

CRITICISM



HIPPOLYTE TAINÉ

[The Two Classes of Characters in *Hard Times*]†

Take away the grotesque characters, who are only introduced to fill up and to excite laughter, and you will find that all Dickens' characters belong to two classes—people who have feelings and emotions, and people who have none. He contrasts the souls which nature creates with those which society deforms. One of his last novels, *Hard Times*, is an abstract of all the rest. He there exalts instinct above reason, intuition of heart above positive science; he attacks education built on statistics, figures, and facts; overwhelms the positive and mercantile spirit with misfortune and ridicule; combats the pride, hardness, selfishness of the merchant and the aristocrat; falls foul of manufacturing towns, towns of smoke and mud, which fetter the body in an artificial atmosphere, and the mind in a factitious existence. He seeks out poor artisans, mountebanks, a foundling, and crushes beneath their common sense, generosity, delicacy, courage, and sweetness, the false science, false happiness, and false virtue of the rich and powerful who despise them. He satirises oppressive society; praises oppressed nature; and his elegiac genius, like his satirical genius, finds ready to his hand in the English world around him, the sphere which it needs for its development.

JOHN RUSKIN

A Note on *Hard Times*‡

The essential value and truth of Dickens's writing have been unwisely lost sight of by many thoughtful persons merely because he presents his truth with some colour of caricature. Unwisely, because Dickens's caricature, though often gross, is never mistaken. Allowing for his manner of telling them, the things he tells us are always true. I wish that he could think it right to limit his brilliant exaggeration to works written only for public amusement; and when he takes up a subject of high national importance, such as that which he handled in *Hard Times*, that he would use severer and more accurate analysis. The usefulness of that work (to my mind, in several respects, the greatest he has written) is with many persons seriously diminished because Mr. Bounderby is a dramatic monster, instead of a characteristic example of a worldly master; and Stephen Blackpool a dramatic perfection, instead of a characteristic

† From an essay of 1856 incorporated into his *History of English Literature* (trans. 1871).

‡ *Cornhill Magazine*, II (1860), and also in *Unto This Last* (1862).

example of an honest workman. But let us not lose the use of Dickens's wit and insight, because he chooses to speak in a circle of stage fire. He is entirely right in his main drift and purpose in every book he has written; and all of them, but especially *Hard Times*, should be studied with close and earnest care by persons interested in social questions. They will find much that is partial, and, because partial, apparently unjust; but if they examine all the evidence on the other side, which Dickens seems to overlook, it will appear, after all their trouble, that his view was the finally right one, grossly and sharply told.

GEORGE GISSING

[Dickens' Portrayal of the Working Class in *Hard Times*]†

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We do not nowadays look for a fervent Christianity in leaders of the people. In that, as in several other matters, Dickens was by choice retrospective. Still writing at a time when "infidelity"—the word then used—was becoming rife among the populace of great towns, he never makes any reference to it, and probably did not take it into account; it had no place in his English ideal. I doubt, indeed, whether he was practically acquainted with the "free-thinking" workman. A more noticeable omission from his books (if we except the one novel which I cannot but think a failure) is that of the workman at war with capital. This great struggle, going on before him all his life, found no place in the scheme of his fiction. He shows us poor men who suffer under tyranny, and who exclaim against the hardship of things; but never such a representative wage-earner as was then to be seen battling for bread and right. One reason is plain; Dickens did not know the north of England. With adequate knowledge of a manufacturing town, he would never have written so unconvincingly as in his book *Hard Times*—the opportunity for dealing with this subject. Stephen Blackpool represents nothing at all; he is a mere model of meekness, and his great misfortune is such as might befall any man anywhere, the curse of a drunken wife. The book is a crude attack on materialism, a theme which might, of course, have entered very well into a study of the combatant working-class. But, as I have already pointed out, the working-class is not Dickens's field, even in London. For the purposes of fiction, it is a class still waiting its por-

† From George Gissing, *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* (London: Blackie and Son, 1898) 201-2.

trayer; much has been written about it in novels, but we have no work of the first order dealing primarily with that form of life. Mrs. Gaskell essayed the theme very faithfully, and with some success; but it was not her best work. I can recall no working-class figures in English novels so truly representative as those in Charlotte Brontë's second book. Given a little wider experience, the author of *Shirley* might have exhibited this class in a masterpiece such as we vainly look for.

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BERNARD SHAW

Hard Times†

John Ruskin once declared *Hard Times* Dickens's best novel. It is worth while asking why Ruskin thought this, because he would have been the first to admit that the habit of placing works of art in competition with one another, and wrangling as to which is the best, is the habit of the sportsman, not of the enlightened judge of art. Let us take it that what Ruskin meant was that *Hard Times* was one of his special favorites among Dickens's books. Was this the caprice of fancy? or is there any rational explanation of the preference? I think there is.

Hard Times is the first fruit of that very interesting occurrence which our religious sects call, sometimes conversion, sometimes being saved, sometimes attaining to conviction of sin. Now the great conversions of the XIX century were not convictions of individual, but of social sin. The first half of the XIX century considered itself the greatest of all the centuries. The second discovered that it was the wickedest of all the centuries. The first half despised and pitied the Middle Ages as barbarous, cruel, superstitious, ignorant. The second half saw no hope for mankind except in the recovery of the faith, the art, the humanity of the Middle Ages. In Macaulay's *History of England*, the world is so happy, so progressive, so firmly set in the right path, that the author cannot mention even the National Debt without proclaiming that the deeper the country goes into debt, the more it prospers. In Morris's *News from Nowhere* there is nothing left of all the institutions that Macaulay glorified except an old building, so ugly that it is used only as a manure market, that was once the British House of Parliament. *Hard Times* was written in 1854, just at the turn of the half century; and in it we see Dickens with his eyes newly open and his conscience newly stricken by the discovery of the real state of England. In the book that went immediately before,

† From Bernard Shaw, *Introduction to Hard Times* (London: Waverley, 1912). Reprinted by permission of The Society of Authors on behalf of the Bernard Shaw Estate.

Bleak House, he was still denouncing evils and ridiculing absurdities that were mere symptoms of the anarchy that followed the industrial revolution of the XVIII and XIX centuries, and the conquest of political power by Commercialism in 1832. In *Bleak House* Dickens knows nothing of the industrial revolution: he imagines that what is wrong is that when a dispute arises over the division of the plunder of the nation, the Court of Chancery, instead of settling the dispute cheaply and promptly, beggars the disputants and pockets both their shares. His description of our party system, with its Coodle, Doodle, Foodle, etc., has never been surpassed for accuracy and for penetration of superficial pretence. But he had not dug down to the bed rock of the imposture. His portrait of the ironmaster who visits Sir Leicester Dedlock, and who is so solidly superior to him, might have been drawn by Macaulay: there is not a touch of Bounderby in it. His horrible and not untruthful portraits of the brickmakers whose abject and battered wives call them "master," and his picture of the now vanished slum between Drury Lane and Catherine Street which he calls Tom All Alone's, suggest (save in the one case of the outcast Jo, who is, like *Oliver Twist*, a child, and therefore outside the old self-help panacea of Dickens's time) nothing but individual delinquencies, local plague-spots, negligent authorities.

In *Hard Times* you will find all this changed. Coketown, which you can see to-day for yourself in all its grime in the Potteries (the real name of it is Hanley in Staffordshire on the London and North Western Railway), is not, like Tom All Alone's, a patch of slum in a fine city, easily cleared away, as Tom's actually was about fifty years after Dickens called attention to it. Coketown is the whole place; and its rich manufacturers are proud of its dirt, and declare that they like to see the sun blacked out with smoke, because it means that the furnaces are busy and money is being made; whilst its poor factory hands have never known any other sort of town, and are as content with it as a rat is with a hole. Mr. Rouncewell, the pillar of society who snubs Sir Leicester with such dignity, has become Mr. Bounderby, the self-made humbug. The Chancery suitors who are driving themselves mad by hanging about the Courts in the hope of getting a judgment in their favor instead of trying to earn an honest living, are replaced by factory operatives who toil miserably and incessantly only to see the streams of gold they set flowing slip through their fingers into the pockets of men who revile and oppress them.

Clearly this is not the Dickens who burlesqued the old song of the Fine Old English Gentleman, and saw in the evils he attacked only the sins and wickednesses and follies of a great civilization. This is Karl Marx, Carlyle, Ruskin, Morris, Carpenter, rising up against civilization itself as against a disease, and declaring that it is not our disorder but our order that is horrible; that it is not our criminals but our magnates that are robbing and murdering us; and that it is not merely Tom All Alone's that must be demolished and abolished, pulled down, rooted up, and

made for ever impossible so that nothing shall remain of it but History's record of its infamy, but our entire social system. For that was how men felt, and how some of them spoke, in the early days of the Great Conversion which produced, first, such books as the *Latter Day Pamphlets* of Carlyle, Dickens's *Hard Times*, and the tracts and sociological novels of the Christian Socialists, and later on the Socialist movement which has now spread all over the world, and which has succeeded in convincing even those who most abhor the name of Socialism that the condition of the civilized world is deplorable, and that the remedy is far beyond the means of individual righteousness. In short, whereas formerly men said to the victim of society who ventured to complain, "Go and reform yourself before you pretend to reform Society," it now has to admit that until Society is reformed, no man can reform himself except in the most insignificantly small ways. He may cease picking your pocket of half crowns; but he cannot cease taking a quarter of a million a year from the community for nothing at one end of the scale, or living under conditions in which health, decency, and gentleness are impossible at the other, if he happens to be born to such a lot.

You must therefore resign yourself, if you are reading Dickens's books in the order in which they were written, to bid adieu now to the light-hearted and only occasionally indignant Dickens of the earlier books, and get such entertainment as you can from him now that the occasional indignation has spread and deepened into a passionate revolt against the whole industrial order of the modern world. Here you will find no more villains and heroes, but only oppressors and victims, oppressing and suffering in spite of themselves, driven by a huge machinery which grinds to pieces the people it should nourish and ennoble, and having for its directors the basest and most foolish of us instead of the noblest and most farsighted.

Many readers find the change disappointing. Others find Dickens worth reading almost for the first time. The increase in strength and intensity is enormous: the power that indicts a nation so terribly is much more impressive than that which ridicules individuals. But it cannot be said that there is an increase of simple pleasure for the reader, though the books are not therefore less attractive. One cannot say that it is pleasanter to look at a battle than at a merry-go-round; but there can be no question which draws the larger crowd.

To describe the change in the readers' feelings more precisely, one may say that it is impossible to enjoy Gradgrind or Bounderby as one enjoys Pecksniff or the Artful Dodger or Mrs. Gamp or Micawber or Dick Swiveller, because those earlier characters have nothing to do with us except to amuse us. We neither hate nor fear them. We do not expect ever to meet them, and should not be in the least afraid of them if we did. England is not full of Micawbers and Swivellers. They are not our fathers, our schoolmasters, our employers, our tyrants. We do not read

novels to escape from them and forget them: quite the contrary. But England is full of Bounderbys and Podsnaps and Gradgrinds; and we are all to a quite appalling extent in their power. We either hate and fear them or else we are them, and resent being held up to odium by a novelist. We have only to turn to the article on Dickens in the current edition of the *Encyclopædia Britannica* to find how desperately our able critics still exalt all Dickens's early stories about individuals whilst ignoring or belittling such masterpieces as *Hard Times*, *Little Dorrit*, *Our Mutual Friend*, and even *Bleak House* (because of Sir Leicester Dedlock); for their mercilessly faithful and penetrating exposures of English social, industrial, and political life; to see how hard Dickens hits the conscience of the governing class; and how loth we still are to confess, not that we are so wicked (for of that we are rather proud), but so ridiculous, so futile, so incapable of making our country really prosperous. *The Old Curiosity Shop* was written to amuse you, entertain you, touch you; and it succeeded. *Hard Times* was written to make you uncomfortable; and it will make you uncomfortable (and serve you right) though it will perhaps interest you more, and certainly leave a deeper scar on you, than any two of its forerunners.

At the same time you need not fear to find Dickens losing his good humor and sense of fun and becoming serious in Mr. Gradgrind's way. On the contrary, Dickens in this book casts off, and casts off for ever, all restraint on his wild sense of humor. He had always been inclined to break loose: there are passages in the speeches of Mrs. Nickleby and Pecksniff which are impossible as well as funny. But now it is no longer a question of passages: here he begins at last to exercise quite recklessly his power of presenting a character to you in the most fantastic and outrageous terms, putting into its mouth from one end of the book to the other hardly one word which could conceivably be uttered by any sane human being, and yet leaving you with an unmistakable and exactly truthful portrait of a character that you recognize at once as not only real but typical. Nobody ever talked, or ever will talk, as Silas Wegg talks to Boffin and Mr. Venus, or as Mr. Venus reports Pleasant Riderhood to have talked, or as Rogue Riderhood talks, or as John Chivery talks. They utter rhapsodies of nonsense conceived in an ecstasy of mirth. And this begins in *Hard Times*. Jack Bunsby in *Dombey and Son* is absurd: the oracles he delivers are very nearly impossible, and yet not quite impossible. But Mrs. Sparsit in this book, though Rembrandt could not have drawn a certain type of real woman more precisely to the life, is grotesque from beginning to end in her way of expressing herself. Her nature, her tricks of manner, her way of taking Mr. Bounderby's marriage, her instinct for hunting down Louisa and Mrs. Pegler, are drawn with an unerring hand; and she says nothing that is out of character. But no clown gone suddenly mad in a very mad harlequinade could express all these truths in more extravagantly ridiculous speeches. Dickens's busi-

ness in life has become too serious for troubling over the small change of verisimilitude, and denying himself and his readers the indulgence of his humor in inessentials. He even calls the schoolmaster Mc-Choakumchild, which is almost an insult to the serious reader. And it was so afterwards to the end of his life. There are moments when he imperils the whole effect of his character drawing by some overpoweringly comic sally. For instance, happening in *Hard Times* to describe Mr. Bounderby as drumming on his hat as if it were a tambourine, which is quite correct and natural, he presently says that "Mr. Bounderby put his tambourine on his head, like an oriental dancer." Which similitude is so unexpectedly and excruciatingly funny that it is almost impossible to feel duly angry with the odious Bounderby afterwards.

This disregard of naturalness in speech is extraordinarily entertaining in the comic method; but it must be admitted that it is not only not entertaining, but sometimes hardly bearable when it does not make us laugh. There are two persons in *Hard Times*, Louisa Gradgrind and Cissy Jupe, who are serious throughout. Louisa is a figure of poetic tragedy; and there is no question of naturalness in her case: she speaks from beginning to end as an inspired prophetess, conscious of her own doom and finally bearing to her father the judgment of Providence on his blind conceit. If you once consent to overlook her marriage, which is none the less an act of prostitution because she does it to obtain advantages for her brother and not for herself, there is nothing in the solemn poetry of her deadly speech that jars. But Cissy is nothing if not natural; and though Cissy is as true to nature in her character as Mrs. Sparsit, she "speaks like a book" in the most intolerable sense of the words. In her interview with Mr. James Harthouse, her unconscious courage and simplicity, and his hopeless defeat by them, are quite natural and right; and the contrast between the humble girl of the people and the smart sarcastic man of the world whom she so completely vanquishes is excellently dramatic; but Dickens has allowed himself to be carried away by the scene into a ridiculous substitution of his own most literary and least colloquial style for any language that could conceivably be credited to Cissy.

"Mr. Harthouse: the only reparation that remains with you is to leave her immediately and finally. I am quite sure that you can mitigate in no other way the wrong and harm you have done. I am quite sure that it is the only compensation you have left it in your power to make. I do not say that it is much, or that it is enough; but it is something, and it is necessary. Therefore, though without any other authority than I have given you, and even without the knowledge of any other person than yourself and myself, I ask you to depart from this place to-night, under an obligation never to return to it."

This is the language of a Lord Chief Justice, not of the dunce of an elementary school in the Potteries.

But this is only a surface failure, just as the extravagances of Mrs. Sparsit are only surface extravagances. There is, however, one real failure in the book. Slackbridge, the trade union organizer, is a mere figment of the middle-class imagination. No such man would be listened to by a meeting of English factory hands. Not that such meetings are less susceptible to humbug than meetings of any other class. Not that trade union organizers, worn out by the terribly wearisome and trying work of going from place to place repeating the same commonplaces and trying to "stoke up" meetings to enthusiasm with them, are less apt than other politicians to end as windbags, and sometimes to depend on stimulants to pull them through their work. Not, in short, that the trade union platform is any less humbug-ridden than the platforms of our more highly placed political parties. But even at their worst trade union organizers are not a bit like Slackbridge. Note, too, that Dickens mentions that there was a chairman at the meeting (as if that were rather surprising), and that this chairman makes no attempt to preserve the usual order of public meeting, but allows speakers to address the assembly and interrupt one another in an entirely disorderly way. All this is pure middle-class ignorance. It is much as if a tramp were to write a description of millionaires smoking large cigars in church, with their wives in low-necked dresses and diamonds. We cannot say that Dickens did not know the working classes, because he knew humanity too well to be ignorant of any class. But this sort of knowledge is as compatible with ignorance of class manners and customs as with ignorance of foreign languages. Dickens knew certain classes of working folk very well: domestic servants, village artisans, and employees of petty tradesmen, for example. But of the segregated factory populations of our purely industrial towns he knew no more than an observant professional man can pick up on a flying visit in Manchester.

It is especially important to notice that Dickens expressly says in this book that the workers were wrong to organize themselves in trade unions, thereby endorsing what was perhaps the only practical mistake of the Gradgrind school that really mattered much. And having thus thoughtlessly adopted, or at least repeated, this error, long since exploded, of the philosophic Radical school from which he started, he turns his back frankly on Democracy, and adopts the idealized Toryism of Carlyle and Ruskin, in which the aristocracy are the masters and superiors of the people, and also the servants of the people and of God. Here is a significant passage.

"Now perhaps," said Mr. Bounderby, "you will let the gentleman know how you would set this muddle (as you are so fond of calling it) to rights."

"I donno, sir. I canna be expecten to't. Tis not me as should be looken to for that, sir. Tis they as is put ower me, and ower aw the rest of us. What do they tak upon themseln, sir, if not to do it?"

And to this Dickens sticks for the rest of his life. In *Our Mutual Friend* he appeals again and again to the governing classes, asking them with every device of reproach, invective, sarcasm, and ridicule of which he is master, what they have to say to this or that evil which it is their professed business to amend or avoid. Nowhere does he appeal to the working class to take their fate into their own hands and try the democratic plan.

Another phrase used by Stephen Blackpool in this remarkable fifth chapter is important. "Nor yet lettin alone will never do it." It is Dickens's express repudiation of *laissez-faire*.

There is nothing more in the book that needs any glossary, except, perhaps, the strange figure of the Victorian "swell," Mr. James Harthouse. His pose has gone out of fashion. Here and there you may still see a man—even a youth—with a single eyeglass, an elaborately bored and weary air, and a little stock of cynicisms and indifferentisms contrasting oddly with a mortal anxiety about his clothes. All he needs is a pair of Dundreary whiskers, like the officers in Desanges' military pictures, to be a fair imitation of Mr. James Harthouse. But he is not in the fashion: he is an eccentric, as Whistler was an eccentric, as Max Beerbohm and the neo-dandies of the *fin de siècle* were eccentrics. It is now the fashion to be energetic, to hustle as American millionaires are supposed (rather erroneously) to hustle. But the soul of the swell is still unchanged. He has changed his name again and again, become a Masher, a Toff, a Johnny and what not; but fundamentally he remains what he always was, an Idler, and therefore a man bound to find some trick of thought and speech that reduces the world to a thing as empty and purposeless and hopeless as himself. Mr. Harthouse reappears, more seriously and kindly taken, as Eugene Wrayburn and Mortimer Lightwood in *Our Mutual Friend*. He reappears as a club in *The Finches of the Grove of Great Expectations*. He will reappear in all his essentials in fact and in fiction until he is at last shamed or coerced into honest industry and becomes not only unintelligible but inconceivable.

Note, finally, that in this book Dickens proclaims that marriages are not made in heaven, and that those which are not confirmed there, should be dissolved.

F. R. LEAVIS

Hard Times: An Analytic Note†

Hard Times is not a difficult work; its intention and nature are pretty obvious. If, then, it is the masterpiece I take it for, why has it not had general recognition? To judge by the critical record, it has had none at all. If there exists anywhere an appreciation, or even an acclaiming reference, I have missed it. In the books and essays on Dickens, so far as I know them, it is passed over as a very minor thing; too slight and insignificant to distract us for more than a sentence or two from the works worth critical attention. Yet, if I am right, of all Dickens's works it is the one that has all the strength of his genius, together with a strength no other of them can show—that of a completely serious work of art.

The answer to the question asked above seems to me to bear on the traditional approach to 'the English novel'. For all the more sophisticated critical currency of the last decade or two, that approach still prevails, at any rate in the appreciation of the Victorian novelists. The business of the novelist, you gather, is to 'create a world', and the mark of the master is external abundance—he gives you lots of 'life'. The test of life in his characters (he must above all create 'living' characters) is that they go on living outside the book. Expectations as unexact as these are not, when they encounter significance, grateful for it, and when it meets them in that insistent form where nothing is very engaging as 'life' unless its relevance is fully taken, miss it altogether. This is the only way in which I can account for the neglect suffered by Henry James's *The Europeans*, which may be classed with *Hard Times* as a moral fable—though one might have supposed that James would enjoy the advantage of being approached with expectations of subtlety and closely calculated relevance. Fashion, however, has not recommended his earlier work, and this (whatever appreciation may be enjoyed by *The Ambassadors*) still suffers from the prevailing expectation of redundant and irrelevant 'life'.

