literary tradition and was very explicit throughout *Hard Times* in denouncing the education system solely grounded on facts and reason. For instance, Thomas Gradgrind is described as "A man of realities. A man of facts and calculations... With a rule and a pair of scales, and the multiplication table always in his pocket, sir, ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature" (Dickens, *Hard Times*, pp.8), with nature or 'The Nature' being widely celebrated in the Romantic literary tradition and it goes without saying that a person measuring beautiful and wonderful things with hard facts is essentially dull and mechanical. Not only was Gradgrind described as such, but he himself also made statements alike, "Reason is the only faculty to which education should be addressed" (Dickens, *Hard Times*, pp.19). Bounderby and Choakumchild held similar views as to education, rendering them equally monotonous.

As the story progresses, we soon know that education which was reduced to rationalism is nothing but a total failure when Tom and Louisa, children of Gradgrind who had once received this kind of education, lived a saddening life. To further exemplify, Tom robbed the bank while making Stephen his scapegoat and could not see his family eventually. Louisa, though being melancholic about her marriage with Bounderby, failed to express her inner feelings. Put into the context of the Industrial Revolution with the bourgeoisie being the ruling class, we can figure out the reason

why they favor education which does not allow 'fancy' and 'idle imagination' (Dickens, *Hard Times*, pp.20). Only with this kind of education system can the working-class people like Stephen give no thoughts at all as to how capitalism in practice gives rise to oppression of the working class so that people cannot stand up to their own feet and oppose oppression while the conscientious bourgeoisie like Louisa could not question about this because they simply lack the essential vocabulary for that and the unrelenting bourgeoisie like Bounderby could live a happier life without having to think about that.

However, we should also take note of the fact that it is the education system which Dickens was aiming to attack on instead of individual persons. This can be seen in Book 3: Chapter 9 'Final' when Dickens evaluates Gradgrind's past by asking, "Did he see himself... bending his hitherto inflexible theories to appointed circumstances; making his facts and figures subservient to Faith, Hope and Charity; and no longer trying to grind that Heavenly trio in his dusty little mills... Probably he had that much foreknowledge knowing his men" (Dickens, *Hard Times*, pp.218). It seems to the readers that Gradgrind went through an epiphany of 'Eureka' as the story goes on, and eventually, we readers have pretty much gone through a journey from the *Songs of Innocence* to the *Songs of Experience*, having gained the knowledge that the education system based on mere facts and pure reason is doomed to fail and we should return and find rest in the Romantic literary tradition, celebrating imagination and the beautiful Nature. Gradgrind at last gained the narrator's (namely Dickens's) sympathy back, and this view was confirmed in one of Dickens's letters (Letter to Henry Cole), writes that "I often say to Mr. Gradgrind that there is reason and good intention in much that he does- in fact, in all that he does- but that he overdoes it." Jane

Sinnett would also agree that, 'the purpose [of Hard Times] would be... to exhibit the evil effects of an exclusive education of the intellect, without a due cultivation of the finer feelings of the heart and the fancy' (Hard Times: A Norton Critical Edition- Jane Sinnet: Dickens as a Critic of Education, pp.309), as evident in Louisa's inability in airing her own feelings when asked to marry Bounderby, "There seems to be nothing there but languid and monotonous smoke. Yet when the night comes, Fire bursts out" (Dickens, Hard Times, pp.78), a mere statement of fact at first sight and suppressed emotions ready to explode after delving deeply into her inner thoughts and feelings.

Dickens's didactic tone throughout the course serves as a guiding voice for readers so as to prevent us readers from being misled by unnecessary ambiguity. "Hard Times is an apologue, a fiction in service of a thesis" (Jones, Ends and Means of Fictions: Hard Times and Mansfield Park, pp.216). Dickens made every endeavor to make clear his own argument and stance: The bourgeoisie should stop oppressing virtuous working-class people and should stop teaching people to write off emotions and feelings and base everything solely on facts which may from time to time be considered as a means to facilitate their further oppression but would soon prove a total and saddening failure. However, Dickens also doubted and cautioned against the formation of trade unions in opposition to bourgeoisie. Industrial Revolution was centuries before now, yet the issues which Dickens's political message in Hard Times targeted have all along been revolving, and not only is it true in our times, but it may well prophesize our political future.