I need say no more by way of defining the moral fable than that in it the intention is peculiarly insistent, so that the representative significance of everything in the fable—character, episode, and so on—is immediately apparent as we read. Intention might seem to be insistent enough

† From F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, London, 1948, pp. 227–48. Copyright 1960. Reprinted by permission of Chatto and Windus and New York University Press. In 1970 this "Analytic Note" became a chapter in Leavis' book, *Dickens the Novelist* (of which Q. D. Leavis was co-author). The 1970 version is virtually identical with the 1948 version except for a modification of the final sentence of the first paragraph. The revised version is as follows: "Yet, if I am right, of all Dickens's works it is the one that, having the distinctive strength that makes him a major artist, has it in so compact a way, and with a concentrated significance so immediately clear and penetrating, as, one would have thought, to preclude the reader's failing to recognize that he had before him a completely serious, and, in its originality, a triumphantly successful work of art" (London: Chatto and Windus, 1970) 147.

in the opening of *Hard Times*, in that scene in Mr. Gradgrind's school. But then, intention is often very insistent in Dickens, without its being taken up in any inclusive significance that informs and organizes a coherent whole; and, for lack of any expectation of an organized whole, it has no doubt been supposed that in *Hard Times* the satiric irony of the first two chapters is merely, in the large and genial Dickensian way, thrown together with melodrama, pathos and humour—and that we are given these ingredients more abundantly and exuberantly elsewhere. Actually, the Dickensian vitality is there, in its varied characteristic modes, which have the more force because they are free of redundancy: the creative exuberance is controlled by a profound inspiration.

The inspiration is what is given in the grim clinch of the title, *Hard Times*. Ordinarily Dickens's criticisms of the world he lives in are casual and incidental—a matter of including among the ingredients of a book some indignant treatment of a particular abuse. But in *Hard Times* he is for once¹ possessed by a comprehensive vision, one in which the inhumanities of Victorian civilization are seen as fostered and sanctioned by a hard philosophy, the aggressive formulation of an inhumane spirit. The philosophy is represented by Thomas Gradgrind, Esquire, Member of Parliament for Coketown, who has brought up his children on the lines of the experiment recorded by John Stuart Mill as carried out on himself. What Gradgrind stands for is, though repellent, nevertheless respectable; his Utilitarianism is a theory sincerely held and there is intellectual disinterestedness in its application. But Gradgrind marries his eldest daughter to Josiah Bounderby, 'banker, merchant, manufacturer', about whom there is no disinterestedness whatever, and nothing to be respected. Bounderby is Victorian 'rugged individualism' in its grossest and most intransigent form. Concerned with nothing but self-assertion and power and material success, he has no interest in ideals or ideas—except the idea of being the completely self-made man (since, for all his brag, he is not that in fact). Dickens here makes a just observation about the affinities and practical tendency of Utilitarianism, as, in his presentment of the Gradgrind home and the Gradgrind elementary school, he does about the Utilitarian spirit in Victorian education.

All this is obvious enough. But Dickens's art, while remaining that of the great popular entertainer, has in *Hard Times*, as he renders his full critical vision, a stamina, a flexibility combined with consistency, and a depth that he seems to have had little credit for. Take that opening scene in the school-room:

"Girl number twenty," said Mr. Gradgrind, squarely pointing with his square forefinger, "I don't know that girl. Who is that girl?"

1. In 1970 "for once possessed" was changed to "unmistakably possessed" [Editor].

“Sissy Jupe, sir,” explained number twenty, blushing, standing up, and curtsying.

“Sissy is not a name,” said Mr. Gradgrind. “Don’t call yourself Sissy. Call yourself Cecilia.”

“It’s father as calls me Sissy, sir,” returned the young girl in a trembling voice, and with another curtsy.

“Then he has no business to do it,” said Mr. Gradgrind. “Tell him he mustn’t. Cecilia Jupe. Let me see. What is your father?”

“He belongs to the horse-riding, if you please, sir.”

Mr. Gradgrind frowned, and waved off the objectionable calling with his hand.

“We don’t want to know anything about that here. You mustn’t tell us about that here. Your father breaks horses, don’t he?”

“If you please, sir, when they can get any to break, they do break horses in the ring, sir.”

“You mustn’t tell us about the ring here. Very well, then. Describe your father as a horse-breaker. He doctors sick horses, I dare say?”

“Oh, yes, sir!”

“Very well, then. He is a veterinary surgeon, a farrier, and horse-breaker. Give me your definition of a horse.”

(Sissy Jupe thrown into the greatest alarm by this demand.)

“Girl number twenty unable to define a horse!” said Mr. Gradgrind, for the general benefit of all the little pitchers. “Girl number twenty possessed of no facts in reference to one of the commonest animals! Some boy’s definition of a horse. Bitzer, yours.”

“Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely, twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy countries, sheds hoofs too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth.” Thus (and much more) Bitzer.’

Lawrence himself, protesting against harmful tendencies in education, never made the point more tellingly. Sissy has been brought up among horses, and among people whose livelihood depends upon understanding horses but ‘we don’t want to know anything about that here’. Such knowledge isn’t real knowledge. Bitzer, the model pupil, on the button’s being pressed, promptly vomits up the genuine article, ‘Quadruped. Graminivorous’, etc.; and ‘Now, girl number twenty, you know what a horse is’. The irony, pungent enough locally, is richly developed in the subsequent action. Bitzer’s aptness has its evaluative comment in his career. Sissy’s incapacity to acquire this kind of ‘fact’ or formula, her

unaptness for education, is manifested to us, on the other hand, as part and parcel of her sovereign and indefeasible humanity: it is the virtue that makes it impossible for her to understand, or acquiesce in, an ethos for which she is 'girl number twenty', or to think of any other human being as a unit for arithmetic.

This kind of ironic method might seem to commit the author to very limited kinds of effect. In *Hard Times*, however, it associates quite congruously, such is the flexibility of Dickens's art, with very different methods; it co-operates in a truly dramatic and profoundly poetic whole. Sissy Jupe, who might be taken here for a merely conventional *persona*, has already, as a matter of fact, been established in a potently symbolic rôle: she is part of the poetically-creative operation of Dickens's genius in *Hard Times*. Here is a passage I omitted from the middle of the excerpt quoted above:

"The square finger, moving here and there, lighted suddenly on Bitzer, perhaps because he chanced to sit in the same ray of sunlight which, darting in at one of the bare windows of the intensely white-washed room, irradiated Sissy. For the boys and girls sat on the face of an inclined plane in two compact bodies, divided up the centre by a narrow interval; and Sissy, being at the corner of a row on the sunny side, came in for the beginning of a sunbeam, of which Bitzer, being at the corner of a row on the other side, a few rows in advance, caught the end. But, whereas the girl was so dark-eyed and dark-haired that she seemed to receive a deeper and more lustrous colour from the sun when it shone upon her, the boy was so light-eyed and light-haired that the self-same rays appeared to draw out of him what little colour he ever possessed. His cold eyes would hardly have been eyes, but for the short ends of lashes which, by bringing them into immediate contrast with something paler than themselves, expressed their form. His short-cropped hair might have been a mere continuation of the sandy freckles on his forehead and face. His skin was so unwholesomely deficient in the natural tinge, that he looked as though, if he were cut, he would bleed white.'

There is no need to insist on the force—representative of Dickens's art in general in *Hard Times*—with which the moral and spiritual differences are rendered here in terms of sensation, so that the symbolic intention emerges out of metaphor and the vivid evocation of the concrete. What may, perhaps, be emphasized is that Sissy stands for vitality as well as goodness—they are seen, in fact, as one; she is generous, impulsive life, finding self-fulfilment in self-forgetfulness—all that is the antithesis of calculating self-interest. There is an essentially Laurentian suggestion about the way in which 'the dark-eyed and dark-haired' girl,

contrasting with Bitzer, seemed to receive a 'deeper and more lustrous colour from the sun', so opposing the life that is lived freely and richly from the deep instinctive and emotional springs to the thin-blooded, quasi-mechanical product of Gradgrindery.

Sissy's symbolic significance is bound up with that of Sleary's Horse-riding where human kindness is very insistently associated with vitality.

The way in which the Horse-riding takes on its significance illustrates beautifully the poetic-dramatic nature of Dickens's art. From the utilitarian schoolroom Mr. Gradgrind walks towards his utilitarian abode, Stone Lodge, which, as Dickens evokes it, brings home to us concretely the model regime that for the little Gradgrinds (among whom are Malthus and Adam Smith) is an inescapable prison. But before he gets there he passes the back of a circus booth, and is pulled up by the sight of two palpable offenders. Looking more closely, 'what did he behold but his own metallurgical Louisa peeping through a hole in a deal board, and his own mathematical Thomas abasing himself on the ground to catch but a hoof of the graceful equestrian 'Tyrolean flower act!' The chapter is called 'A Loophole', and Thomas 'gave himself up to be taken home like a machine'.

Representing human spontaneity, the circus-athletes represent at the same time highly-developed skill and deftness of kinds that bring poise, pride and confident ease—they are always buoyant, and ballet-dancer-like, in training:

"There were two or three handsome young women among them, with two or three husbands, and their two or three mothers, and their eight or nine little children, who did the fairy business when required. The father of one of the families was in the habit of balancing the father of another of the families on the top of a great pole; the father of the third family often made a pyramid of both those fathers, with Master Kidderminster for the apex, and himself for the base; all the fathers could dance upon rolling casks, stand upon bottles, catch knives and balls, twirl hand-basins, ride upon anything, jump over everything, and stick at nothing. All the mothers could (and did) dance upon the slack wire and the tight-rope, and perform rapid acts on bare-backed steeds; none of them were at all particular in respect of showing their legs; and one of them, alone in a Greek chariot, drove six-in-hand into every town they came to. They all assumed to be mighty rakish and knowing, they were not very tidy in their private dresses, they were not at all orderly in their domestic arrangements, and the combined literature of the whole company would have produced but a poor letter on any subject. Yet there was a remarkable gentleness and childishness about these people, a special inaptitude for any

kind of sharp practice, and an untiring readiness to help and pity one another, deserving often of as much respect, and always of as much generous construction, as the every-day virtues of any class of people in the world.'

Their skills have no value for the Utilitarian calculus, but they express vital human impulse, and they minister to vital human needs. The Horse-riding, frowned upon as frivolous and wasteful by Gradgrind and malignantly scorned by Bounderby, brings the machine-hands of Coketown (the spirit-quenching hideousness of which is hauntingly evoked) what they are starved of. It brings to them, not merely amusement, but art, and the spectacle of triumphant activity that, seeming to contain its end within itself, is, in its easy mastery, joyously self-justified. In investing a travelling circus with this kind of symbolic value Dickens expresses a profounder reaction to industrialism than might have been expected of him. It is not only pleasure and relaxation the Coketowners stand in need of; he feels the dreadful degradation of life that would remain even if they were to be given a forty-four hour week, comfort, security and fun. We recall a characteristic passage from D. H. Lawrence.

"The car ploughed uphill through the long squalid straggle of Tevershall, the blackened brick dwellings, the black slate roofs, glistening their sharp edges, the mud black with coal-dust, the pavements wet and black. It was as if dismalness had soaked through and through everything. The utter negation of natural beauty, the utter negation of the gladness of life, the utter absence of the instinct for shapely beauty which every bird and beast has, the utter death of the human intuitive faculty was appalling. The stacks of soap in the grocers' shops, the rhubarb and lemons in the greengrocers'! the awful hats in the milliners all went by ugly, ugly, ugly, followed by the plaster and gilt horror of the cinema with its wet picture announcements, "A Woman's Love," and the new big Primitive chapel, primitive enough in its stark brick and big panes of greenish and raspberry glass in the windows. The Wesleyan chapel, higher up, was of blackened brick and stood behind iron railings and blackened shrubs. The Congregational chapel, which thought itself superior, was built of rusticated sandstone and had a steeple, but not a very high one. Just beyond were the new school buildings, expensive pink brick, and gravelled playground inside iron railings, all very imposing, and mixing the suggestion of a chapel and a prison. Standard Five girls were having a singing lesson, just finishing the la-me-do-la exercises and beginning a "sweet children's song." Anything more unlike song, spontaneous song, would be impossible to imagine: a strange bawling yell followed the outlines of a tune. It was

not like animals: animals *mean* something when they yell. It was like nothing on earth, and it was called singing. Connie sat and listened with her heart in her boots, as Field was filling petrol. What could possibly become of such a people, a people in whom the living intuitive faculty was dead as nails, and only queer mechanical yells and uncanny will-power remained?’

Dickens couldn't have put it in just those terms, but the way in which his vision of the Horse-riders insists on their gracious vitality implies that reaction.

Here an objection may be anticipated—as a way of making a point. Coketown, like Gradgrind and Bounderby, is real enough; but it can't be contended that the Horse-riding is real in the same sense. There would have been some athletic skill and perhaps some bodily grace among the people of a Victorian travelling circus, but surely so much squalor, grossness and vulgarity that we must find Dickens's symbolism sentimentally false? And 'there was a remarkable gentleness and childishness about these people, a special inaptitude for any kind of sharp practice'—that, surely, is going ludicrously too far?

If Dickens, intent on an emotional effect, or drunk with moral enthusiasm, had been deceiving himself (it couldn't have been innocently) about the nature of the actuality, he would then indeed have been guilty of sentimental falsity, and the adverse criticism would have held. But the Horse-riding presents no such case. The virtues and qualities that Dickens prizes do indeed exist, and it is necessary for his critique of Utilitarianism and industrialism, and for (what is the same thing) his creative purpose, to evoke them vividly. The book can't, in my judgment, be fairly charged with giving a misleading representation of human nature. And it would plainly not be intelligent criticism to suggest that anyone could be misled about the nature of circuses by *Hard Times*. The critical question is merely one of tact: was it well-judged of Dickens to try to do *that*—which had to be done somehow—with a travelling circus?

Or, rather, the question is: by what means has he succeeded? For the success is complete. It is conditioned partly by the fact that, from the opening chapters, we have been tuned for the reception of a highly conventional art—though it is a tuning that has no narrowly limiting effect. To describe at all cogently the means by which this responsiveness is set up would take a good deal of 'practical criticism' analysis—analysis that would reveal an extraordinary flexibility in the art of *Hard Times*. This can be seen very obviously in the dialogue. Some passages might come from an ordinary novel. Others have the ironic pointedness of the school-room scene in so insistent a form that we might be reading a work as stylized as Jonsonian comedy: Gradgrind's final exchange with Bitzer (quoted below) is a supreme instance. Others again are 'literary', like the

conversation between Gradgrind and Louisa on her flight home for refuge from Mr. James Harthouse's attentions.

To the question how the reconciling is done—there is much more diversity in *Hard Times* than these references to dialogue suggest—the answer can be given by pointing to the astonishing and irresistible richness of life that characterizes the book everywhere. It meets us everywhere, unstrained and natural, in the prose. Out of such prose a great variety of presentations can arise congenially with equal vividness. There they are, unquestionably 'real'. It goes back to an extraordinary energy of perception and registration in Dickens. 'When people say that Dickens exaggerates', says Santayana, 'it seems to me that they can have no eyes and no ears. They probably only have *notions* of what things and people are; they accept them conventionally, at their diplomatic value'. Settling down as we read to an implicit recognition of this truth, we don't really and confidently apply any criterion we suppose ourselves to hold for distinguishing varieties of relation between what Dickens gives us and a normal 'real'. His flexibility is that of a richly poetic art of the word. He doesn't write 'poetic prose'; he writes with a poetic force of evocation, registering with the responsiveness of a genius of verbal expression what he so sharply sees and feels. In fact, by texture, imaginative mode, symbolic method, and the resulting concentration, *Hard Times* affects us as belonging with formally poetic works.

There is, however, more to be said about the success that attends Dickens's symbolic intention in the Horse-riding; there is an essential quality of his genius to be emphasized. There is no Hamlet in him, and he is quite unlike Mr. Eliot.

*The red-eyed scavengers are creeping
From Kentish Town and Golders Green*

—there is nothing of that in Dickens's reaction to life. He observes with gusto the humanness of humanity as exhibited in the urban (and suburban) scene. When he sees, as he sees so readily, the common manifestations of human kindness, and the essential virtues, asserting themselves in the midst of ugliness, squalor and banality, his warmly sympathetic response has no disgust to overcome. There is no suggestion for instance, of recoil—or of distance-keeping—from the game-eyed, brandy-soaked, flabby-surfaced Mr. Sleary, who is successfully made to figure for us a humane, anti-Utilitarian positive. This is not sentimentality in Dickens, but genius, and a genius that should be found peculiarly worth attention in an age when, as D. H. Lawrence (with, as I remember, Wyndham Lewis immediately in view) says, 'My God! they stink' tends to be an insuperable and final reaction.

Dickens, as everyone knows, is very capable of sentimentality. We have it in *Hard Times* (though not to any seriously damaging effect) in Ste-

phen Blackpool, the good, victimized working-man, whose perfect patience under infliction we are expected to find supremely edifying and irresistibly touching as the agonies are piled on for his martyrdom. But Sissy Jupe is another matter. A general description of her part in the fable might suggest the worst, but actually she has nothing in common with Little Nell: she shares in the strength of the Horse-riding. She is wholly convincing in the function Dickens assigns to her. The working of her influence in the Utilitarian home is conveyed with a fine tact, and we do really feel her as a growing potency. Dickens can even, with complete success, give her the stage for a victorious *tête-à-tête* with the well-bred and languid elegant, Mr. James Harthouse, in which she tells him that his duty is to leave Coketown and cease troubling Louisa with his attentions:

‘She was not afraid of him, or in any way disconcerted; she seemed to have her mind entirely preoccupied with the occasion of her visit, and to have substituted that consideration for herself.’

The quiet victory of disinterested goodness is wholly convincing.

At the opening of the book Sissy establishes the essential distinction between Gradgrind and Bounderby. Gradgrind, by taking her home, however ungraciously, shows himself capable of humane feeling, however unacknowledged. We are reminded, in the previous school-room scene, of the Jonsonian affinities of Dickens’s art, and Bounderby turns out to be consistently a Jonsonian character in the sense that he is incapable of change. He remains the blustering egotist and braggart, and responds in character to the collapse of his marriage:

‘I’ll give you to understand, in reply to that, that there unquestionably is an incompatibility of the first magnitude — to be summed up in this — that your daughter don’t properly know her husband’s merits, and is not impressed with such a sense as would become her, by George! of the honour of his alliance. That’s plain speaking, I hope.’

He remains Jonsonianly consistent in his last testament and death. But Gradgrind, in the nature of the fable, has to *experience* the confutation of his philosophy, and to be capable of the change involved in admitting that life has proved him wrong. (Dickens’s art in *Hard Times* differs from Ben Jonson’s not in being inconsistent, but in being so very much more flexible and inclusive — a point that seemed to be worth making because the relation between Dickens and Jonson has been stressed of late, and I have known unfair conclusions to be drawn from the comparison, notably in respect of *Hard Times*.)

The confutation of Utilitarianism by life is conducted with great subtlety. That the conditions for it are there in Mr. Gradgrind he betrays by

his initial kindness, ungenial enough, but properly rebuked by Bounderby, to Sissy. 'Mr. Gradgrind', we are told, 'though hard enough, was by no means so rough a man as Mr. Bounderby. His character was not unkind, all things considered; it might have been very kind indeed if only he had made some mistake in the arithmetic that balanced it years ago'. The inadequacy of the calculus is beautifully exposed when he brings it to bear on the problem of marriage in the consummate scene with his eldest daughter:

'He waited, as if he would have been glad that she said something. But she said never a word.

' "Louisa, my dear, you are the subject of a proposal of marriage that has been made to me."

'Again he waited, and again she answered not one word. This so far surprised him as to induce him gently to repeat, "A proposal of marriage, my dear." To which she returned, without any visible emotion whatever:

' "I hear you, father. I am attending, I assure you."

' "Well!" said Mr. Gradgrind, breaking into a smile, after being for the moment at a loss, "you are even more dispassionate than I expected, Louisa. Or, perhaps, you are not unprepared for the announcement I have it in charge to make?"

' "I cannot say that, father, until I hear it. Prepared or unprepared, I wish to hear it all from you. I wish to hear you state it to me, father."

'Strange to relate, Mr. Gradgrind was not so collected at this moment as his daughter was. He took a paper knife in his hand, turned it over, laid it down, took it up again, and even then had to look along the blade of it, considering how to go on.

' "What you say, my dear Louisa, is perfectly reasonable. I have undertaken, then, to let you know that—in short, that Mr. Bounderby . . ."

His embarrassment—by his own avowal—is caused by the perfect rationality with which she receives his overture. He is still more disconcerted when, with a completely dispassionate matter-of-factness that does credit to his *régime*, she gives him the opportunity to state in plain terms precisely what marriage should mean for the young Houyhnhnm:

'Silence between them. The deadly statistical clock very hollow. The distant smoke very black and heavy.

' "Father," said Louisa, "do you think I love Mr. Bounderby?"

'Mr. Gradgrind was extremely discomfited by this unexpected question. "Well, my child," he returned, "I—really—cannot take upon myself to say."

“Father,” pursued Louisa in exactly the same voice as before, “do you ask me to love Mr. Bounderby?”

“My dear Louisa, no. I ask nothing.”

“Father,” she still pursued, “does Mr. Bounderby ask me to love him?”

“Really, my dear,” said Mr. Gradgrind, “it is difficult to answer your question—”

“Difficult to answer it, Yes or No, father?”

“Certainly, my dear. Because”—here was something to demonstrate, and it set him up again—“because the reply depends so materially, Louisa, on the sense in which we use the expression. Now, Mr. Bounderby does not do you the injustice, and does not do himself the injustice, of pretending to anything fanciful, fantastic, or (I am using synonymous terms) sentimental. Mr. Bounderby would have seen you grow up under his eye to very little purpose, if he could so far forget what is due to your good sense, not to say to his, as to address you from any such ground. Therefore, perhaps, the expression itself—I merely suggest this to you, my dear—may be a little misplaced.”

“What would you advise me to use in its stead, father?”

“Why, my dear Louisa,” said Mr. Gradgrind, completely recovered by this time, “I would advise you (since you ask me) to consider the question, as you have been accustomed to consider every other question, simply as one of tangible Fact. The ignorant and the giddy may embarrass such subjects with irrelevant fancies, and other absurdities that have no existence, properly viewed—really no existence—but it is no compliment to say that you know better. Now, what are the Facts of this case? You are, we will say in round numbers, twenty years of age; Mr. Bounderby is, we will say in round numbers, fifty. There is some disparity in your respective years, but . . .”

—And at this point Mr. Gradgrind seizes the chance for a happy escape into statistics. But Louisa brings him firmly back:

“What do you recommend, father?” asked Louisa, her reserved composure not in the least affected by these gratifying results, “that I should substitute for the term I used just now? For the misplaced expression?”

“Louisa,” returned her father, “it appears to me that nothing can be plainer. Confining yourself rigidly to Fact, the question of Fact you state to yourself is: Does Mr. Bounderby ask me to marry him? Yes, he does. The sole remaining question then is: Shall I marry him? I think nothing can be plainer than that.”

“Shall I marry him?” repeated Louisa with great deliberation.

“Precisely.”

It is a triumph of ironic art. No logical analysis could dispose of the philosophy of fact and calculus with such neat finality. As the issues are reduced to algebraic formulation they are patently emptied of all real meaning. The instinct-free rationality of the emotionless Houyhnhnm is a void. Louisa proceeds to try and make him understand that she is a living creature and therefore no Houyhnhnm, but in vain (‘to see it, he must have overleaped at a bound the artificial barriers he had for many years been erecting between himself and all those subtle essences of humanity which will elude the utmost cunning of algebra, until the last trumpet ever to be sounded will blow even algebra to wreck’).

‘Removing her eyes from him, she sat so long looking silently towards the town, that he said at length: “Are you consulting the chimneys of the Coketown works, Louisa?”

“There seems to be nothing there but languid and monotonous smoke. Yet, when the night comes, Fire bursts out, father!” she answered, turning quickly.

“Of course I know that, Louisa. I do not see the application of the remark.” To do him justice, he did not at all.

‘She passed it away with a slight motion of her hand, and concentrating her attention upon him again, said, “Father, I have often thought that life is very short” — This was so distinctly one of his subjects that he interposed:

“It is short, no doubt, my dear. Still, the average duration of human life is proved to have increased of late years. The calculations of various life assurance and annuity offices, among other figures which cannot go wrong, have established the fact.”

“I speak of my own life, father.”

“Oh, indeed! Still,” said Mr. Gradgrind, “I need not point out to you, Louisa, that it is governed by the laws which govern lives in the aggregate.”

“While it lasts, I would wish to do the little I can, and the little I am fit for. What does it matter?”

‘Mr. Gradgrind seemed rather at a loss to understand the last four words; replying, “How, matter? What matter, my dear?”

“Mr. Bounderby,” she went on in a steady, straight way, without regarding this, “asks me to marry him. The question I have to ask myself is, shall I marry him? That is so, father, is it not? You have told me so, father. Have you not?”

“Certainly, my dear.”

“Let it be so.”

The psychology of Louisa's development and of her brother Tom's is sound. Having no outlet for her emotional life except in her love for her brother, she lives for him, and marries Bounderby — under pressure from Tom — for Tom's sake ('What does it matter?'). Thus, by the constrictions and starvations of the Gradgrind *régime*, are natural affection and capacity for disinterested devotion turned to ill. As for Tom, the *régime* has made of him a bored and sullen whelp, and 'he was becoming that not unprecedented triumph of calculation which is usually at work on number one' — the Utilitarian philosophy has done that for him. He declares that when he goes to live with Bounderby as having a post in the bank, 'he'll have his revenge'. — 'I mean, I'll enjoy myself a little, and go about and see something and hear something. I'll recompense myself for the way in which I've been brought up'. His descent into debt and bank-robbery is natural. And it is natural that Louisa, having sacrificed herself for this unrepaying object of affection, should be found not altogether unresponsive when Mr. James Harthouse, having sized up the situation, pursues his opportunity with well-bred and calculating tact. His apologia for genteel cynicism is a shrewd thrust at the Gradgrind philosophy:

"The only difference between us and the professors of virtue or benevolence, or philanthropy — never mind the name — is, that we know it is all meaningless, and say so; while they know it equally, and will never say so."

'Why should she be shocked or warned by this reiteration? It was not so unlike her father's principles, and her early training, that it need startle her.'

When, fleeing from temptation, she arrives back at her father's house, tells him her plight, and, crying, 'All I know is, your philosophy and your teachings will not save me', collapses, he sees 'the pride of his heart and the triumph of his system lying an insensible heap at his feet'. The fallacy now calamitously demonstrated can be seen focused in that 'pride', which brings together in an illusory oneness the pride of his system and his love for his child. What that love is Gradgrind now knows, and he knows that it matters to him more than the system, which is thus confuted (the educational failure as such being a lesser matter). There is nothing sentimental here; the demonstration is impressive, because we are convinced of the love, and because Gradgrind has been made to exist for us as a man who has 'meant to do right':

'He said it earnestly, and, to do him justice, he had. In gauging fathomless deeps with his little mean excise rod, and in staggering over the universe with his rusty stiff-legged compasses, he had meant to do great things. Within the limits of his short tether he had tumbled about, annihilating the flowers of existence with greater singleness of purpose

than many of the blatant personages whose company he kept.'

The demonstration still to come, that of which the other 'triumph of his system', Tom, is the centre, is sardonic comedy, imagined with great intensity and done with the sure touch of genius. There is the pregnant scene in which Mr. Gradgrind, in the deserted ring of a third-rate travelling circus, has to recognize his son in a comic negro servant; and has to recognize that his son owes his escape from Justice to a peculiarly disinterested gratitude—to the opportunity given him to assume such a disguise by the non-Utilitarian Mr. Sleary, grateful for Sissy's sake:

'In a preposterous coat, like a beadle's, with cuffs and flaps exaggerated to an unspeakable extent; in an immense waist-coat, knee breeches, buckled shoes, and a mad cocked-hat; with nothing fitting him, and everything of coarse material, moth-eaten, and full of holes; with seams in his black face, where fear and heat had started through the greasy composition daubed all over it; anything so grimly, detestably, ridiculously shameful as the whelp in his comic livery, Mr. Gradgrind never could by any other means have believed in, weighable and measurable fact though it was. And one of his model children had come to this!

'At first the whelp would not draw any nearer but persisted in remaining up there by himself. Yielding at length, if any concession so sullenly made can be called yielding, to the entreaties of Sissy—for Louisa he disowned altogether—he came down, bench by bench, until he stood in the sawdust, on the verge of the circle, as far as possible, within its limits, from where his father sat.

'“How was this done?” asked the father.

'“How was what done?” moodily answered the son.

'“This robbery,” said the father, raising his voice upon the word.

'“I forced the safe myself overnight, and shut it up ajar before I went away. I had had the key that was found made long before. I dropped it that morning, that it might be supposed to have been used. I didn't take the money all at once. I pretended to put my balance away every night, but I didn't. Now you know all about it.”

'“If a thunderbolt had fallen on me,” said the father, “it would have shocked me less than this!”

'“I don't see why,” grumbled the son. “So many people are employed in situations of trust; so many people, out of so many, will be dishonest. I have heard you talk, a hundred times, of its being a law. How can I help laws? You have comforted others with such things, father. Comfort yourself!”

‘The father buried his face in his hands, and the son stood in his disgraceful grotesqueness, biting straw: his hands, with the black partly worn away inside, looking like the hands of a monkey. The evening was fast closing in; and, from time to time, he turned the whites of his eyes restlessly and impatiently towards his father. They were the only parts of his face that showed any life or expression, the pigment upon it was so thick.’

Something of the rich complexity of Dickens’s art may be seen in this passage. No simple formula can take account of the various elements in the whole effect, a sardonic-tragic in which satire consorts with pathos. The excerpt in itself suggests the justification for saying that *Hard Times* is a poetic work. It suggests that the genius of the writer may fairly be described as that of a poetic dramatist, and that, in our preconceptions about ‘the novel’, we may miss, within the field of fictional prose, possibilities of concentration and flexibility in the interpretation of life such as we associate with Shakespearean drama.

The note, as we have it above in Tom’s retort, of ironic-satiric discomfiture of the Utilitarian philosopher by the rebound of his formulae upon himself is developed in the ensuing scene with Bitzer, the truly successful pupil, the real triumph of the system. He arrives to intercept Tom’s flight:

‘Bitzer, still holding the paralysed culprit by the collar, stood in the Ring, blinking at his old patron through the darkness of the twilight.

‘“Bitzer,” said Mr. Gradgrind, broken down and miserably submissive to him, “have you a heart?”

‘“The circulation, sir,” returned Bitzer, smiling at the oddity of the question, “couldn’t be carried on without one. No man, sir, acquainted with the facts established by Harvey relating to the circulation of the blood, can doubt that I have a heart.”

‘“Is it accessible,” cried Mr. Gradgrind, “to any compassionate influence?”

‘“It is accessible to Reason, sir,” returned the excellent young man. “And to nothing else.”

‘They stood looking at each other; Mr. Gradgrind’s face as white as the pursuer’s.

‘“What motive—even what motive in reason—can you have for preventing the escape of this wretched youth,” said Mr. Gradgrind, “and crushing his miserable father? See his sister here. Pity us!”

‘“Sir,” returned Bitzer in a very business-like and logical manner, “since you ask me what motive I have in reason for taking young Mr. Tom back to Coketown, it is only rea-

sonable to let you know . . . I am going to take young Mr. Tom back to Coketown, in order to deliver him over to Mr. Bounderby. Sir, I have no doubt whatever that Mr. Bounderby will then promote me to young Mr. Tom's situation. And I wish to have his situation, sir, for it will be a rise to me, and will do me good."

"If this is solely a question of self-interest with you—" Mr. Gradgrind began.

"I beg your pardon for interrupting you, sir," returned Bitzer, "but I am sure you know that the whole social system is a question of self-interest. What you must always appeal to is a person's self-interest. It's your only hold. We are so constituted. I was brought up in that catechism when I was very young, sir, as you are aware."

"What sum of money," said Mr. Gradgrind, "will you set against your expected promotion?"

"Thank you, sir," returned Bitzer, "for hinting at the proposal; but I will not set any sum against it. Knowing that your clear head would propose that alternative, I have gone over the calculations in my mind; and I find that to compound a felony, even on very high terms indeed, would not be as safe and good for me as my improved prospects in the Bank."

"Bitzer," said Mr. Gradgrind, stretching out his hands as though he would have said, See how miserable I am! "Bitzer, I have but one chance left to soften you. You were many years at my school. If, in remembrance of the pains bestowed upon you there, you can persuade yourself in any degree to disregard your present interest and release my son, I entreat and pray you to give him the benefit of that remembrance."

"I really wonder, sir," rejoined the old pupil in an argumentative manner, "to find you taking a position so untenable. My schooling was paid for; it was a bargain; and when I came away, the bargain ended."

"It was a fundamental principle of the Gradgrind philosophy, that everything was to be paid for. Nobody was ever on any account to give anybody anything, or render anybody help without purchase. Gratitude was to be abolished, and the virtues springing from it were not to be. Every inch of the existence of mankind, from birth to death, was to be a bargain across the counter. And if we didn't get to Heaven that way, it was not a politico-economical place, and we had no business there.

"I don't deny," added Bitzer, "that my schooling was cheap. But that comes right, sir. I was made in the cheapest market, and have to dispose of myself in the dearest."

Tom's escape is contrived, successfully in every sense, by means belonging to Dickensian high-fantastic comedy. And there follows the solemn moral of the whole fable, put with the rightness of genius into Mr. Sleary's asthmatic mouth. He, agent of the artist's marvellous tact, acquits himself of it characteristically:

"Thquire, you don't need to be told that dogth ith wonderful animalth."

"Their instinct," said Mr. Gradgrind, "is surprising."

"Whatever you call it—and I'm bletht if I know what to call it"—said Sleary, "it ith athtonithing. The way in which a dog'll find you—the dithtanthe he'll come!"

"His scent," said Mr. Gradgrind, "being so fine."

"I'm bletht if I know what to call it," repeated Sleary, shaking his head, "but I have had dogth find me, Thquire . . ."

—And Mr. Sleary proceeds to explain that Sissy's truant father is certainly dead because his performing dog, who would never have deserted him living, has come back to the Horse-riding:

"he wath lame, and pretty well blind. He went to our children, one after another, ath if he wath a theeking for a child he knowed; and then he come to me, and throwd hithelf up behind, and thtood on hith two fore-legth, weak as he wath, and then he wagged hith tail and died. Thquire, that dog was Merrylegth."

The whole passage has to be read as it stands in the text (Book III, Chapter VIII). Reading it there we have to stand off and reflect at a distance to recognize the potentialities that might have been realized elsewhere as Dickensian sentimentality. There is nothing sentimental in the actual effect. The profoundly serious intention is in control, the touch sure, and the structure that ensures the poise unassertively complex. Here is the formal moral:

"Tho, whether her father bathely detherted her; or whether he broke hith own heart alone, rather than pull her down along with him; never will be known now, Thquire, till—no, not till we know how the dogth findth uth out!"

"She keeps the bottle that he sent her for, to this hour; and she will believe in his affection to the last moment of her life," said Mr. Gradgrind.

"It theemth to prethent two thingth to a perthon, don't it, Thquire?" said Mr. Sleary, musing as he looked down into the depths of his brandy-and-water: "one, that there ith a love in the world, not all Thelf-interethth after all, but thomething very different; t'other, that it hath a way of ith own

of calculating or not calculating, whith thomehow or another ith at leatht ath hard to give a name to, ath the wayth of the dogth ith!"

'Mr. Gradgrind looked out of the window, and made no reply. Mr. Sleary emptied his glass and recalled the ladies.'

It will be seen that the effect (I repeat, the whole passage must be read), apparently so simple and easily right, depends upon a subtle interplay of diverse elements, a multiplicity in unison of timbre and tone. Dickens, we know, was a popular entertainer, but Flaubert never wrote anything approaching this in subtlety of achieved art. Dickens, of course, has a vitality that we don't look for in Flaubert. Shakespeare was a popular entertainer, we reflect—not too extravagantly, we can surely tell ourselves, as we ponder passages of this characteristic quality in their relation, a closely organized one, to the poetic whole.

Criticism, of course, has its points to make against *Hard Times*. It can be said of Stephen Blackpool, not only that he is too good and qualifies too consistently for the martyr's halo, but that he invites an adaptation of the objection brought, from the negro point of view, against Uncle Tom, which was to the effect that he was a white man's good nigger. And certainly it doesn't need a working-class bias to produce the comment that when Dickens comes to the Trade Unions his understanding of the world he offers to deal with betrays a marked limitation. There were undoubtedly professional agitators, and Trade Union solidarity was undoubtedly often asserted at the expense of the individual's rights, but it is a score against a work so insistently typical in intention that it should give the representative rôle to the agitator, Slackbridge, and make Trade Unionism nothing better than the pardonable error of the misguided and oppressed, and, as such, an agent in the martyrdom of the good working man. (But to be fair we must remember the conversation between Bitzer and Mrs. Sparsit:

"It is much to be regretted," said Mrs. Sparsit, making her nose more Roman and her eyebrows more Coriolanian in the strength of her severity, "that the united masters allow of any such class combination."

"Yes, ma'am," said Bitzer.

"Being united themselves, they ought one and all to set their faces against employing any man who is united with any other man," said Mrs. Sparsit.

"They have done that, ma'am," returned Bitzer; "but it rather fell through, ma'am."

"I do not pretend to understand these things," said Mrs. Sparsit with dignity. ". . . I only know that these people must be conquered, and that it's high time it was done, once and for all."')

Just as Dickens has no glimpse of the part to be played by Trade Unionism in bettering the conditions he deplures, so, though he sees there are many places of worship in Coketown, of various kinds of ugliness, he has no notion of the part played by religion in the life of nineteenth-century industrial England. The kind of self-respecting steadiness and conscientious restraint that he represents in Stephen did certainly exist on a large scale among the working-classes, and this is an important historical fact. But there would have been no such fact if those chapels described by Dickens had had no more relation to the life of Coketown than he shows them to have.

Again, his attitude to Trade Unionism is not the only expression of a lack of political understanding. Parliament for him is merely the 'national dust-yard', where the 'national dustmen' entertain one another 'with a great many noisy little fights among themselves', and appoint commissions which fill blue-books with dreary facts and futile statistics — of a kind that helps Gradgrind to 'prove that the Good Samaritan was a bad economist'.

Yet Dickens's understanding of Victorian civilization is adequate for his purpose; the justice and penetration of his criticism are unaffected. And his moral perception works in alliance with a clear insight into the English social structure. Mr. James Harthouse is necessary for the plot; but he too has his representative function. He has come to Coketown as a prospective parliamentary candidate, for 'the Gradgrind party wanted assistance in cutting the throats of the Graces', and they 'liked fine gentlemen; they pretended that they did not, but they did'. And so the alliance between the old ruling class and the 'hard' men figures duly in the fable. This economy is typical. There is Mrs. Sparsit, for instance, who might seem to be there merely for the plot. But her 'husband was a Powler', a fact she reverts to as often as Bounderby to his mythical birth in a ditch; and the two complementary opposites, when Mr. James Harthouse, who in his languid assurance of class-superiority doesn't need to boast, is added, form a trio that suggests the whole system of British snobbery.

But the packed richness of *Hard Times* is almost incredibly varied, and not all the quoting I have indulged in suggests it adequately. The final stress may fall on Dickens's command of word, phrase, rhythm and image: in ease and range there is surely no greater master of English except Shakespeare. This comes back to saying that Dickens is a great poet: his endless resource in felicitously varied expression is an extraordinary responsiveness to life. His senses are charged with emotional energy, and his intelligence plays and flashes in the quickest and sharpest perception. That is, his mastery of 'style' is of the only kind that matters — which is not to say that he hasn't a conscious interest in what can be done with words; many of his felicities could plainly not have come if

there had not been, in the background, a habit of such interest. Take this, for instance:

'He had reached the neutral ground upon the outskirts of the town, which was neither town nor country, but either spoiled . . .'

But he is no more a stylist than Shakespeare; and his mastery of expression is most fairly suggested by stressing, not his descriptive evocations (there are some magnificent ones in *Hard Times*—the varied *décor* of the action is made vividly present, you can feel the velvety dust trodden by Mrs. Sparsit in her stealth, and feel the imminent storm), but his strictly dramatic felicities. Perhaps, however, 'strictly' is not altogether a good pointer, since Dickens is a master of his chosen art, and his mastery shows itself in the way in which he moves between less direct forms of the dramatic and the direct rendering of speech. Here is Mrs. Gradgrind dying (a cipher in the Gradgrind system, the poor creature has never really been alive):

'She had positively refused to take to her bed; on the ground that, if she did, she would never hear the last of it.

'Her feeble voice sounded so far away in her bundle of shawls, and the sound of another voice addressing her seemed to take such a long time in getting down to her ears, that she might have been lying at the bottom of a well. The poor lady was nearer Truth than she had ever been: which had much to do with it.

'On being told that Mrs. Bounderby was there, she replied, at cross purposes, that she had never called him by that name since he had married Louisa; and that pending her choice of an objectionable name, she had called him J; and that she could not at present depart from that regulation, not being yet provided with a permanent substitute. Louisa had sat by her for some minutes, and had spoken to her often, before she arrived at a clear understanding who it was. She then seemed to come to it all at once.

'“Well, my dear,” said Mrs. Gradgrind, “and I hope you are going on satisfactorily to yourself. It was all your father's doing. He set his heart upon it. And he ought to know.”

'“I want to hear of you, mother; not of myself.”

'“You want to hear of me, my dear? That's something new, I am sure, when anybody wants to hear of me. Not at all well, Louisa. Very faint and giddy.”

'“Are you in pain, dear mother?”

'“I think there's a pain somewhere in the room,” said

Mrs. Gradgrind, "but I couldn't positively say that I have got it."

'After this strange speech, she lay silent for some time.

' "But there is something — not an Ology at all — that your father has missed, or forgotten, Louisa. I don't know what it is. I have often sat with Sissy near me, and thought about it. I shall never get its name now. But your father may. It makes me restless. I want to write to him, to find out, for God's sake, what it is. Give me a pen, give me a pen."

'Even the power of restlessness was gone, except from the poor head, which could just turn from side to side.

'She fancied, however, that her request had been complied with, and that the pen she could not have held was in her hand. It matters little what figures of wonderful no-meaning she began to trace upon her wrappers. The hand soon stopped in the midst of them; the light that had always been feeble and dim behind the weak transparency, went out; and even Mrs. Gradgrind, emerged from the shadow in which man walketh and disquieteth himself in vain, took upon her the dread solemnity of the sages and patriarchs.'

With this kind of thing before us, we talk not of style but of dramatic creation and imaginative genius.

MONROE ENGEL

Hard Times†

The recent marked increase in the reputation of *Hard Times* has come at the expense of Dickens' general reputation. Satisfaction with this one sport of his genius has been used as a basis on which to denigrate that genius in its more characteristic manifestations. *Hard Times* satisfies the modern taste (in the arts alone) for economy — in fiction, for spare writing and clearly demonstrable form. Dickens was capable of both, but they were not natural or congenial to him, and he chose to employ them only under the duress of limited space. Curiously enough, *Hard Times* grants a scant measure of the very quality for which it argues, imaginative pleasure. Its seriousness is so scrupulous, plain, and insistent that the reader moves along with simple, too rarely surprised consent, and it is

† From Monroe Engel, *The Maturity of Dickens*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1959. Pp. 172-75. Copyright 1959. Reprinted by permission of the publishers, Harvard University Press.

worth noting that at one point Dickens considered calling the novel "Black and White."