Critical analysis

Hard Times by Charles Dickens investigates how English people and society suffered from poverty, persecution, and injustice of the

industrial era. The novel shows the various ways through which people gather power and dominance by rape and violating rights, independence and freedom. *Hard Times* shows tyranny and oppression of manufacturers and owners of factories during the 19th century. Dickens explores how drastically the Industrial Revolution changed lives of people particularly farmers. Through presenting multiplicity of Characters, Dickens's covers the lives of all the English classes including the lower class: those who suffered oppression and poverty, the middle: the mechanized "Hands" and the traditional elite class. In fact, *Hard Times* is a realistic novel that depicts how the industrialization in England drastically changed the lives of people. The workers (like Stephen and Rachael) work 24 hours as machines without getting their independence and rights. One of the most important purposes of Dickens in writing his novel *Hard Times* is to comment on the faults and mistakes of inventing machines because it mechanized people and brought pollution and malformation for nature. The novel discusses violating and exploitation by the manufacturers. The novel also reflects the theme of Fact Vs. Fancy. The novel emphasizes the idea that any method of ruling product or affairs that lacks sympathy, love and understanding between human being, is bitterly destructive. in *Hard Times* gives, children (like Louisa, Tom and Bitzer) are enrolled in schools and educated on facts and nothing else. They are treated only as numbers and they are deprived them from any kind of feeling, imagination and love. Thus, depending on this way of thinking and teaching, children would be dehumanized and turn them into only robots or machines. Dickens makes a comparison between the life of undervalued workers and the life of the owners of mills and factories who always try to control the life of people by applying their utilitarian principles at both schools and factories. It seems

that the writer wants to tell the English audience that this is the bitter truth of their bitter reality in which they live. The owners are the controllers of the English life as they try to transfer authority and legislate new laws that suit their own lives. Therefore, *Hard Times* is a direct indictment on Utilitarianism. Dickens strongly criticizes the utilitarian system of education and the different types of school, he describes teachers and their relationships with the owners of manufactures and how they always try to confirm negatively that the system which have been applied by the capitalism and utilitarianism is the only method that could increase and improve the lives of people of the English nation in particular. Utilitarianism in educational system refuses to teach and cultivate pupils and students imagination or any imagined subject that deals with fancy and supernatural elements. What they believe is just facts. They argue that life depends on truth and there is no existence to imagination. Some critics think that imagination would destruct and limit the advantage of both utilitarian and capitalist system because they believe that this would fail their plans, ambition, arrogance and pretension.

Conclusion

The book concludes with the upper class characters being forced into accepting that something other than facts exist. Thomas Gradgrind has given up his philosophy of facts by allowing his daughter back into his house.

Hard Times is regarded as one of the dystopian novel for it reflects the socio-political system of the English society that is corrupted with bribes and personal preferences. In addition, the novel exposes the inequality of social class and the wide gap between the destitution of the poor and the luxury of the rich. What is meant by this is the idea that the author aspires to reflect the realistic facts of his society and to resolve these crises by building new society

relying on justice, helping each other, rights and independence. He always tries to bridge the wide gap between luxury rich and indigence of poor people in which they are unequal. A.feminist study of Dickens' female characters determines that Dickens was sympathetic to the plight of Victorian women. His representation of female characters is a portrayal of the Victorian ideologies and perceptions towards women. Unlike the other novelists of his time who strongly promoted the Victorian gender constructions through their writings, Dickens subtly criticizes the treatment of women by the patriarchal society. So literature's reflection on feminist ideals through the 'long' nineteenth century inevitably places marriage at the center of its considerations. From Austen's Fanny Price, alarmed at being forced into marriage with a man of weak principles, to Grand's Edith Beale, who dies after contracting syphilis from her dissolute husband, nineteenth-century fiction, while paying lip service to the traditional novelistic happy ending, subjects marriage to relentless interrogation. At the same time, it stalls over alternative routes to independent self-sufficiency for women and finds work without love, or love without marriage, bleak consolation prizes to those who make a principled stand against the social norm.

Hard Times tracks and predicts the progression of feminism within the world. Through the various female characters in the novel, Dickens suggests that feminine compassion is essential to restore social harmony. We can assume that Dickens was a hidden feminist; whether he tried to mask it with mocking humor or not, this piece of feminine ante litteram highlights Dickens's ingenuity and feminine side. It's his protest or warning, informing society on the rise and bloom of women.

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