Yet it is silly to prolong the arbitrary see-saw between *Hard Times* and the rest of Dickens' work. It is more to the point to see that the greatest virtues of *Hard Times* are Dickens' characteristic virtues, but less richly present in this book than in many others.

Hard Times is least interesting as an exploitation of its avowed subject, the inadequacy of the Benthamite calculus. The crude but forceless simplicity of Gradgrind can scarcely be said to represent the complexity and solidity of Bentham's influential contributions to English thought. Gradgrind is the merest of straw men. But it may well be that in writing *Hard Times* Dickens was impelled as much by a need to dissociate himself fully and publicly from the Benthamites as by any need to attack them for themselves. The chief grounds on which he attacks the Benthamites, however, are well taken grounds—are, in fact, the very grounds on which Mill himself was to attack them two decades later in his *Autobiography*. Mill had to discover poetry in order to recover from the ravages of the Benthamite education imposed on him by his father, and the ultimate deficiency of the Gradgrind system, too, is that it ignores or condemns the imagination.

More interesting than the attack on the Benthamites, then, though it is laid out almost as obviously, is the defense of fancy and imagination. The necessity for imagination becomes clear only when the inadequacy of reason and of rational social action to deal completely with the unalterable aspects of existence is recognized. The death of fancy is linked to the threat of revolution:

The poor you will always have with you. Cultivate in them, while there is yet time, the utmost graces of the fancies and affections, to adorn their lives so much in need of ornament; or, in the days of your triumph, when romance is utterly driven out of their souls, and they and a bare existence stand face to face, Reality will take a wolfish turn, and make an end of you.

It is only imagination, too, that can bridge the gulf of difference between the classes, only imagination that can merge immediate and divergent self-interests in an ultimate common self-interest. "The like of you don't know us, don't care for us, don't belong to us," Rachael says to Louisa, and the "facts" of Coketown amply support her contention, though in Louisa's case the birth of her imaginative powers is accompanied by a growing realization of and sympathy for the condition of the poor.

Fancy is the progenitor of charity, in the Christian rather than the philanthropic sense, and it is the lack of fancy in her childhood that makes it impossible for Louisa to approach her mother's deathbed with

full feeling, with better than "a heavy, hardened kind of sorrow." This recognition immediately precedes one of Dickens' most brilliant and functional death scenes, the death of Mrs. Gradgrind with only Louisa present.

"But there is something—not an Ology at all—that your father has missed, or forgotten, Louisa. I don't know what it is. I have often sat with Sissy near me, and thought about it. I shall never get its name now. But your father may. It makes me restless. I want to write to him, to find out for God's sake, what it is. Give me a pen, give me a pen."

Even the power of restlessness was gone, except from the poor head, which could just turn from side to side.

She fancied, however, that her request had been complied with, and that the pen she could not have held was in her hand. It matters little what figures of wonderful no-meaning she began to trace upon her wrappers. The hand soon stopped in the midst of them; the light that had always been feeble and dim behind the weak transparency, went out; and even Mrs. Gradgrind, emerged from the shadow in which man walketh and disquieteth himself in vain, took upon her the dread solemnity of the sages and patriarchs.

Here, as usual with Dickens, death is the control by which reality is measured—and, in this case, by which the Gradgrind system is discounted. In the vivid imaginative rendering of the scene, we comprehend what forces are at work on Louisa to pierce her trained incapacity, as we do too when her hazard at the devices of James Hart-house is rendered in an extraordinary sexual image: "The figure descended the great stairs, steadily, steadily; always verging, like a weight in deep water, to the black gulf at the bottom."

It is finally the brief, largely figurative renderings of experience in this novel, far more than the rather mechanical working out of the plot, that most effectively accomplish the destruction of the "hard facts" point of view. We know best what is wrong with Coketown not from the facts we are told about it, nor from the picture of Bounderby's hypocritical oppression, nor even so much from the scene of the union meeting, as from the descriptive imagery of serpents and elephants. In a sense, imagination makes its own best case for itself.

The great virtues of the novel are in disquieting part incidental virtues—incidental, that is, to the main line of development of the story, though absolutely essential to its impact. The questions this raises are peculiar questions concerning the forced restriction of the play of imagination or fancy in a novel that has chiefly to do with the necessity for the free life of the imagination. It seems almost Gradgrindian therefore to prefer *Hard Times* to, say, *David Copperfield* or *Our Mutual Friend*!

ROBERT BARNARD

Imagery and Theme in *Hard Times*†

"I am afraid I shall not be able to get much here."¹

Dickens's disappointment in the Preston power-loom strike was obvious: the town was quiet, the people mostly sat at home, and there were no hints whatsoever from which he could work up one of his big set pieces. He would have been much happier, artistically, with something of a more French-revolutionary nature:

I am in the Bull Hotel, before which some time ago the people assembled supposing the masters to be here, and on demanding to have them out were remonstrated with by the landlady in person. I saw the account in an Italian paper, in which it was stated that "the populace then environed the Palazzo Bull, until the padrona of the Palazzo heroically appeared at one of the upper windows and addressed them!" One can hardly conceive anything less likely to be represented to an Italian mind by this description, than the old, grubby, smoky, mean, intensely formal red brick house with a narrow gateway and a dingy yard, to which it applies.

One suspects Dickens would have liked to take the Italian view of the incident rather than the English. But he obviously felt there was nothing to be done with industrial action as such: "I have no intention of striking," he wrote to Mrs. Gaskell. The decision changed not only the direction of the plot, but the whole tone and texture of the novel. If Dickens had found what he was hoping to find, the novel would surely have been at once more melodramatic and more "popular." As it is, the emotional key of the novel is low.

In most respects the decision was a fortunate one. At this period Dickens adopted the pusillanimous view that workers had a right to strike but were unwise to use that right, and his presentation would probably have been slanted as well as sensationalised. Dickens knew very little about the Northern industrial scene, and the North and the South are two nations. A brief visit was far from sufficient to understand the industrial worker and the stand he was taking. Again, in such a terse, compact novel the interest could not be widely diffused, and the comparative thinness of the Trade Union side of the novel enabled him to concen-

† From *Imagery and Theme in the Novels of Dickens*. ©1974 by the Norwegian Research Council for Science and the Humanities. Universitetsforlaget, 1974. Reprinted by permission of Norwegian University Press.

1. From a letter by Dickens written at Preston during his visit to learn about the strike (January 29, 1854) [Editor].

trate his attention relentlessly on the Hard Fact men (though even here Butt and Tillotson note that Dickens intended to establish an identity between the Gradgrind view of life and the "dandy," dilettante view, so roundly castigated in *Bleak House*, but was unable to find space for it).

Nevertheless, the discontent of the workers, and their banding together in Trade Unions could not be ignored altogether, and it is in the treatment of these themes that the reader is brought up against the major false note in the book. As many commentators have observed, the professional speaker from a nearby town whom Dickens saw addressing the striking workers during his visit to Preston becomes the Slackbridge of *Hard Times*, with the difference that in Preston the man was received with scant sympathy by the men, and was prevented from stirring up trouble by "the persuasive right hand of the chairman," whereas in *Hard Times* he gets a sympathetic hearing and brings about the ostracisation of Stephen.

The point is not as trivial as it might seem. Of course Dickens is under no obligation to be exact in his reporting; a misrepresentation of detail which allowed the better presentation of a wider truth about the industrial situation would have been understandable. But in this case Dickens makes the change in order to misrepresent the wider situation. Either to placate his middle-class readers, or else because a preconceived plotline forced the falsification on him, he depicts the workers as intelligent men misled by mischievous agitators—just the very line taken up towards the new Trade Unions by the fainthearted who baulked at offending either side. Edgar Johnson's heading for his chapter dealing with the writing of *Hard Times*—"The heaviest blow in my power"—is distinctly misleading. Dickens used the phrase in a letter written sixteen years before the visit to Preston. As far as the treatment of industrial unrest in this novel is concerned, the "blow" Dickens strikes is a muffled, misdirected one.

The importance of his misrepresentation of the situation is not merely extraliterary, for the falseness of Dickens's approach is quite evident in the text itself:

As he stood there, trying to quench his fiery face with his drink of water, the comparison between the orator and the crowd of attentive faces turned towards him, was extremely to his disadvantage. Judging him by Nature's evidence, he was above the mass in very little but the stage on which he stood. In many great respects he was essentially below them. He was not so honest, he was not so manly, he was not so good-humoured; he substituted cunning for their simplicity, and passion for their safe solid sense. An ill-made, high-shouldered man, with lowering brows, and his features crushed into an habitually sour expression, he contrasted

most unfavourably, even in his mongrel dress, with the great body of his hearers in their plain working clothes. Strange as it always is to consider any assembly in the act of submissively resigning itself to the dreariness of some complacent person, lord or commoner, whom three-fourths of it could, by no human means, raise out of the slough of inanity to their own intellectual level, it was particularly strange, and it was even particularly affecting, to see this crowd of earnest faces, whose honesty in the main no competent observer free from bias could doubt, so agitated by such a leader.

It does indeed appear strange; in fact nothing Dickens says can make it anything but inexplicable. Nor is he helped by the quality of his writing in the Trade Union section of the novel which at times ("no competent observer free from bias") resembles that of a leader-writer defending a distinctly dubious proposition.

The first consequence of making the workers malleable by such hands as Slackbridge is that Dickens's no doubt genuinely admiring descriptions of them and their attitudes no longer ring true. His comment that "age, especially when it strives to be self-reliant and cheerful, finds much consideration among the poor" sounds condescending, where similar tributes to the brick-makers' wives in *Bleak House* seem perfectly natural. Nor can one convincingly laud the intelligence of men who are persuaded by the eloquence of a windbag to persecute an admirable and unfortunate fellow-worker. And the second consequence is that, if he devalues and disowns the Trade Union movement, he is forced to look elsewhere for a panacea, since this is a novel which cries out for some sort of positive statement—seems in fact, almost to have presented itself to Dickens as the means of bringing his testimony on the subject to the public's notice. And thus he is forced into the drivelling fatuity of Stephen's "dyin prayer that aw th'world may on'y coom together more, an' get a better unnerstan'in o' one another." Stated so baldly this message would be feeble in any industrial novel. In one that includes Bounderby it is patently ludicrous. Is it suggested that the "honest," "manly" and "good-humoured" workers should sort out their troubles amiably by getting together with this hectoring, lying bully? As far as the Trade Union section is concerned, this novel refutes its own thesis.

But in the parts of the novel concerning the Hard Fact men Dickens is much more at home. If the scenes involving Stephen and Rachael seem thinly written, superior padding, the Gradgrind-Bounderby scenes are hard-hitting and rich in layer upon layer of implication. The first impression these scenes give is of a powerful imagination holding itself in, of an almost painful discipline being exercised over an unruly creative urge. The descriptions of character are brief, forceful; the "keynotes" of

the various sections are struck with admirable directness. Most of the chapters begin succinctly, even brutally: "Thomas Gradgrind, Sir. A man of realities. A man of facts and calculations"; or "The Gradgrind party wanted assistance in cutting the throats of the Graces." What would be matter for a page in Dickens's normal style is compressed to a three or four-line paragraph in the new, telegraphic style necessary for the short episodes of a weekly serial:

Mr. James Harthouse began to think it would be a new sensation, if the face which changed so beautifully for the whelp, would change for him.

or

I entertain a weak idea that the English people are as hard-worked as any people upon whom the sun shines. I acknowledge to this ridiculous idiosyncrasy, as a reason why I would give them a little more play.

The idea that Dickens is a writer incapable of artistic self-control is a discredited one; no novel proves its untruth so well as this one. The letters of the time and the notes for the novel testify to the severity of the discipline which he kept himself under, but the reader also senses that he is consciously trying not to squeeze out entirely the exuberance and fluency of his mature style—hence the occasional latitude he allows himself in the depiction of, for example, the circus people and Bounding-belly.

Dickens's use of imagery in *Hard Times* is similarly spare, similarly effective. In the larger novels the aspects which acquire in the course of the novel symbolic overtones—be they weather, landscapes, buildings or whatever—are thoroughly, hauntingly established early on, and then subjected to elaboration and modification as the book progresses. The significance of the symbol, and the ramifications of that significance are gradually opened up to the reader; the emotional and intellectual effects that Dickens aims at are cumulative. No such technique was possible for *Hard Times*. There is nothing in this novel comparable to the prison in *Dorrit* or the river in *Our Mutual Friend*. Here Dickens's method is to strike a keynote, then remind the reader of it by constant repetition. For example, the keynote Coketown is struck in chapter 5 in three pages which suggest, with a wealth of illustrative example, emotional and imaginative repression, uniformity, spiritual death. The key features of the physical description are the "interminable serpents of smoke" from the chimneys and the piston of the steam-engine which looked like "the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness." Later, in chapter 10, we are told that from the express trains the lights in the factories made them look like fairy palaces. Whenever we need to be reminded of the emotional stagnation inherent in the Coketown system later in

the book, Dickens simply mentions the serpent, the elephant and the fairy palaces, normally with no alteration or elaboration, none of the extravagances one might expect from him, given such material. Never has he made his points so economically.

A similar self-discipline is evident in the use of the staircase image, symbol of Louisa's gradual slipping into an adulterous relationship with Harthouse. It is first foreshadowed in chapter 7 of book 2, where Dickens mentions Louisa going "step by step, onward and downward, towards some end, yet so gradually, that she believed herself to remain motionless." Later we hear that she has fallen into a confidential alliance with Harthouse "by degrees so fine that she could not retrace them if she tried." By this time the image, and its usefulness in depicting a process which he himself had not space to trace in detail was clear to Dickens, and he decided to present the image as an authorial gift to Mrs. Sparsit:

Now, Mrs. Sparsit was not a poetical woman; but she took an idea in the nature of an allegorical fancy, into her head. Much watching of Louisa, and much consequent observation of her impenetrable demeanour, which keenly whetted and sharpened Mrs. Sparsit's edge, must have given her as it were a lift, in the way of inspiration. She erected in her mind a mighty Staircase, with a dark pit of shame and ruin at the bottom; and down those stairs, from day to day and hour to hour, she saw Louisa coming.

From this point on Mrs. Sparsit becomes suitably single-minded in her idea until the moment when, she believes, Louisa "falls from the lowermost stair, and is swallowed up in the gulf." In the author's hand this image would have needed considerable elaboration and expansion; without that it would have seemed too rigid and unsympathetic as a symbol of the downward course of an unhappily married woman, desperately seizing the chance of a love she has never had, and would have suggested a too conventional moral judgment of her actions. As a figment of Mrs. Sparsit's imagination, however, it is perfect, and further develops the woman's combination of prurient curiosity and dreary respectability.

Hard Times is a reaffirmation of belief in fancy. Its targets are not Utilitarianism or political Economy, but some aspects of Utilitarianism, some results of Political Economy. The book is aimed, in fact, at all the tendencies of the age to repress the free creative imagination of men, to stifle their individuality, to make them cogs in a machine—mere numbers in a classroom, or "hands" without bodies or minds. That Dickens was unfair to Utilitarians, and in particular to their achievements in the great national cinder-heap, is only important if we agree with House that Gradgrind is satirised as an "intellectual,"² that Dickens was taking on a philosophy. If this were true, then we might agree that he "did not under-

2. See Humphry House, *The Dickens World* (Oxford, 1960) 205 [Editor].

stand enough of any philosophy even to be able to guy it successfully" (*The Dickens World*). But Utilitarianism plays the same role in Gradgrind's mind as, say, religion in Mrs. Clennam's: it acts as a formidable prop to traits of character which were formed quite independently of it. Just as religion was not a part of Dickens's early conception of Mrs. Clennam, so one can imagine Gradgrind without the overlay of Utilitarianism, and still see him as a significant and relevant comment on his age. Dickens's target was not a philosophy but a frame of mind, and a very nineteenth-century frame of mind. It is not often noted that much of what he says about Gradgrind and the education of his children repeats in almost identical terms what he had recently said about Grandfather Smallweed in *Bleak House* and the education of his grandchildren, who "never owned a doll, never heard of Cinderella, never played at any game" and "could as soon play at leap-frog, or at cricket, as change into a cricket or a frog." It was inevitable that he should be thought at the time to be "taking on" the political economists, but he is in fact only concerned with certain of their attitudes which he regarded as symptomatic of attitudes generally current at the time. His message was little more than "we must not neglect the imagination"—a familiar one from Dickens, but an extremely timely one. (Many critics have noted that Dickens, in the upbringing of his own children, was true to his own precepts, and filled their lives with fun, games and stories. What is not so often remarked is that many of his children, when they grew up, resembled nothing so much as the young Gradgrinds. Several of the boys were discontented, shiftless and financially irresponsible. One of the daughters married a man she did not love to escape her father's house.)

Inevitably in a novel with such a theme mathematical and mechanical imagery plays a large part. In many superb, ironical phrases Dickens salutes mechanised, dehumanised man in his mechanised, de-naturalised environment. For example Gradgrind's house is a "calculated, cast up, balanced, and proved house," with a "lawn and garden and an infant avenue, all ruled straight like a botanical accountbook." Gradgrind's judgement of human beings and relationships, which is the core of the novel's message, is similarly mathematical, though faced with the extraordinary grace and vitality of a Sissy Jupe he has to admit that "there was something in this girl which could hardly be set forth in a tabular form." Gradgrind himself is a "galvanizing apparatus" and life at Stone Lodge—like life in the Clennam household, which practises a similar repression of emotion and imagination—goes "monotonously round like a piece of machinery." The "mechanical art and mystery of educating the reason" is served in his school by a master who is one of a hundred and forty "lately turned at the same time, in the same factory, on the same principles, like so many pianoforte legs." Time is the "great manufacturer" and, in a series of images in chapter 14, turns out a number

of human products, varying in their satisfactoriness. In this environment, love—or rather courtship—wears a “manufacturing aspect”: “love was made on these occasions in the form of bracelets.” All is profit and loss, input and output. Mass production extends to people: “thousands upon thousands . . . aw leading the like lives,” says Stephen, as usual a mouth-piece for the author, with the masters “‘rating ’em as so much Power, and reg’latin ’em as if they was figures in a soom, or machines.’”

And yet fancy, rigorously excluded by the front door, pushes its way brazenly in at the back. Butt and Tillotson note the intrusion of fancy through Bounderby’s assumption of low origins and Mrs. Sparsit’s assumption of gentility. Even more insistent is the imagery of the novel, with its constant reference to fables, fairy tales, and the stuff of childhood and adolescent reading. Everything that was lacking in the upbringing of Louisa and Tom is present in Dickens’s treatment of their story, and the Hard Fact men, who sternly outlaw fancy and emotion from their lives, become, paradoxically, the stuff of fairy-tales—mere ogres. Dickens makes the point very explicitly early on:

Almost as soon as they could run alone, they had been made to run to the lecture-room. The first object with which they had an association, or of which they had a remembrance, was a large black board with a dry Ogre chalking ghastly white figures on it.

Not that they knew, by name or nature, anything about an Ogre. Fact forbid! I only use the word to express a monster in a lecturing castle, with Heaven knows how many heads manipulated into one, taking childhood captive, and dragging it into gloomy statistical dens by the hair.

And of course here and later he goes on to emphasise the imaginative deprivation of the young Gradgrinds, cut off—like the appalling young Smallweeds—from nursery rhymes, fairy tales, and the usual nourishers of childhood fancy.

But fancy has its revenge, and Coketown and its inhabitants are covered with a patina of myth and fable. Stephen, for example, betakes himself at one point to “the red brick castle of the giant Bounderby.” Mrs. Sparsit, whose classical features are of the “Coriolanian style,” is surrounded by Roman references drawn from the sort of story once considered suitable for schoolboy reading. She goes down to meet Mr. Hart-house “in the manner of a Roman matron going outside the city walls to treat with an invading general”; as she takes tea with Bounderby she “rather looked as if her classical countenance were invoking the infernal gods”; her position in that gentleman’s household is that of “captive Princess” in attendance on his car in state-processions. Inevitably, after her drenching during the pursuit of Louisa, she is compared to a classical ruin. Not particularly fanciful herself, Mrs. Sparsit is the source of fan-

cifulness in Dickens, and is rich in a number of other imaginative comparisons of a fabulous nature: she is a griffin, she is the "Bank Dragon keeping watch over the treasures of the mine" (though she thinks of herself as the Bank Fairy), she trails Louisa "like Robinson Crusoe in his ambuscade against the savages." Similarly Coketown, as well as being full of fairy palaces, is "red and black like the painted face of a savage." The more repulsively unimaginative the subject, the more exotic and fantastic the imagery Dickens lavishes on it, always with rich comic effect. Mr. Bounderby, for example, is a "Venus . . . risen out of the mud"; by banging his hat he becomes an oriental dancer who eventually puts her tambourine on her head. Indeed, his own description of the aspirations of the Coketown hands—"to be set up in a coach and six, and to be fed on turtle soup and venison, with a gold spoon" is drawn from the world of childish fantasy, reminding one of the young Pip's lies about Miss Havisham. Thus in all these ways Dickens drives home his message that the irrational and life-giving world of fancy cannot be suppressed, *will* be heard; as Sleary says to Gradgrind: "You *mutht* have uth, Thquire . . . make the bethht of uth; not the wurtht."

The fancy is not the only quality that is suppressed in Coketown and has its revenge by devious means. Religion too is perverted and slighted, yet emerges fitfully as one of the few forces that can save men from the living death which is Coketown. Dickens's religion, as it shows itself in this novel, is the same uncomplicated, unintellectual religion of good works and the heart's affections which it always had been. He is moved by the story of the Good Samaritan and the Woman Taken in Adultery more than by any Christian doctrine, however vital and central the theologians might judge it. But if he never goes beyond the "common stock of Christian phrases" which House notes as being all he has at his command, he uses it with telling force, for he sees the Political Economists as erecting a new religion, full of doctrine and empty of love. He can hardly mention the views of the "Hard Fact tribe" without tacking on an ironical religious phrase to emphasise the barrenness of their philosophy:

The M'Choakumchild school was all fact, and the school of design was all fact, and the relations between master and man were all fact, and everything was fact between the lying-in hospital and the cemetery, and what you couldn't state in figures, or show to be purchaseable in the cheapest market and saleable in the dearest, was not, and never should be, world without end, Amen.

One senses in all the religious references the desperation of one who sees the comfortable and comforting faith which he has taken for granted all his life, and which he has believed to be the natural religion of mankind in general, being extinguished all around and being replaced by

something brutal and materialistic. The masters in Coketown take up a godlike stance, rule with "a sort of Divine Right," and the Gradgrind party regale their "disciples" with "little mouldy rations of political economy." Faith, Hope and Charity, the cornerstones of his faith, are being ground in the "dusty little mills" of the Political Economists; existence is becoming a "bargain across a counter" and "if we didn't get to Heaven that way, it was not a politico-economical place, and we had no business there." In similar vein Mr. Gradgrind, at the moment when his daughter is about to burst in upon him to confront him with the terrible consequences of his system, is writing in his room what Dickens conjectures to be a study proving that the Good Samaritan was a bad political economist. For Bitzer, that superbly mechanised product of the system, the "whole duty of man" can be calculated as a matter of profit and loss, and when Mr. Gradgrind becomes an M.P., he is described as the Member for

ounce weights and measures, one of the representatives of the multiplication table, one of the deaf honourable gentlemen, dumb honourable gentlemen, blind honourable gentlemen, lame honourable gentlemen, dead honourable gentlemen, to every other consideration. Else wherefore live we in a Christian land, eighteen hundred and odd years after our Master?

And if the masters deny the Christian message, or twist it to their own ends, the Union leaders do the same. It is perhaps a sign of the shaky balance which Dickens saw it as his mission to maintain that this should be so. Slackbridge is a slightly more secular Chadband, and what Dickens christens "the gospel according to Slackbridge" contains frequent references to Judas Iscariot, the serpent in the garden and the "God-like race" of workers. Slackbridge always talks of himself in terms of a Miltonic God punishing our first fathers: "I hurled him out from amongst us: an object for the undying finger of scorn to point at . . . etc." It is characteristic of Dickens that Stephen should answer him with a reference to the Good Samaritan. Dickens rather frequently uses the God of the New Testament to shame the God of the Old.

For in spite of perversions and suppressions, Dickens's religion of the heart does manage to establish itself as a yardstick by which the newer, harsher creeds are measured and found wanting. Partly, of course, it makes itself felt in this novel through Stephen, and this is unfortunate. Dickens establishes, from the moment the keynote Coketown is struck, that whoever belongs to the eighteen religious denominations which had established chapels like "pious warehouses" in Coketown, "the labouring people did not." Stephen, therefore, is untypical of his class not merely in the promise he made to Rachael not to join a Union (that inexplicable promise which she didn't want him to make and apparently doesn't insist

that he keep) but also in his conviction that "the heavens is over me ahint the smoke." He is, as Leavis observes, a white man's nigger, and it is a measure of Dickens's lack of confidence in his power to handle the subject of the industrial worker that he has to remove Stephen so far from the average or typical before he can consider it appropriate to demand sympathy for him from the reader. The laboured allegory of his end in the "Old Hell" shaft, squeezed so dry of all emotional impact by the dreary, obvious moralising as Stephen approaches the "God of the poor," is feeble beyond belief, and one feels that it required considerable audacity on Dickens's part to write such a scene shortly after complaining about Mrs. Gaskell's characters, that he wished they would be "a little firmer on their legs." Stephen's fall down Old Hell Shaft and his long wait for hearers for his dying words amount to wanton and sadistic sentimentality. He is butchered in order to bring home to the masters and men a wholly inadequate—indeed a thoroughly false—moral.

Nevertheless, not even Stephen's blankness as a character and wrongness as a representative can totally rob his words of their force. It is wonderful how Dickens, in this brief novel, makes his moral equations almost mathematically precise but still generally manages to make them convincing. Stephen accuses his workmates of being like the Levite who ignored the man who fell among thieves (" 'if I was a lvin parisht i' th' road, yo'd feel it right to pass me by, as a forrenner and stranger' ") just as Mr. Gradgrind had proved to himself that the Good Samaritan was a bad economist. At the end of the book Gradgrind's appeal to Bitzer for compassion and that young machine's reply recall, but without seeming pat or unconvincing, Sissy Jupe's version of the first principle of Political Economy: "To do unto others as I would that they should do unto me." Sissy's quotation is the stuff of which Dickens's homely, kindly religion was made, as is Rachael's " 'Let him who is without sin among you cast the first stone at her! ' " Totally unmythical, generous, practical, tinged with sentimentality yet capable of rising to extraordinary insights. It is not always realised how closely interwoven into his thought and range of reference the Bible and its message are. It comes to his mind almost automatically when he is confronted by the brutality and materialism of his age. The philosophy of the toady Pockets, the commercial arrogance of Dombey, the greed that Merdle plays on, the stifling in children of fancy in favour of fact—the immediate response to all these is to use, or to pervert ironically, the Bible, to emphasise the shabbiness and selfishness of the proceedings. "Murdering the Innocents" is the title of the chapter which deals with Gradgrind's school.

And the third irrational force which the Philosophers fail to suppress is, of course, passion, the affections—that love which is the basis of Dickens's philosophy of life—as well as the more dangerous and destructive expressions of the sexual instinct. The whole direction of the novel is an

exposition of this failure, and though this theme is dealt with less frankly and less exhaustively than the related suppression of "fancy," the crime of the attempt is clearly, in Dickens's eyes, as heavy.

In no one is the suppression completely successful. Mr. Gradgrind himself may not be conscious of any gap in his life, any dissatisfaction with the pale transparency of a wife whom he married because she was "most satisfactory as a question of figures," but he unconsciously seeks a compensation through his love for his daughter, a love which he disastrously fails to disentangle from the figures and percentages which preoccupy his conscious mind. Even Bitzer, that triumphant product of the system, on one occasion is found relieving his irrational impulses by tormenting Sissy Jupe. Though in Coketown "Nature was as strongly bricked out as killing airs and gases were bricked in," we have a sense throughout this novel of an uneasy, deceptive calm, of suppressed forces which are in danger of becoming, by that very suppression, perverted and destructive forces.

The images Dickens uses to suggest these unused powers are related to fire and water. The fires of Coketown are mirrored in the fires of Louisa's nature, where, unobserved by her father, there is "a light with nothing to rest upon, a fire with nothing to burn." In the striking scene—obviously prefiguring the similar ones in *Our Mutual Friend* involving Lizzie Hexam and Charlie—when Tom first explicitly suggests that Louisa might use her sexual hold over Bounderby to his, Tom's, advantage, she gazes into the fire, thinking her "unmanageable thoughts." When Tom leaves her after a later scene, she stands at the door gazing out over the lurid lights from the fires at Coketown and trying to establish their relationship to "her own fire within the house." All the suppressions involved in the Coketown system are related. Fire is the image she herself uses in that extraordinary and suggestive moment during the crucial interview with her father over the Bounderby proposal, he uneasily fingering his paper-knife, she gazing with a restlessness she herself only half understands over the tall chimneys of Coketown: "There seems to be nothing there but languid and monotonous smoke. Yet when the night comes, Fire bursts out, father!" The image is further developed when, later in the book, Dickens has to describe Louisa's resentment at Sissy Jupe's pity for her. The fire which has been suppressed is now all the more likely to rage destructively:

A dull anger that she should be seen in her distress, and that the involuntary look she had so resented should come to this fulfilment, smouldered within her like an unwholesome fire. All closely imprisoned forces rend and destroy. The air that would be healthful to the earth, the water that would enrich it, the heat that would ripen it, tear it when caged up.

The frequent use of water imagery and one powerful scene involving water have a similar purpose, but the instincts suggested by the comparison are deeper, gentler, more fruitful. In Coketown the factual and the superficial are relentlessly cultivated at the expense of the irrational, subconscious forces, but nevertheless Dickens has to suggest the depths of a nature like Louisa's, unplumbed, neglected, unaroused though they are. Of course, he only has to suggest, for there is nothing in Coketown that will ever be able to bring them to the surface:

To be sure, the better and profounder part of her character was not within his [Harthouse's] scope of perception; for in natures, as in seas, depth answers unto depth.

For all his love and genuine desire to do right her father entirely fails to understand her nature—he has merely been “gauging fathomless deeps with his little mean excise-rod.” The whole process of education for Louisa has been nothing more than “the drying up of every spring and fountain in her young heart as it gushed out.” Dickens never develops the conventional image of life as a voyage—as he does in other novels—but phrases associated with such an image come naturally to his mind when he considers the waste of Louisa's life, and the perilous suppression of her best feelings. “It is the drifting icebergs setting with any current anywhere, that wreck the ships” he notes of Harthouse. In the desperate scenes with her father when she confronts him with the consequences of his system, she is described as “cast away”—for “she had suffered the wreck of her whole life upon the rock.” Her descent down the staircase towards adultery is “like a weight in deep water, to the black gulf at the bottom.” The powerful and suggestive scene between Tom and Harthouse, where Tom plucks to pieces rosebuds and scatters them onto the lake below is, in its level of suggestion, too subtle and complex to respond readily to analysis, but clearly it suggests among other things the wanton sacrifice not only of Louisa's virginity but also of her whole life on the altar of Tom's selfishness. In its feeling of waste and constraint the whole scene is a brilliant epitome of the book as a whole.

At this point a tribute to Dr. Leavis's account of the novel is customary, and indeed deserved, though one wonders whether the oblivion in which the novel languished before his essay is as total as is sometimes implied. And surely Shaw's essay of forty years earlier is at least as perceptive an account of the book. Do the circus scenes really bear the weight of implication which Leavis lays on them, and isn't Mr. Sleary more of a bore than he will allow—yet another, more asthmatic, mouthpiece for the author, who puts over his message more succinctly and convincingly in his own voice?

Nevertheless, though one takes Monroe Engel's point when he suggests that it is Gradgrindian to prefer *Hard Times* to the more plenteously imaginative novels of Dickens's maturity, still one cannot altogether

agree with him that "curiously enough, *Hard Times* grants a scant measure of the very quality for which it argues, imaginative pleasure" (*The Maturity of Dickens*). That pleasure is there—less exuberant, less all-enveloping, less grotesque, but it is there, and it is far from scant. And there is a special fascination about a novel in which the message is so clearly matched by the manner. The fancy, the love, the compassion which Dickens brings to his picture of Coketown work subterraneously, erupt spasmodically, but they do finally and forcefully make themselves felt, win their small victories. One frequent image in the novel is that of the "short tether": Mr. Gradgrind tumbles about "within the limits of his short tether . . . annihilating the flowers of existence"; he draws a line and ties Tom down to it; he chains Louisa down to material realities. Harthouse is similarly conscious of the "stake to which he was tied." Bounderby keeps "so tight a hand" over his work people that their existence is one of unrelieved drudgery; only when he wants to entrap them is it his policy "to give 'em line enough." The image arises naturally from the feeling of restriction which pervades the book, and it is probably true to say that Dickens himself was similarly restricted to a short tether—by the length of the novel, the length of each installment, the very nature of the subject matter—and chafed furiously against the limitations.

But a Dickens tethered is a very different matter from a Gradgrind tethered, for Dickens cannot help cultivating and scattering profusely those "flowers of existence" that the other annihilates. With all its faults and weaknesses, *Hard Times* does, both in its theme and the manner of its treatment, gloriously proclaim the ultimate victory of the fancy.

DAVID CRAIG

[*Hard Times*: The Meaning of the Title]†

Dickens's flair for expressing matters of common concern *in their own style* shows in the very title of the novel in which, for once, he dealt with the average life of his time. Most of the twenty-five possible titles for *Hard Times* and the fourteen he short-listed suggest, usually by a cliché or a pun, the theme of human life ground down by calculation and routine: for example, 'According to Cocker', 'Prove It', 'Hard Times', 'Hard Heads and Soft Hearts', 'A Mere Question of Figures'. 'Hard Times' stands out in that it was the phrase which came most naturally, when weariness or hardship had to be voiced, to the people with whom the novel is concerned: the men, women and children whose lives were being transformed by the industrial revolution. It is very much a vernac-

† From *The Real Foundations: Literature and Social Change*, by David Craig (London: Chatto and Windus, 1979). Reprinted by permission.

ular phrase, common in folk songs especially between 1820 and 1865¹ but not in pamphlets, speeches, or the papers, however popular or radical. 'Hard times' (or 'tickle times', 'weary times', 'bad times') usually meant a period, often a slump, when scanty food and low wages or unemployment bore particularly hard. Much less often it could mean the more pervasive state in which people felt that the essential and permanent conditions of their lives hemmed them in inflexibly, as in the refrain of a song from the knitting mills of South Carolina around 1890:

Every morning just at five,
Gotta get up, dead or alive.
It's hard times in the mill, my love,
Hard times in the mill.

Every morning just at six,
Don't that old bell make you sick?
It's hard times in the mill, my love,
Hard times in the mill. . . .

Ain't it enough to break your heart?
Have to work all day and at night it's dark.
It's hard times in the mill, my love,
Hard times in the mill.

The rightness of Dickens's judgement lay in his seizing on the popular phrase and using it for a novel which is not about a time of special neediness but rather about a kind of bondage to routine and calculation so integral to the culture of industrial societies that much of it is still with us.

* * *

DAVID LODGE

How Successful Is *Hard Times*?†

The so-called industrial novels of the Victorian period, like *Hard Times*, offer a special problem, or trap, for literary criticism. Because these novels comment directly upon contemporary social issues, they open themselves to evaluation according to the 'truthfulness' with which they reflect

1. E.g. 'Jone o' Grinfil's Visit to Mr. Fielden', c. 1835; 'Gooin' T' Schoo' and 'Hard Times', c. 1864 (John Harland, *Ballads and Songs of Lancashire*, 175, 508, 512); 'The New-Fashioned Farmer', c. 1840 (John Ashton, *Modern Street Ballads*, 191); 'Hard Times' (Ben Brierley, *Ab-o'th-Yate' Sketches*, Oldham, 1896, 270-2; the song is much earlier than the volume).

† From *Working with Structuralism* by David Lodge (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981). Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

the 'facts' of social history. Modern criticism of *Hard Times* shows this tendency very clearly. Humphry House, in *The Dickens World* (1941), for instance, argued that the novel was a failure because Dickens had taken on subject-matter that he either could not or would not treat adequately: Dickens did not understand Utilitarianism well enough to attack it effectively, and in handling the theme of industrial relations falsified his own observations, as recorded in his report on the Preston strike in *Household Words* (11 February 1854). Dr. Leavis, in advancing a (then) startlingly high evaluation of the novel in *The Great Tradition* (1948), conceded Dickens's failure on the latter score, but minimised its significance. For him, the centre of the novel was its critique of Utilitarianism, through the characterisation of Gradgrind and Bounderby. In his treatment of the latter, Leavis claimed, 'Dickens . . . makes a just observation about the affinities and practical tendency of Utilitarianism, as, in his presentment of the Gradgrind home and the Gradgrind elementary school, he does about the Utilitarian spirit in Victorian education'. John Holloway contested this view in his essay, '*Hard Times*, A History and a Criticism'. Documenting his case extensively from contemporary encyclopedias, textbooks and government reports, Holloway argued forcefully that Dickens's account of Utilitarianism, and of the various practices that derived from it, was both unfair and internally inconsistent; and as regards the industrial theme he followed House in stressing Dickens's 'deliberate falsification of what [he] knew from his visit to Preston'.¹ In his introduction to the Penguin English Library edition of the novel, the Marxist critic David Craig swung back to the opposite pole. Affirming the 'deep and manifold rootedness of *Hard Times* in its age', he sought to demonstrate the essential truthfulness of Dickens's critique of Gradgrind's philosophy of education by culling from the work of the Hammonds and other social historians descriptions of contemporary board schools that correspond closely to the early chapters of *Hard Times*. 'The schooling systems favoured by go-ahead cotton masters', says Craig, 'were themselves like living satires on Utilitarianism in practice, even before Dickens had recreated them in the mode of satire'.² But the 'mode' of the novel is less acceptable to Craig when it comes to the treatment of the working class, and his claims for the novel's truthfulness become progressively more tortuous and equivocal as his introduction proceeds. His conclusion reads almost like a parody of Stalinist Socialist Realism: 'if one tried to imagine the great industrial novel that never did get written, one might suggest that the masters cried out to be satirized, the mass of the people presented with clear-eyed realism. Insofar as Dickens fails in the latter, his novel sags; insofar as he excels in the former, it succeeds . . .'

1. John Holloway, '*Hard Times*, a History and a Criticism' in *Dickens and the Twentieth Century*, ed. John Gross and Gabriel Pearson (1962), p. 167.

2. David Craig, Introduction to *Hard Times* (Harmondsworth, 1969), p. 22.

The history of critical commentary on *Hard Times* demonstrates that no amount of comparison between a novel and its social-historical sources (whether specific or general) can ever settle the question of how successful it is as a work of art. The reason is not that criteria of empirical truthfulness are wholly irrelevant (they are not); but that in referring from fiction to fact and back again, the critics are ignoring a vitally important stage in the creative process by which narratives are composed, viz. the transformation of the deep structure of the text into its surface structure. We must consider, that is to say, not just the transformation of the historical data into fictional narrative, but the transformation of the narrative *fabula*, a story potentially realisable in an infinite number of ways, into a particular *sjuzet*, or text. It is in this process that the particular literary identity of a novel, and therefore the range of reader-responses appropriate to it, are determined.

In an earlier essay on *Hard Times*³ I tried to mediate between conflicting evaluations of the novel by a formalistic analysis of its surface structure—that is, its characteristic style or rhetoric—suggesting that persuasiveness rather than truthfulness should be the criterion of success or failure. In this essay I aim to complement that earlier study by examining the novel's structure at a deeper level, that of narrative technique. The object is to answer the question, how successful is *Hard Times*, by answering another one: what kind of novel is *Hard Times*?

In advancing his very high estimate of the novel, Dr Leavis classified it as a 'moral fable', which he defined by saying that 'in it the intention is peculiarly insistent, so that the representative significance of everything in the fable—character, episode and so on—is immediately apparent as we read'. But as Robert Garis pointed out, Dr Leavis's reading of *Hard Times* is not perceptibly different from his reading of other novels in *The Great Tradition*, and claims for it qualities which it hardly possesses.⁴ Professor Garis's own term for the exuberant explicitness which Leavis characterised as 'moral fable' is 'theatre', but it is a quality *he* finds permeating all Dickens's writing, whereas most readers of *Hard Times* have felt that there is something quite distinctive about the 'feel' of this novel. In what follows I shall try to analyse in formal terms the moralised theatricality that is specific to *Hard Times*, beginning with the categories of time and 'point of view'.

The most significant aspect of Dickens's handling of time in his novel concerns what Gérard Genette calls 'duration', affecting the *pace* of the narrative. There is not much to comment on with regard to the *ordering* of events—we do not find in *Hard Times* that radical dislocation and rearrangement of chronological order that we encounter, for instance, in *Wuthering Heights* or the novels of Joseph Conrad. Dickens tells his

3. "The Rhetoric of *Hard Times*" in *Language of Fiction* (1966).

4. Robert Garis, *The Dickens Theatre* (1965).

story in a straightforward way, narrating events in the order in which they occurred (except for passages where he shifts attention from one set of characters to another, and must bring us up to date by a brief recapitulation). The pace of the narrative is, however, rapid—considerably more so than Dickens's other novels, and certainly more rapid than other 'industrial novels' of the period, like Mrs Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) or Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845). This rapid pace is partly the result of the condensation of several years' doings into a relatively short text, but it is also the result of the drastic curtailment of *description*, compared with Dickens's usual practice. There are, of course, vivid and memorable descriptions of people and places in *Hard Times*, but they are highly compressed, and overtly symbolic rather than realistic in function. The description of Mr Gradgrind's physiognomy and physique and house in metaphorical terms of geometrical regularity, mercantile accountancy, etc., is representative. Location is described in the same way, with a few bold strokes: the brick-red and soot-black city of Coketown, with its ugly, uniform civic architecture, its anonymous crowds of workers moving backwards and forwards at fixed intervals between their mean, identical dwellings and the factories that are ironically likened to brightly lit palaces, in which the pistons of the steam engines 'worked monotonously up and down, like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness'. Dickens's often remarked technique of describing the animate in terms of the inanimate, and vice versa, here attains a stark, cartoon-like simplicity and economy of means. And since description always suspends the onward flow of narrative, this economy has the effect of speeding up the narrative tempo of *Hard Times*—an effect increased by the breaking up of the text into very short chapters. Authorial commentary, too, is more self-denying in terms of space than equivalent passages in, say, *Dombey and Son* or *Bleak House*. These features of *Hard Times* were no doubt partly dictated by the weekly serial publication in *Household Words* for which it was originally written—but only partly. Other novels by Dickens originally published in the same way, such as *The Old Curiosity Shop* or *Great Expectations*, have quite different and more leisurely rhythms. The basic rhythm of *Hard Times* is the alternation of highly compressed and stylised authorial narration/description/commentary with dialogue between the characters, presented in a scenic or dramatic fashion, with comparatively little comment or analysis from the authorial voice. In these dialogue scenes, the tempo of the text approximates to that of 'real life', but it rarely becomes slower, because Dickens does not linger to examine motives and responses in great detail.

I turn now to 'point of view'. *Hard Times* is narrated by an authorial voice who occasionally refers to himself as 'I' and whom it is natural to regard as a literary persona of the 'Charles Dickens' whose name appears on the title page. In other words, he is a reliable narrator, whose values and opinions we are invited to adopt. He is also omnis-

cient, in the sense that he knows all there is to be known about the characters and their actions, though he withholds or postpones the revelation of his knowledge in the interests of narrative. He is intrusive, constantly drawing attention to his mediation of the story by the highly rhetorical language he uses, and by making polemical, didactic comments from time to time on matters of education, politics, social justice, etc. The entire novel, considered as a discourse, is uttered by the authorial voice, except for the direct speech of the characters. But while the author reports everything, he frequently restricts himself to reporting what this or that particular character *perceives*. Thus, by restricting the narrative to the limited and fallible perspective of a character, suspense and mystery are generated, by making the reader share the uncertainty of the character.

The characters in the novel are grouped in various clusters:

- 1 the Gradgrind family
- 2 the Bounderby ménage
- 3 the workers
- 4 the circus folk

What the narrative does is to bring members of these clusters into contact with each other, and occasionally to shift them from one cluster to another (thus, Louisa and Tom move from 1 to 2, Sissy from 4 to 1, and Mrs Pegler from 3 to 2) in ways which generate enigma and suspense and at the same time illustrate in moral terms certain ideas about culture and society which are explicitly formulated by the authorial voice. Of these effects enigma is probably the least important. It would be a very slow-witted reader who did not guess that Tom committed the robbery, and that Mrs Pegler is Bounderby's mother, long before these facts are made plain to the characters. Compared with Dickens's other novels, the plot of *Hard Times* depends little upon mystery for its interest. The main source of simple narrative interest lies in suspense—in such questions as: will Louisa commit adultery? will Stephen be found and cleared of suspicion? will Tom escape from Bitzer? Most important of all is the didactic, illustrative import of the story, which is principally communicated by a series of ironic reversals or peripeteias. Thus the falsity of Mr Gradgrind's Utilitarian philosophy of life is demonstrated by the failure of his educational system as applied to his own children and to others. Louisa is so emotionally starved by her upbringing that she makes a loveless marriage and is thus rendered vulnerable to seduction by Hart-house, whom Gradgrind has himself introduced to Coketown in pursuance of his Utilitarian political interests; Tom grows up to be a wastrel and a thief, and when Mr Gradgrind tries to rescue him from public disgrace he is almost prevented by the model pupil of his own school, Bitzer, who produces impeccably Utilitarian reasons for his interven-

tion.⁵ Sissy Jupe, by contrast, who was ineducable by Gradgrind's system, has developed into a young woman of shining character on whom Gradgrind himself has come to depend heavily for moral support and practical assistance. The motif of ironic reversal permeates the whole novel. Mrs Sparsit's efforts to ingratiate herself with Mr Bounderby and vent her own spleen twice misfire — once in connection with Louisa's suspected elopement and a second time when she arrests Mrs Pegler, a scene which also constitutes a humiliating reversal for Bounderby himself.

The above description of the form of *Hard Times* does not, however, take us very far towards defining what is distinctive about this novel. Most of Dickens's novels concern several clusters of characters drawn from different ranks of society, between whom the plot sets up interesting and instructive connections, and most are narrated by an omniscient and intrusive authorial voice, who, however, often limits himself to articulating what is perceived by certain characters. Indeed, one might say this is the form of most classic English novels from Scott to George Eliot. *Hard Times* is unusual in that there are no characters whose perspectives dominate the novel, which is another way of saying that it has no hero or heroine: no character or pair of characters in whose fortune the reader develops an overriding interest. Sissy, Louisa and Stephen Blackpool are all possible candidates for such a role, but we are never allowed to share their perspectives in a sufficiently sustained way as to really identify with them. Indeed, we hardly ever get inside the girls' heads at all — they are primarily objects in the perceptual fields of other characters; and Stephen, though presented in a more interiorised fashion, is not in the foreground of the novel long enough to dominate it (out of thirty-seven chapters, he appears in only nine). The characters whose viewpoints are adopted by the narrator for any significant length of time are the morally unreliable characters like Mr Gradgrind in the early chapters of Book I, or Harthouse and Mrs Sparsit in Book II. But none of them is allowed to dominate the book either. The overall impression is of rapid and constant shifts of perspective, not only from one chapter to another, but often within a single chapter. No character is allowed to dominate, and no character is interiorised to any significant extent. We learn what they think and feel from what they say — aloud and to each other. The narrative is built up of scenes rather than episodes, explicit verbal interchanges between characters. The scene in the schoolroom, the scene at the Pegasus's Arms, the interview between Louisa and her father to discuss Bounderby's proposal, the corresponding scene in which she

5. Arguably it would have made a fitter conclusion to the novel if Bitzer's intervention had been successful. There is no natural or poetic justice in allowing Tom to escape, as Dickens seems to acknowledge by killing him off by fever in the epilogue; and all the 'good' characters, even Sissy, seem somewhat compromised morally by their eagerness to save him from prison. Dickens no doubt wanted to bring the circus folk back into the story in a positive role, but the suspicion lingers that he thought it would be too black a conclusion to send a gentleman's son to prison.

returns, a fugitive from Harthouse's attention, to reproach Gradgrind for the way she was brought up, the speeches at the workers' meetings and Stephen Blackpool's two confrontations with Bounderby, Harthouse's insidious *tête-à-têtes* with Louisa and Tom, and his verbal defeat by Sissy in his hotel—these and many similar scenes are the building blocks out of which *Hard Times* is constructed. Even the authorial voice is very much a speaking voice: not a ruminative essayist, or even a fireside conversationalist, but an orator, a pulpit-thumper, a Chorus.

Dickens's lifelong interest in the theatre and theatricals is well-known, and the theatrical quality of his literary genius has been remarked by more than one critic. That this influence is particularly evident in *Hard Times*, and that it can alienate readers who expect a more subtle and realistic representation of life in novels, was shrewdly observed by Dickens's great contemporary, John Ruskin:

“The usefulness of that work (to my mind, in several respects, the greatest he has written) is with many persons seriously diminished because Mr Bounderby is a dramatic monster instead of a characteristic example of a worldly master; and Stephen Blackpool a dramatic perfection instead of a characteristic example of an honest workman. But let us not lose the use of Dickens's wit and insight, because he chooses to speak in a circle of stage fire.”

A sympathetic reading of *Hard Times*, then (which is not to say an uncritical reading), must recognise that its method is to a considerable extent borrowed from the popular theatre. The point may be illustrated by comparing Dickens's novel with the peculiarly British theatrical institution, the pantomime. Originally a form of mime, with its roots in the Italian *Commedia del Arte*, the pantomime became in the course of the nineteenth century a mixed form of narrative drama, usually based on some traditional story such as a fairy-tale, combining music, dance, spectacle, broad humour, slapstick and strong melodrama, with audience participation in the form of hissing, booing and cheering. It is still, of course, an extremely popular form of entertainment—indeed, the annual visit to the Christmas pantomime is the only occasion on which the average British family patronises the live theatre.

There are several reasons why it seems useful to invoke the pantomime in defining the distinctive quality of *Hard Times*. First of all, something very like pantomime is actually represented in the novel. The entertainment provided by Sleary's Horse-Riding is not, like our modern circuses, pure spectacle, but has a strong narrative and dramatic element. Sissy's father, for instance, plays the leading role in 'the novel and laughable hippo-commedietta of the Tailor's Journey to Brentford' and Tom is disguised as a black servant in a presentation of 'Jack the Giant-Killer'.

Dickens, then, invites our approval not only of the values which the circus folk embody (loyalty, generosity, spontaneity, etc.) but also of the art which they practice. Secondly, as I have demonstrated elsewhere,⁶ the text of *Hard Times* is saturated with allusions to the world of fairy tale and nursery rhyme with which pantomimes are characteristically concerned: ogres and witches and dragons and fairies, old women on broomsticks, the cow with the crumpled horn, Peter Piper, and so on. Mr. Gradgrind's ruthless exclusion of this kind of fantasy from his children's education is a primary index of what is wrong with his system:

'And what,' asked Mr. Gradgrind, in a still lower voice, 'did you read to your father, Jupe?'

'About the Fairies, sir, and the Dwarf, and the Hunchback and the Genies,' she sobbed out, 'and about—'

'Hush!' said Mr. Gradgrind, 'that is enough. Never breathe a word of such destructive nonsense any more. Bounderby, this is a case for rigid training, and I shall observe it with interest.'

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the characters themselves tend to act out roles that derive from the same literary and dramatic traditions. Thus Louisa and Tom first figure as the brother and sister pair who often appear in fairy tales (e.g. the Babes in the Wood, another item in Sleary's repertoire) threatened by various dangers—in their case, the 'ogre' their father. Bounderby is a giant in a castle as far as Stephen Blackpool is concerned ('Stephen . . . turned about and betook himself as in duty bound, to the red brick castle of the giant Bounderby'), but he also owes a lot to the very traditional comic figure of the Braggart or *miles gloriosus*, the boastful soldier who is really a coward. As the Gradgrind children grow up, Louisa becomes a princess threatened with enchantment by a bad fairy or witch (Mrs. Sparsit, willing Louisa to descend the 'Giant's Staircase'), Tom is the thieving knave, and Harthouse a demon king invariably wreathed in smoke:

smoking his cigar in his own easy way, and looking pleasantly at the whelp, as if he knew himself to be a kind of agreeable demon who had only to hover over him, and he must give up his whole soul if required.

The way these characters interact is theatrical in a bold, explicit, conventionalised manner typical of pantomime and other forms of popular theatre. I will give three examples. First, the scene in which Sissy tells Harthouse that he must give up any hope of winning Louisa and leave Coketown immediately. Sissy combines, in the novel, the roles of Cinderella (at first the most despised, later the most valued member of the family) and Fairy Godmother (Mr. Gradgrind 'raised his eyes to where

6. In "The Rhetoric of *Hard Times*," *op.cit.*, pp. 159–62.

she stood, like a good fairy in his house'), and her success in dispatching the demon tempter Harthouse depends on our acceptance of these stereotypes rather than on the persuasiveness of her arguments or the plausibility of Harthouse's motivation. The second scene is the one in which the mysterious old woman who, Bounderby observes, 'seems to have been flying into the town on a broomstick now and then', and whom he suspects of being involved in the bank robbery, is revealed to be his mother and thus exposes the falsity of his claims to have dragged himself up from the gutter. The highly theatrical feature of this scene, apart from the fact that it is nearly all direct speech, is that a large number of townspeople pour into Bounderby's house to witness the confrontation. It is implausible that they should have been admitted in the first place and still more so that they are permitted to remain after Bounderby has recognised his mother. But realism is sacrificed to a theatrical denouement, the whole 'company' on stage to mark, ritually, Bounderby's exposure. The third scene is when Louisa returns to her father and reproaches him with his failure to educate her emotions in the past. Louisa is given lines and gestures that belong entirely to the stage, and the chapter (the last one in Book II) ends with a strong 'curtain line' and symbolic tableau in which the novel's primary theme is made heavily explicit:

'Now, father, you have brought me to this. Save me by some other means!'

He tightened his hold in time to prevent her sinking on the floor, but she cried out in a terrible voice, 'I shall die if you hold me! Let me fall upon the ground!' And he laid her down there, and saw the pride of his heart and the triumph of his system, lying, an insensible heap, at his feet.

This scene owes more to melodrama than to pantomime, and it is precisely in this respect that Dickens's reliance on the conventions of the popular stage creates most problems for his readers, especially modern ones. To treat the 'Condition of England' theme in the style of pantomime was a brilliantly imaginative stroke. First of all, it relieved Dickens of the obligation to present Utilitarianism, trade unionism or the workings of industrial capitalism, with any kind of objective, detailed verisimilitude — something he lacked the necessary experience and technical knowledge to accomplish in any case. Secondly, by invoking the world of fairy-tale *ironically*, making the inhabitants of this drab, gritty, Victorian mill town re-enact the motifs of folk-tale and legend, he drew attention to that repression or elimination of the human faculty of imagination (he calls it 'Fancy') which he believed was the culturally disastrous effect of governing society according to purely materialistic, empirical criteria of 'utility'. This double effect is epitomised by the recurrent description of the factories of Coketown as 'fairy palaces': instead of a realistic description of a factory, full of documentary detail,

we get an ironic metaphor. To complain of the lack of realism is to miss the point of the metaphor. In *Hard Times* Dickens seems to be attempting something comparable to the 'alienation effect' of Bertolt Brecht's plays: to defamiliarise not merely the subject-matter of the story, so that we perceive it freshly, but also the method of presentation itself, so that instead of lapsing into a passive enjoyment of the illusion of life, instead of reacting emotionally to the story, we are compelled to recognise its artificiality and to consider its ideological implications. Dickens is not, however, so consistent and thoroughgoing as Brecht—and it would be anachronistic to expect him to be. In some parts of *Hard Times*—such as Louisa's scene with her father, or Stephen Blackpool's death scene—he exploits the techniques of popular theatre to encourage an emotional, indeed sentimental, response to the story, and seems to evade the awkward questions about class, capitalism and social justice that he himself has raised. *Hard Times* is not a totally satisfactory novel, but when we consider the boldness of Dickens's experiment, we should perhaps be more impressed by the degree of his success than by the novel's imperfections.

PATRICIA E. JOHNSON

Hard Times and the Structure of Industrialism: The Novel as Factory†

Since F. R. Leavis's elevation of *Hard Times* into *The Great Tradition* in 1948, critics have had a tendency to see *Hard Times* as somehow distinct from Dickens's other novels. Some, following Leavis, have discovered in it a coherence and a high seriousness lacking in his other works; others have disliked its constraint and found it wanting in the very Fancy that it celebrates.¹ However it has been evaluated, it has been recognized as Dickens's distinctive attempt to come to grips with the phenomenon of the industrial city and with the more hidden economic and social structures which that city visibly represents. A curious contradiction emerges in the criticism of *Hard Times* as a social novel. On the one hand, as a realistic description of the industrial city and the industrial worker, it has been unfavorably compared to blue book reports, to the

† *Studies in the Novel* 21.2 (1989): 128–37.

1. See F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1960), pp. 227–48. Among the many critical rebuttals to Leavis are Peter Bracher's "Muddle and Wonderful No-Meaning: Verbal Irresponsibility and Verbal Failures in *Hard Times*," *Studies in the Novel* 10 (1978): 305–19; Joseph Butwin's "The Paradox of the Clown in Dickens," *Dickens Studies Annual* 5 (1976): 115–32; and David Sonstroem's "Fettered Fancy in *Hard Times*," *PMLA* 84 (1969): 520–29.

work of Friedrich Engels and other commentators on the emerging industrial society, and to Dickens's own journalistic description of the Preston strike.² Yet, on the other hand, the enduring power of *Hard Times* as a representation of conditions in industrial societies has been repeatedly affirmed, even by its harshest critics, though the source of that power is left largely unexplained.

Although it is now a commonplace of Dickens criticism that he denaturalizes and problematizes entire social structures in his later fiction—that he presents social problems, not as isolated pollutions, but as mere manifestations of the growing, increasingly corporate power of social and economic organizations—this insight has not been successfully applied to *Hard Times* which, because of its status as an industrial novel, has been seen as somehow inherently self-contradicting. I would like to suggest that *Hard Times* is much more coherent as a representation of industrialism than has been realized. The imaginative constraint of *Hard Times* is the symbolic expression of Dickens's critique of the interlocking structures—economic, social, and political—of industrial capitalism. As Terry Eagleton argues in *Criticism and Ideology*, “Dickens is forced in his later fiction to use as aesthetically unifying images the very social institutions (the Chancery Court of *Bleak House*, the Circumlocution Office of *Little Dorrit* which are the object of his criticism.”³ Eagleton, however, like many other critics of the novel, goes on to name the “aesthetically unifying image” of *Hard Times* as the educational system.⁴ But, as his Chapter 5 entitled “The Key-note” demonstrates, Dickens uses a much more pertinent and concretely realized representation of industrialism to shape his novel. Just as *Bleak House*, published the preceding year, uses the labyrinthine law courts surrounded by fog as the symbol of social malfesance, so *Hard Times* uses the physical structure of the factory itself as both the metaphor for the destructive forces at work on its characters' lives and as the metaphor for its own aesthetic unity as a novel.

It has recently been suggested by critics such as Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Spector that there are slippages and inconsistencies in Dickens's use of metaphor and metonymy in *Hard Times*. In *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction, 1832–1867*, Catherine Gallagher argues that Dickens uses the metaphor of the society as family to organize the novel, a metaphor which ultimately fails.⁵ In his article, “Monsters of Metonymy: *Hard Times* and Knowing the Working Class,” Stephen

2. See Sheila M. Smith, *The Other Nation: The Poor in English Novels of the 1840s and 1850s* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980); and Nicholas Coles, “The Politics of *Hard Times*: Dickens the Novelist versus Dickens the Reformer,” *Dickens Studies Annual* 15 (1986): 145–79.

3. Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology: A Study in Marxist Literary Theory* (London: Redwood Burn, Ltd., 1976), p. 129.

4. Eagleton, p. 130.

5. Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction, Social Discourse and Narrative Form, 1832–1867* (Chicago: Chicago Univ. Press, 1985), pp. 149–66.

Spector argues that Dickens's use of metonymy turns the working-class characters into lifeless machines.⁶ But, if the central metaphor of the factory itself is put in its proper place, it becomes clear that Dickens's uses of metaphor and metonymy do not conflict but, instead, interlock with one another and together reenact the consumption of fuel on which the factory system is based. Spector's argument, taken together with Gallagher's, implies that Dickens's use of figurative language is class-conscious, that metaphor is more applicable to the middle class, metonymy to the working class. Gallagher concludes her discussion with the judgment that "[u]p to its very last page, *Hard Times* is a book that simultaneously flaunts and discredits its metaphoricality, calling into question both the possibility of paternalist reform and the validity of its own narrative practice."⁷ This is certainly true in a novel which metaphorically identifies the middle class with the buttressing, external wall of the factory while the working class and women are presented metonymically as being used as fuel. In fact, the shape of the novel recreates the dynamics of urban industrialism. In its firm outer framework—focused on the competing philosophies of Mr. Gradgrind's Utilitarianism and the circus's traditional humanism—which surrounds and contains an inner core of smoke and fire—represented by the stories of Stephen Blackpool, the industrial worker, and Louisa Gradgrind, the central female character—*Hard Times* imitates the closed economy of the factory system.

The setting and shape of the novel cohere strikingly. *Hard Times* takes place in Coketown, a milltown that is polarized between the industrialists on the one side and working-class men on the other. Within this framework and delimited by it, the lives of Stephen and Louisa unfold. Dickens provides a unique description of Coketown as a physical environment. Unlike Elizabeth Gaskell or Friedrich Engels, for example, two other Victorian recorders of England's "shock cities," Dickens does not emphasize the pollution, the labyrinthine slums, or the hustling, bustling streets of the industrial city. Instead, he abstracts its essential structure, rather than the superficial manifestations of that structure, what he calls its keynote, *fact*, which he metaphorically represents by the shape of the *factory* itself, a word that significantly repeats the sound of *fact*.⁸

Coketown, he tells us, is "a town of red brick," "a town of machinery and tall chimneys," filled with "vast piles of buildings full of windows

6. Stephen J. Spector, "Monsters of Metonymy: *Hard Times* and Knowing the Working Class," *ELH* 51 (1984): 365–84.

7. Gallagher, p. 166.

8. John Lucas criticizes Dickens's representation of Coketown as "largely a compilation of clichés based on an external and distanced acquaintance" and questions its "adequacy" and "relevance" (pp. 176, 179). See John Lucas, "Mrs. Gaskell and Brotherhood," in *Tradition and Tolerance in Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, eds. David Howard et al. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966). I am arguing, on the other hand, that Dickens's Coketown is stripped of inessentials in order to lay bare the essence of industrialism inherent in the factory structure itself.

where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long, and where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down."⁹ Every church, hospital, and jail in the town is built on the same model, a "warehouse of red brick" (p. 17). Mr. M'Choakumchild's school is "a plain, bare, monotonous vault of a schoolroom," and even Mr. Gradgrind's face repeats this pattern with its "square wall of a forehead" (p. 1). This unique emphasis by Dickens on the repetition of the factory structure in every aspect of Coketown's life has often been read as Dickens's recognition of the deadening sameness of factory work and the alienated nature of its system of production. Yet the metaphor of the specific structure that Coketown repeats has additional resonance. The square red brick walls, the factory's most visible manifestation, are cemented and maintained by the upper- and middle-class professions of religion, medicine, law, education, and politics.¹ The churches, hospitals, jails, schools, and even Mr. Gradgrind's face reproduce the external wall of the factory structure. They contain the rattle of life, the action of the pistons, while the only visible symbols of internal activity are the "interminable serpents of smoke," revealing that fuel is being consumed (p. 17).²

Having once established this outer structure of seeming "fact" that the factory symbolizes, *Hard Times* questions and then penetrates that shell to reveal and describe the processes that the walls of the factory hide. Having established the metaphorical key-note, Dickens asks, "A town so sacred to fact, and so triumphant in its assertion, of course got on well?" and answers, "No. Coketown did not come out of its own furnaces, in all respects like gold that had stood the fire." The name Coketown itself points to this conclusion. "Coke" suggests both the fuel that stokes the furnaces and the waste product that is left after the process has been completed. According to the *OED*, coke is a North-country word, probably derived from the word "colk" which means core. Coke is "the hard core of the coal left after other parts have been consumed" or "the solid substance left after mineral coal has been deprived by dry distillation of its volatile constituents." Coketown is a city that founds its outer structure on this core process of fuel consumption. But what is the true nature of the fuel that is being consumed? Dickens's answer, as the core of his

9. Charles Dickens, *Hard Times*, eds. George Ford and Sylvere Monod (New York: Norton Critical Edition, 1966), p. 17. Subsequent citations to the novel will be from this edition and will appear in the text.

1. In "Social Criticism in Dickens: Some Problems of Method and Approach," *Critical Quarterly* 6 (1964). Raymond Williams argues that Dickens shows that "Parliament, the trade unions, educational reform, public protective legislation of many kinds . . . could not operate, at that level, in the fiction itself" (p. 221) Dickens further underlines the irrelevance of these largely upper- and middle-class institutions and activities to the industrial process by pointing out that none of the factory workers attend the churches provided by the eighteen denominations.

2. Thomas M. Leitch also points out the importance of "the image of fire, which produces energy by reducing its fuel to ashes" in his commentary on the ending of *Hard Times*. See his article, "Closure and Teleology in Dickens," *Studies in the Novel* 18 (1986): 150.

novel shows, is that the true coke, both fuel and waste product, of the factory system is human life.

The shape of *Hard Times* as a fiction reproduces the shape of the factory—its supporting framework and its core of fuel. The first seven and last three chapters of the novel focus on the social and political framework. This framework tells the story of Mr. Gradgrind, the Utilitarian Member of Parliament. Like the square red brick walls that surround the inner workings of the factory, this framework is the most immediately apparent feature of the novel and seems almost detachable from the novel's core. Thus many critics have read the novel solely through Gradgrind's story and argued over the effectiveness of Dickens's critique of Utilitarianism or the realism of Gradgrind's conversion to a more humanistic way of thinking.³ Yet structurally the answers to such questions do not really matter. Regardless of what changes are made in the framework, as long as it still stands, the system itself is maintained. It is only in the framework of the novel, and by implication of society, that change is allowed to occur. The framework can contain, adapt, and even be strengthened by such changes as long as they are kept separate from the core of the novel and from the dynamics of production and reproduction. Neither Gradgrind nor the circus can restore the wasted lives of Louisa or Stephen Blackpool. Gradgrind only preserves and prolongs the life of his son Tom, and by implication of himself, by further withdrawing from the center of the system. Thus, despite, or even because of, humanistic conversion, the framework of the novel and of society remains in place, and the dynamics of capitalist industrial production are untouched.

The only point where systemic change and perhaps explosion are possible is at the core of the system and in the central stories in *Hard Times*. Yet here Dickens metonymically reproduces the system in its harnessing and control of energy, rather than the free release of it. *Hard Times* is organized into three books, named "Sowing," "Reaping," and "Garnering." These titles underline the significance of what I have called the core of the novel and Dickens's central theme. By using these references

3. This approach can be briefly represented by Fredric Jameson's schematic analysis of *Hard Times* in *The Prison-House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972):

In *Hard Times* we witness the confrontation of what amounts to two antagonistic intellectual systems: Mr. Gradgrind's utilitarianism ("Facts! Facts!") and that world of anti-facts symbolized by Sissy Jupe and the circus, or in other words, imagination. The novel is primarily the education of the educator, the conversion of Mr. Gradgrind from his inhuman system to the opposing one. (p. 167)

In this analysis the experiences of Louisa and Stephen are present as mere object lessons for Mr. Gradgrind. Catherine Gallagher, on the other hand, has pointed out that the true significance of *Hard Times* must also take into account the parallel lives of Louisa and Stephen. See her article, "*Hard Times* and *North and South*: The Family and Society in Two Industrial Novels," *Arizona Quarterly* 36 (1980): 70-96.

to natural production, Dickens implicitly criticizes the unnatural method of production that the factory system represents. The central portion of the novel, occupying 27 out of 37 chapters, focuses on the private lives and unhappy marriages of Stephen Blackpool, the novel's representative working-class man, and Louisa Gradgrind, the daughter of its central spokesman for Utilitarianism. *Hard Times* counterpoints the events of their lives, drawing a series of parallels between these two seemingly disparate characters. Superficially, there would seem to be little connection between this older working-class man and this young middle-class woman, but Stephen and Louisa follow the same metonymic pattern. Each begins the novel in a state of confusion, smoke. This is underlined by Stephen's oft repeated statement that everything is "in a muddle." The connection is strengthened by the fact that both characters' entrapment within the system is manifested primarily in their unhappy marriages. Each, in fact, comes to despise the mate that he or she is tied to for life. Each becomes increasingly isolated from his or her own class and gender, as Louisa seldom returns home after her marriage and Stephen is ostracized by other working-class men for his refusal to join the union. Finally, each appears to suffer a moral fall, which is followed by a literal, physical fall. Stephen appears to have broken the law by stealing, and he literally falls into an abandoned mine pit. Louisa is imagined by Mrs. Sparsit to be slowly descending a moral staircase that leads to adultery and the status of fallen woman, what the novel calls "a dark pit of shame and ruin" (p. 154). She, too, literally falls at the feet of her father at the climactic turning-point in her life. While each is in a sense rescued, and by the same agent, the circus girl Sissy Jupe, neither is brought back to a full life. Stephen survives for only a few minutes after his maimed body is pulled out of the mine, and Louisa's scarring past prevents her from marrying again or ever having children.

My argument is that these two lives, described in the central portion of *Hard Times*, are metonymically presented by Dickens as the "coke," the fuel and eventually the waste products, of the factory system. Dickens's use of metonymy encourages such a reading as he repeatedly connects Stephen and Louisa with images of smoke and fire. Stephen most obviously fits this reading as the representative factory hand. The system obviously measures him as fuel: "So many hundred Hands in this Mill; so many hundred horse Steam Power," Dickens tell us (p. 53). Stephen exists at the heart of the system, almost in the heat of the furnace as it were. His flat is described as being "in the hardest working part of Coketown; in the innermost fortifications of that ugly citadel, where Nature was as strongly bricked out as killing airs and gases were bricked in" (p. 48). Dickens stresses the factory-like shape of Coketown's working-class slums where the fuel for the system is housed: "in the last close

nook of this great exhausted receiver, where the chimneys, for want of air to make a draught, were built in an immense variety of stunted and crooked shapes, as though every house put out a sign of the kind of people who might be expected to be born in it" (pp. 48–49). This is where the factory hands live, and, when they die, black ladders are raised to the windows to dispose of the dead, "the sliding away of all that was most precious in this world to a striving wife and a brood of hungry babies," like coal down a chute (p. 63).

It is no wonder that Stephen looks old for his age. Dickens describes him emerging from "the hot mill," "haggard and worn" (p. 53). His "volatile constituents" consumed by the factory, he is nearly a burnt-out cinder of a man even as the novel begins.⁴ It is not that Stephen has internalized the factory, but that he is internal to it. In the first glimpse we have of him, he is "standing in the street, with the odd sensation upon him which the stoppage of the machinery always produced—the sensation of its having worked and stopped in his own head" (p. 49). Even his nightmares are shaped by this key-note: "He stood on a raised stage, under his own loom; and, looking up at the shape the loom took, and hearing the burial service distinctly read, he knew that he was there to suffer death" (p. 66). Here he dreams that his station in the factory is a scaffold where he will be punished for attempting to internally transform his life by making a second marriage. His dreams and nightmares, therefore, do not provide him with an imagined escape from his place within the system but instead reenact his physical and emotional entrapment.

At the novel's opening Stephen still hopes for transformation, hopes to salvage something from his life by divorcing his first wife and making a happier second marriage. Dickens tells us, "In the strength of his misfortune, and the energy of his distress, he *fired* for the moment like a proud man" (emphasis mine, p. 56). There is still a spark left in him, but the title of the chapter that contains this description, "No Way Out," indicates that the system will soon consume that spark. There is "no way out" of the system for the factory hand, an idea that Dickens ironically illustrates by having Stephen leave Coketown only to fall into an abandoned mine pit, called the Old Hell Shaft, just on the outskirts of town.⁵ Stephen himself recognizes that his end is a metonym for the factory hand's life: just before he dies, he says,

4. This metonymic presentation of Stephen, emphasizing his function as fuel for the system, provides an explanation to the critics who have questioned the "realism" of Dickens's representation of the industrial worker's "slowness." Stephen Spector states, "Dickens bestows hardly a single *spark* of his vitalizing genius" on Stephen Blackpool (emphasis mine, p. 365). But he interprets Stephen's lack of fire as a failure of metonymy which turns the working class into monsters whereas I am arguing that Dickens shows that it is the factory system, not the working class, that is monstrous.

5. Nicholas Coles points out that Stephen's death can be interpreted as "a form of industrial accident" (p. 148).

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. (pp. 206–207)

The word "Fire-damp" again returns us to the idea of fuel and to the processes of combustion. It is a miner's term for the gas given off by coal which is liable to explode if mixed with air. Yet the explosion is fully contained within the pit, hurting only the miners themselves. Stephen underlines the separation between the outer social structure and the inner process of production when he goes on to say.

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! (p. 207)

Here Stephen recognizes the daily destructiveness of the system. Though "in a muddle," he has experienced the interior of factory life and describes its nature in a way that the lawmakers and gentlefolk are incapable of doing. Yet, like the Old Hell Shaft, in work or out of work, Stephen's life is structured by the factory process. Like Stephen, the pit provided fuel for the system; having been stripped, it is abandoned. As fuel or as waste product. Stephen's life is fully contained and defined by the factory system.

As Stephen is shown to be fuel for the system of production, so Louisa is fuel for the system of marriage and reproduction. The most potentially explosive connection that Dickens makes in *Hard Times* is the structural parallel that he implicitly draws between the factory system and the patriarchal family. Though it is situated a mile or two outside of Coketown, Stone Lodge, the Gradgrind family home, is "a great square house," another repetition of the factory structure: "Not the least disguise toned down or shaded off that uncompromising fact in the landscape" (p. 8). Our first glimpse inside Stone Lodge gives us the other essential element of the factory structure. We see Mr. Bounderby, the novel's Captain of Industry and Louisa's future husband, significantly "warming himself before the fire" (p. 11). Both Tom and Louisa Gradgrind grow up within this structure: "Their shadows were defined upon the wall" (p. 40). But, because Tom will eventually move to the external structure of the Bank while Louisa will remain within, of the two, Louisa alone is persistently connected to the image of fire. She is first described as "a fire with nothing to burn" (p. 10). And her most frequently described activity in

Hard Times is gazing into the fire. Tom remarks on this activity and connects it directly with gender: "You seem to find more to look at in it than ever I could find," said Tom. "Another of the advantages, I suppose, of being a girl" (pp. 40-41). Louisa's seemingly perverse insistence that the fire indicates something about her own position in life is emphasized when her mother reproves her for "wondering" what it means:

After I have heard you myself, when the whole of my right side has been benumbed, going on with your master about combustion, and calcination, and calorification, and I may say every kind of ation that could drive a poor invalid distracted, to hear you talking in this absurd way about sparks and ashes! (p. 42)

But Louisa is simply applying "combustion, and calcination, and calorification," all processes of fuel consumption, to herself and reaching the logical conclusion: "I was encouraged by nothing, mother, but by looking at the red sparks dropping out of the fire, and whitening and dying. It made me think, after all, how short my life would be, and how little I could hope to do in it" (pp. 41-42).

Thus Louisa early recognizes her function within the system, but, as with Stephen, this knowledge does not provide a way out. Instead, she allows herself to be used as an object of exchange by her father and her brother, Tom, in her marriage to Bounderby. She accepts her position because a part of her agrees with her family and her society's valuation of her as fuel. During the scene in which Tom indirectly suggests how useful she will be to him as Bounderby's wife, Louisa gazes persistently at the fire. When, after congratulating her on being "a *capital* girl" (emphasis mine). Tom leaves, Louisa shifts her gaze from the fire in the house to the fires of Coketown, instinctively connecting her personal position with that of the wider processes and effects of industrialism: "It seemed as if, first in her own fire within the house, and then in the fiery haze without, she tried to discover what kind of woof Old Time, that greatest and longest-established Spinner of all, would weave from the threads he had already spun into a woman" (p. 73): In the proposal scene which follows, Louisa continues to gaze not at the fire within but at the larger landscape, and the imagery of smoke and fire is even more insistent. Even her father is struck by the direction of her look: "Are you consulting the chimneys of the Coketown works, Louisa?" (p. 76). They lead her to conclude that she has been too shaped by the system to effectively change it: "While [my life] lasts, I would wish to do the little I can, and the little I am fit for. What does it matter?" (p. 77).

Yet the danger of an outbreak of fire, an explosion, is present. As Louisa gazes out of the window at the smoke pouring from the Coketown factories, she takes the scene as an emblem of her life, warning her father: "There seems to be nothing there but languid and monotonous smoke.

Yet when the night comes, Fire bursts out, father!" (p. 76). Eventually, both Stephen and Louisa try to break out of their lives. With his wife in a drunken stupor, Stephen is filled with such hatred of her that he is tempted to poison her. Louisa comes close to disgracing her father and husband by eloping with James Harthouse. Finally, however, both Stephen and Louisa are unable to act out their terrible anger because they accept the framework for which they provide the fuel. They implode, rather than explode, ending their lives as burnt-out cinders: Stephen dies slowly and significantly at the bottom of a mine shaft while Louisa lives on, a barren woman, denied the only satisfactions—home and children—that her society allows women.

It could be argued that Dickens did not intend his novel to be read in this way. Certainly, he appears to control the radical implications of his own representation of the factory system, to provide a safety valve as it were, by placing much of the anger about the system in Louisa rather than in Stephen and by providing the floating circle of the circus as a possible, temporary release from the monotony of the square, immovable factory walls. Yet in its interlocking use of metaphor and metonymy, *Hard Times* does recreate the dynamics of capitalist production. Dickens pays a chilling tribute to the power of the factory system by allowing his own creative energy to be harnessed to it, by producing his novel as factory. At the end of Book 3, "Garnering," Dickens enumerates the goods that this system of production has stored up for itself: Stephen is dead; Tom will die exiled and alone; Louisa is living a life of self-sacrifice. The circus girl Sissy's happy children, outside the factory, are the only notes of hope. In his conclusion Dickens unrelentingly directs our gaze to the shape of the factory and its underlying significance. The last pages of the novel return us to Louisa, still looking into the fire. The last two paragraphs dwell on the metaphors of the wall and the fire. Dickens tells us that "national prosperity figures" will be "the Writing on the Wall," and asks us with what feelings we will watch while "the ashes of our fires turn grey and cold" (pp. 226–27). Fancy itself can do little more than decorate this enclosure. Thus Dickens's primary purpose goes beyond Fancy. He does not provide us with an escape from the system but instead holds us to a strict accounting of what it costs to maintain it. When we read *Hard Times*, the process we are put through leaves us enclosed, and at the conclusion we are left staring at the cinders of the fire and the stark contours of the factory walls.

GORMAN BEAUCHAMP

Mechanomorphism in *Hard Times*†

Heinrich Heine did not like England or the English. A visit to London in 1827 only intensified and focused his dislike: the English, who initiated the machine age of production, the Industrial Revolution, seemed to Heine themselves to be turning into machines:

The perfection of machinery, which is there everywhere applied to some purpose, and which executes so many human tasks, had for me something mysterious and terrible; the artificial headlong action of wheels, shafts, cylinders, . . . cogs, and teeth, which whirl so madly, filled me with dread. The definiteness, the exactness, the meted out and measurable punctuality of life, tormented me quite as much, for the machines in England seem like men, so the men seem to me like mere machines. Yes, wood, iron and brass, these seemed to have usurped the spirit of humanity . . . while Man, with his soul gone, attends like a machine to his business . . .¹

Similar observations were not uncommon among other visitors to England in the nineteenth century, particularly among those predisposed to dislike what they found there: Dostoevsky, for example, in *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions* echoes Heine's opinion that the English resembled machine-men. Not only Anglophobes, however, were alarmed at the effect that mechanization exerted on the English character. Two years after Heine's visit, Carlyle in "Signs of the Times" voiced his famous complaint about his countrymen: "Men are grown mechanical in head and heart, as well as in hand."² This essay became the *locus classicus* of the technophobic reaction to industrialism, the term itself coined by Carlyle in *Sartor Resartus*. "Were we required to characterize this age of ours by any single epithet," he wrote, "we should be tempted to call it. . . the Mechanical Age. It is the Age of Machinery, in every outward and inward sense of the word . . ." (p. 59). Carlyle conceded a proper sphere for the mechanical—the outward, economic one—but observed "how the mechanical genius of our time has diffused itself into quite other provinces"—those inward ones of the mind, and the spirit. "For the same habit regulates not our modes of action alone but our modes of thought and feeling. . . [Men's] whole efforts, attach-

† *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 22.1 (Spring 1989): 61–77.

1. *Florentine Nights* in *The Works of Heinrich Heine*, trans. Charles Godfrey Leland (London: Heineman, 1903), I, pp. 51–52.
2. "Signs of the Times," *Critical and Miscellaneous Essays in The Works of Thomas Carlyle* (New York: Scribners, 1899), XXVII, p. 59.

ments, opinions, turn on mechanism, and are of a mechanical character" (pp. 61–63). With variation, this became the standard gravamen in the late Romantic critique of the industrial age, in the writings, for example, of Ruskin and William Morris, and, in the twentieth century, of F. G. Jünger, Lewis Mumford, Herbert Marcuse, and Jacques Ellul.³ In *The Technological Society*, Ellul argues that the technique of mechanization "transforms everything it touches into a machine. . . . As long as technique was represented exclusively by the machine, it was possible to speak of 'man and the machine.' The machine remained an external object. . . . But when technique enters into every area of life . . . it ceases to be external to man and becomes his very substance."⁴ In short, machines were seen to usurp the functions of men, and men to approach the condition of machines.

But the development that these writers deplored, others welcomed. Andrew Ure, Carlyle's contemporary and a celebrated celebrator of industrialism, praised Richard Arkwright, initiator of the factor system, above all for "training human beings to renounce their desultory habits of work, and to identify themselves with the unvarying regularity of the complex automation."⁵ This desideratum—that man should pattern his behavior on the model of the machine—can be termed mechanomorphism. In Ure's *The Philosophy of Manufactures* or, for instance, in Frederick Winslow Taylor's *Principles of Scientific Management* (1911)—the most thoroughgoing attempt to apply engineering techniques to human material—the mechanomorphic imperative is limited to the workplace and to manual laborers, the so-called hands; but the broader social implications of mechanomorphism are expounded and extolled in Thorstein Veblen's remarkable *Theory of Business Enterprise*. "The machine process," he writes,

pervades the modern life and dominates it in a mechanical sense. Its dominance is seen in the enforcement of precise mechanical measurements and adjustments and the reduction of all manner of things, purposes and acts, necessities, conveniences, and amenities of life of standard units. . . . [My purpose is to demonstrate] the bearing of the machine process upon the growth of culture,—the disciplinary effect which this movement for standardization and mechanical equivalence has upon the human material.⁶

* * *

3. See Jünger, *The Failure of Technology* (Chicago: Regnery, 1956); Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964); and Mumford, *The Myth of the Machine* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1967). See also, e.g., E. F. Schumacher, *Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973); and Theodore Roszak, *Where the Wasteland Ends: Politics and Transcendence in Postindustrial Society* (New York: Doubleday, 1972).
4. Trans. John Wilkinson (New York: Knopf, 1964), p. 6.
5. *The Philosophy of Manufactures* (London: Knight, 1835), p. 15.
6. (1904, rpt. New York: Mentor, 1958), p. 146.

Of the works of English literature that confront the Industrial Revolution, *Hard Times*, for all its many shortcomings, is generally accounted among the two or three most significant; certainly it stands as the first and still one of the most provocative fictive depictions of mechanomorphism. Dedicated to Carlyle, *Hard Times* displays a deep debt to "Signs of the Times," which one critic describes as "an ideological prospectus to the novel."⁷ In a well-known letter to Carlyle, Dickens wrote, "I know it contains nothing in which you do not think with me, for no man knows your books better than I":⁸ so that it is unsurprising to find Carlyle's animus against the encroachments of mechanism into all areas of life reflected in the fable of Coketown, the blighted industrial setting of the novel. Still, it should be noted that Dickens' attitude toward industrialism was curiously ambiguous, by no means uniformly negative. Indeed, on Dickens' death in 1870 Ruskin wrote of him as "a leader of the steam-whistle party *par excellence*. . . . [whose] hero is essentially the iron master."⁹ While hardly the whole truth, Ruskin's claim is not without justice, for Dickens' public speeches and journalism are filled with patriotic praise of the progress of British industry. John Holloway can, therefore, write of Dickens' "whole love-hate relationship to Victorian industry."¹¹

* * *

In *Hard Times* the practitioner of the wickedest and most enormous vice is Thomas Gradgrind, member of Parliament for weights and measures;

A man of realities. A man of facts and calculations. A man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two makes four, and nothing over, and who is not to be talked into allowing anything over . . . 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, and tell you exactly what it comes to. It is a mere question of figures, a case of simple arithmetic.²

7. Michael Goldberg, *Carlyle and Dickens* (Athens: Univ of Georgia Press, 1972), p. 79. See pp. 78-99, for a thorough discussion of Dickens' debt to Carlyle in *Hard Times*; see also William Oddie, *Dickens and Carlyle: The Question of Influence* (London: Centenary Press 1972), pp. 41-60.
8. *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Walter Dexter (London: Nonesuch, 1937-38), 11, p. 567.
9. Letter to Charles Eliot Norton (19 June 1870), quoted in *Dickens: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Philip Collins (London: Routledge, 1971), pp. 443-44.
1. "Hard Times: A History and a Criticism," in *Dickens and the Twentieth Century*, ed. John Gross and Gabriel Pearson (London: Routledge, 1962), p. 167. On Dickens' overall reaction to industrialism, see Herbert Sussman, *Victorians and the Machine: The Literary Response to Technology* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 41-75; Patrick Brantlinger, "Dickens and the Factories," *NCF* 26 (1971): 270-85; Philip Collins, "Dickens and Industrialism," *SEL* 20 (1980): 651-73; and Martin J. Weiner, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 30-40.
2. All quotations are taken from the Norton Critical Edition of *Hard Times*, ed. George Ford and Sylvère Monod (New York: Norton, 1966).

Dickens establishes at the outset the opposition between knowledge issuing from life experience, truths that are proved upon the pulse, and knowledge that is purely abstract, "objective," statistical. In the opening scene in M'Choakumchild's school, the circus waif Sissy Jupe, who has lived her life among horses, cannot "define" a horse to Mr. Gradgrind's satisfaction, as his desiccated clone Bitzer promptly can and does: "Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, normally twenty-four grinders, four eye teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in spring.' . . . Thus (and much more) Bitzer." "Now, girl number twenty;" Gradgrind informs Sissy, "you know what a horse is" (p. 3) [7]. Sissy has always known, of course, what a horse is, not abstractly, but experientially, in a way that cannot be articulated by a recital of book-learned facts.

At every point Dickens takes pains to isolate Gradgrind from life-as-it-is-lived, to limit his consciousness to the contents of the parliamentary blue books stacked in this observatory:

In that charmed apartment, the most complicated social questions were cast up, got into exact totals, and finally settled—if those concerned could only have been brought to know it. As if an astronomical observatory should be made without any windows, and the astronomer within would arrange the starry universe solely by pen, ink, and paper, so Mr. Gradgrind, in *his* Observatory (and there are many like it), had no need to cast an eye upon the teeming myriads of human beings around him, but could settle all their destinies on a slate, and wipe out all their tears with one dirty bit of sponge. (p. 73)

This commentary opens the chapter in which Gradgrind's detached abstractness apotheosizes in even the most intimate matters involving his own family. When his daughter Louisa receives an offer of marriage from the much older, unredeemably boorish, utterly unromantic Bounderby, Gradgrind urges her to consider the offer purely in terms of "the facts," weighing the pros and cons of the alliance in the manner of a calculating machine. To answer her mute appeal for some heartfelt, sympathetic response,

he must have overleaped at a bound the artificial barriers he had for so many years been erecting, between himself and all those subtle essences of humanity which will evade the utmost cunning of algebra until the last trumpet ever to be sounded shall blow even algebra to wreck . . . With his unbending, utilitarian, matter-of-fact face, he hardened her again; and the moment shot away. . . . (p. 76)

F. R. Leavis calls this crucial scene "a triumph of ironic art. No logical analysis," he concludes, "could dispose of the philosophy of fact and calculus with such neat finality."³ Dickens' ironic art here appears

3. *The Great Tradition* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948), p. 287.

directed against the Felicific Calculus of Jeremy Bentham, the particular *bête noire* of Carlyle, who found the Utilitarian's "moral arithmetic" truly asinine. "Fantastic tricks enough man has played in his time," he wrote in *Sartor Resartus*, "but to fancy himself a dead Iron Balance for weighing Pains and Pleasures on, was reserved for his latter era. There stands he, his Universe one huge Manger, filled with hay and thistles to be weighed against each other; and looks long eared enough."⁴ It is in this Carlylean spirit that Dickens mocks the calculations of Gradgrind, who appears one of the ruthless "logic choppers" of the Benthamite persuasion: the reference to his utilitarian face thus has philosophical as well as physiognomic significance. As Humphry House points out, Gradgrind is "the only major Dickens character who is meant to be an 'intellectual,' " but the portrayal fails, he concludes, because "Dickens did not understand enough philosophy even to be able to guy it successfully."⁵ Such was, for many years, the conventional wisdom regarding Dickens' attack on the "hard facts" school of philosophy—that it was simplistic caricature devoid of any serious content. Monroe Engel, however, seems closer to the truth when he notes that, while Gradgrind hardly captures "the complexity and solidity of Bentham's influential contributions to English thought," the grounds on which Dickens attacks the Benthamites are "the very grounds on which [John Stuart] Mill was to attack them two decades later in his *Autobiography*"—the failure to acknowledge the power of the imagination.⁶ And in perhaps the most comprehensive survey of this subject, Richard J. Arneson concludes that "in responding with sensitivity to the diffusion of the Benthamite spirit in early Victorian popular culture, Dickens creates a philosophical satire that is broad and rough but also generally accurate."⁷

My concern here, however, is not to gauge the accuracy of Dickens' attack on a specific philosophy, but rather to suggest that, with Gradgrind, he creates the satirical archetype of a generic intellectual figure, the modern social scientist, or Social Newtonist. In the wake of Newton's revolution in physics, wherein the universe was converted into a vast mechanism subject to inflexible laws, attempts at a similar revolution in social philosophy began to appear, attempts to apply the laws of physics and mathematics to human affairs. For instance, the Dutch political theorist John de Witt (1625–1672), contending that human society could be explained only through the application of "social mathematics," devised an elaborate scheme that portrayed social organizations as vast geometrical configurations operating in accordance with immutable natural laws, "to which the free will of each individual, after more or less

4. *Works*, VI, p. 135.

5. *The Dickens World* (1942; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1960), p. 205.

6. *The Maturity of Dickens* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), pp. 172–73.

7. "Benthamite Utilitarianism and *Hard Times*," *Philosophy and Literature*, 2 (1978): 60–75. See also G. D. Klingopulos, "Notes on the Victorian Scene," in *From Dickens to Hardy: Pelican Guide to English Literature* 6, ed. Boris Ford (Baltimore: Penguin, 1958), pp. 28–40.

variation, always ended obeying." Thus social geometers, de Witt believed, could chart the future orbit of societies with all the precision of astronomers.⁸ Similarly, David Hartley (1705–1757), the first Englishman to use the term psychology to denote his subject matter, overtly imported Newton's methods and language into the study of human behavior. Indeed, Hartley suggested that "future generations should put all kinds of evidence and inquiries into mathematical forms . . . so as to make mathematics and logic, natural history and civil history, natural philosophy and philosophy of all other kinds, coincide *omni ex parte*."⁹ Hartley's attempt is typical of the impulse, pervading the Enlightenment, to apply the concepts of physics to every area of existence—a broad intellectual enterprise that I call Social Newtonism. Of its influence, Coleridge wrote that, since Newton "not only all things in external nature, but the subtlest mysteries of life and organization, and even of the intellect and moral being, were conjured within the magic circle of mathematical formulae."¹⁰

The history of Social Newtonism, in which Utilitarianism constitutes a single albeit important changer, is both sweeping and intricate, and I am not suggesting that Dickens had more than a vague and general knowledge of any of its serious manifestations; still, in the person of Gradgrind, he satirically distills the essence of the Social Newtonist's approach to human affairs—abstract, statistical, impersonal. Leavis at one point compares Gradgrind to the Houyhnhnms, the superrational horses of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. While he adduces the right book, he chooses the wrong voyage: the aptest parallel to Gradgrind is not the noble-savage Houyhnhnms, living a Rousseauian-minimalist existence "according to Nature," but rather the Third Voyage's mathematics-mad intellectuals of the Flying Island of Laputa, so out of touch with reality that they must periodically be struck in the face to focus their attention on what is before their eyes, and their earthbound followers, the innovators of the Academy of Lagado, whose plans for the scientific reorganization of their society have left it in complete chaos. Dickens presents the Laputian intellectual a century further along, detached from life, buried in a mass of blue book statistics, rational to the point of madness. In fact, in these respects, Gradgrind sounds like the spiritual descent of Swift's Modest Proposer, that parody of Malthus before Malthus, whose disinterested solution to the economic plight of the poor of Ireland is to sell their children to the English for food—a solution logical in the extreme.

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8. Floyd Matson, *The Broken Image: Man, Science and Society* (New York: Braziller, 1964), pp. 8–9.
9. Quoted in John Passmore, *The Perfectibility of Man* (New York: Scribners, 1970), p. 202.
10. "Formation of a More Comprehensive Theory of Life," in *Selected Poetry and Prose of Coleridge*, ed. Donald A. Stauffer (New York: Modern Library, 1951), p. 566.

This concept of rationality Dickens perceived as "the wickedest and most enormous vice" of his age: viewing life in terms of "figures and averages and nothing else." And it is this concept of rationality that shapes and ultimately blights the lives of Gradgrind and his children, this substitution of abstraction for experience. Meeting Stephen Blackpool in his lodgings, Louisa "for the first time in her life . . . was face to face with anything like individuality in connection with" the Coketown Hands.

She knew of their existence by hundreds and by thousands. She knew what results in work a given number of them would produce in a given space of time. She knew them in crowds passing to and from their nests, like ants or beetles. . . . Something to be worked so much and paid so much, and there ended; something to be infallibly settled by laws of supply and demand; something that blundered against those laws, and floundered into difficulty; something that was a little pinched when wheat was dear, and over-ate itself when wheat was cheap; something that increased at such a rate of percentage, and yielded such another percentage of crime, and such another percentage of pauperism. . . . [T]his she knew the Coketown Hands to be. But, she scarcely thought more of separating them into units, than of separating the sea itself into component drops. (pp. 120-21)

In such passages, Dickens parodies the writings of economists like Adam Smith, Malthus, and Ricardo, who treated mankind only in the aggregate, as masses subject to inexorable laws, like Ricardo's "iron law of wages" or Malthus' laws of population. (That Gradgrind's two youngest, never-seen sons are named Adam Smith and Malthus obviously signifies.) Dickens' "meddling" in economic issues of which he had no expertise called down the wrath of defenders of *laissez-faire* orthodoxy like E. P. Whipple and Harriet Martineau,² but, at least in *Hard Times*, his satire targets not specific economic systems, but the *mentality* that reduces people to the status of statistics in equations. Gradgrind holds to the statistical view of human experience until his own son becomes a statistic, one of those "determined" by social laws to fall into crime. Young Tom, who embezzles money from Bounderby's bank, bitterly throws his father's views back in his face: "So many people are employed in situations of trust; so many people, out of so many, will be dishonest. I have heard you talk, a hundred times, of its being a law. How can I help laws? You have comforted others with such things, father. Comfort yourself!" (p. 216).

Confronted with the operation of such laws in his personal life, Grad-

2. Whipple, "Dickens' *Hard Times*," *Atlantic Monthly* 39 (March 1877): 353-58; Martineau, *The Factory Controversy: A Warning Against Meddling Legislation* (Manchester: A. Ireland, 1855), p. 36. See K. J. Fielding and Ann Smith, "Hard Times and the Factory Controversy: Dickens vs. Harriet Martineau," *NCF* 24 (1969-70): 404-27.

grind can, of course, find no comfort in them: his vaunted objectivity dissolves in a father's desperate concern. In a morally dubious stratagem, he seeks to help Tom evade the consequences of his actions by having him flee the country, in which effort he must enlist the aid of Mr. Sleary's circus, which formerly he had despised. The humbling of Mr. Gradgrind begins his regeneration, a regeneration in which the arid calculations of the head give way to the imperatives of the heart.³ Ironically, however, this development crystallizes with the appearance on the scene of the purest product of the Gradgrind philosophy, Bitzer, intent on thwarting Tom's escape. Even more mechanical than his mentor, Bitzer epitomizes egotistical utilitarian calculation—a bloodless, soulless opportunist, devoted exclusively to “the facts.”

He had grown into an extremely clear-headed, cautious, prudent young man, who was safe to rise in the world. His mind was so exactly regulated, that he had no affections or passions. All his proceedings were the result of the nicest and coldest calculation.

Bitzer grasped that buying cheap and selling dear had been “clearly ascertained by philosophers” to comprise “the whole duty of man—not part of man's duty, but the whole” (p. 88). Hewing faithfully to this philosophy, Bitzer plays a role analogous to that of Victor Frankenstein's Monster: turning on his creator, he proves to him the error of his ideas.

“Bitzer,” said Mr. Gradgrind, broken down, and miserably submissive to him, “have you a heart?”

“The circulation, Sir,” returned Bitzer, smiling at the oddity of the question, “couldn't be carried on without one. . . .”

“Is it accessible,” cried Mr. Gradgrind, “to any compassionate influence?”

“It is accessible to reason, Sir,” returned the excellent young man. “And to nothing else.”

Bitzer has learned well the “fundamental principle of Gradgrind philosophy”:

Nobody was ever on any account to give anybody anything, or render anybody help without purchase. Gratitude was to be abolished, and the virtues springing out of it were not to be. Every inch of the existence of mankind, from birth to death, was to be a bargain across a counter. And if we didn't get to Heaven that way, it was not a politico-economical place, and we had no business there. (pp. 217–19)

3. See William J. Palmer, “*Hard Times*: A Dickens Fable of Personal Salvation,” *Dalhousie Review* 52 (1972): 67–77; and, for Bitzer's role in his reformation, see Barbara Hardy, “The Change of Heart in Dickens' Novels,” in *Dickens: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Martin Price (Englewood-Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1967), pp. 49–50.

For all his intransigence to Gradgrind's pleas, Bitzer is still outwitted by Mr. Sleary and his confederates, who effect Tom's escape. The confrontation between the purest Gradgrinder of them all and the circus world deprecated by the school of hard facts constitutes the central ideological moment in the novel. Self-serving social calculus collides with the generous, spontaneous, sympathetic ethos of the horse-riding. Critics who read the book as concerned primarily with the labor problem fault the use of the circus as a symbol of resolution, for, existing anachronistically on the margins of industrialism, it offers no solution to the exploitation of the proletariat: in short, factory hands cannot, in any sizeable numbers, run off to join the circus. If, however, one reads *Hard Times* as an attack on the whole mechanomorphic worldview, then Mr. Sleary's circus serves as an apt symbolic countervalance to the equally symbolic Coketown; where one is hard, "rational," and mechanical, the other is warm, imaginative, and organic. Coketown's alienation from nature contrasts with the incorporation of nature into the circus. Tom's escape, as Sylvia Manning notes, is achieved through the collaboration of men and animals, imagination, and nature.⁴ This symbiosis marks the circus world generally, where performers create a mutual interdependence and each, as Joseph Gold suggests, "finds his place in an harmonious group with a common purpose."⁵

The father of one of the families was in the habit of balancing the father of another of the families on the top of the great pole; and the father of a third family often made a pyramid of both those fathers, with Master Kidderminster for the apex, and himself for the base; all the fathers could dance upon rolling casks, stand upon bottles, catch knives and balls, twirl hand-basins, ride upon anything, jump over everything, and stick at nothing. (p. 27)

Not without certain inconsistencies and a large measure of sentimentality, Sleary's circus nonetheless effectively subverts the mechanistic imperatives of Coketown. And Gradgrind learns painfully the lesson in being human articulated by the lisping and always slightly tipsy Mr. Sleary: "There ith a love in the world, not all Thelf-interethth after all, but thomething very different . . . that . . . hath a way of ith own of calculating or not calculating" (p. 222). Mr. Gradgrind, Dickens adds, "looked out the window, and made no reply": a silence that clearly signals assent.

* * *

Hard Times unfolds in three different rhetorical modes. One is the pathos (or bathos) of the Stephen Blackpool story; one is the exuberant

4. *Dickens as Satirist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 147.

5. *Charles Dickens: Radical Moralizer* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1972), p. 203.

comedy of the Bounderby—Mrs. Sparsit ambit; the third is the mode employed to create the Gradgrind stratum of the story. The rhetoric of Gradgrindism is satiric in a special sort of way: applying language appropriate to the operation of machines to the behavior of humans, Dickens devises a novel variant of the grotesque. Originally, of course, *grotesque* referred to fantastic combinations of human and animal forms; Dickens' grotesque achieves an analogous effect by fantastically combining human and mechanical forms.

In his essay *Laughter*, Henri Bergson identifies the essence of comedy as "something mechanical encrusted on the living." "The attitudes, gestures and movements of the human body are laughable," he contends, "in exact proportion as that body reminds us of a mere machine."⁶ As a comprehensive theory of the nature of the comic, Bergson's explanation hardly suffices; but it does, incidentally, illuminate the function of the mechanico-grotesque in *Hard Times*. What a wealth of laughable results have been obtained, he suggests, by transposing events of everyday life into technical jargon. "Recall to mind the scenes in the *Faux Bonhommes* and the *Famille Benoiton*, where marriage is dealt with as a business affair, and matters of sentiment are set down in strictly commercial language" (p. 144). Such, of course, is precisely Dickens' technique for satirizing Gradgrind's *modus operandi*, reducing affairs of the heart to mathematical calculations. And the key to the technique clearly lies in the incongruity.

At least since La Mettrie's *L'Homme-machine* (1747), people of a certain turn of mind have equated, more or less literally, men with machines. Occasionally, the man/machine analogy has a certain utility, for, of course, there are points of similarity between them—as there are between men and monkeys, or men and mice. But the grotesquerie stems from mistaking a loosely approximate analogy for reality. Consider, for example, the comment of a computer programmer who, quoted in the *New York Times*, characterized a former associate as being "reduced to an eight cycle infinite loop with look up table." The parody here appears unintentional, but the comment provides a real-life instance of the rhetoric of Gradgrindism, upon which no fictionalist could improve. Here is the true—grotesque—idiom of mechanomorphism.

6. In *Comedy*, ed. Wylie Sypher (Garden City: Doubleday Anchor, 1956), pp. 84, 79.

MARTHA C. NUSSBAUM

The Literary Imagination in Public Life†

I. *Nothing but Facts*

Dickens's *Hard Times*¹ contains a normative vision of a scientific political economy and of the scientific political imagination. It presents this norm, to be sure, as a target of withering satirical attack, a goal that cannot be truly described without being made to appear both ridiculous and sinister. But since the attack is a deep attack, the satirical target itself is described with insight, as the novel both depicts and shows the deeper significance of what is still today very often taught as normative in public policy-making, in welfare and development economics—and, recently, even in the law. What makes this norm appear so odd to the reader of the novel is that it is taken seriously all the way down, so to speak: understood not just as a way of writing up reports, but as a way of dealing with people in daily encounters; not just as a way of doing economics, but a way of defining a horse or talking to a child; not just as a way of appearing professionally respectable, but as a commitment that determines the whole content of one's personal and social life. But since this norm does in fact claim to be a norm of rationality, and not just a handy professional tool, and since, if it is really a norm, it seems fair to ask people to abide by it consistently, it seems perfectly fair to examine it in this way, asking what people who really and thoroughly saw the world in the way this norm recommends would be like, and whether such a vision does really seem to be a complete one. (And it seems reasonable, too, to suppose that the personal vision and conduct of committed social scientists is actually influenced at least to some extent by the content of the norm their science upholds, by the habits of perception and recognition it encourages. So in examining it this way we can expect to learn something about what we do *to* people by holding it up as a norm, and what we can expect *from* people so treated.) Dickens pays the economic utilitarian the tribute of taking him at his word and holding him to his word; of this treatment he can hardly, it seems to me, complain. Later I shall draw some explicit connections between the Gradgrind philosophy and some aspects of contemporary economic thought and practice. But for now I need to set out the features of this norm, as the novel dissects it. (This will mean beginning to speak of its limitations as well: for in seeing it we see what the novel sees.)

What I am about to say here may seem in some respects obvious. For

† *New Literary History* 22.4 (Autumn 1991): 877–910.

1. All citations from *Hard Times* are taken from the Penguin edition (Harmondsworth 1969), edited by David Craig; cited in text.

it is part of the novel's design that the economist's way of thinking, seen in the full context of daily life, should look extremely strange, and the opposing way natural. What I hope to bring out here, however, is that the economic opponent is not a straw man: it is a conception that even now dominates much of our public life, in a form not very different from the form presented in this novel. Once, focusing on the subtle modifications of utilitarianism that one finds in recent philosophy,² I felt that the satire of *Hard Times* was unfair. But now that I have spent time in the world of economics, reading the prose and following the arguments, I am convinced that the criticisms in the novel are both fair and urgent. The simple utilitarian idea of what rational choice consists in dominates not only economic thought and practice, but also—given the prestige of economics within the social sciences—a great deal of writing in other social sciences as well, where “rational choice theory” is taken to be equivalent to utilitarian rational choice theory as practiced in neoclassical economics. Public policy-makers turn to these norms to find a principled, orderly way of making decisions. And the allure of the theory's elegant simplicity is so great that it is having an increasing influence even in the law, which has traditionally reasoned in a very different way, using a different norm of the rational.³ Recently the theory has even made its way into literary studies, where the prestige of neoclassical economics, Chicago style, is evoked in defense of a broad application of its behavioral theory to all areas of human life.⁴ To the reader who has no familiarity with the opposing position and the prose in which it is expressed, a short course in the writings of Gary Becker or Richard Posner might be recommended. (For their views are extreme—but only in the sense that, like this novel, they apply across the board a theory that economics treats as normative for rational choice in general. If it is indeed a norm of rationality, they are right to do so: and we are justified in examining their works as tests of the theory's normative appropriateness.⁵ To the reader I leave, then, the further investigation of the economist's position in contemporary life. For now I myself shall turn to Mr.

2. For example, see James Griffin, *Well-Being* (Oxford, 1986), and Richard B. Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and Right* (Oxford, 1979).

3. See all the writings of Richard Posner, including *Economic Analysis of Law* (Boston, Mass., 1977), *The Economics of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), and *Law and Literature: A Misunderstood Relation* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988). In *The Problems of Jurisprudence* (Cambridge, Mass., 1990) Posner has modified his approach, espousing a kind of “pragmatism.” For a good general critique of economic reasoning in public life generally, see the introduction to *Utilitarianism and Beyond*, ed. Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams (Cambridge, 1988).

4. See Barbara Herrnstein Smith, *Contingencies of Value* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988).

5. See Posner, *Economic Analysis of Law* and *The Economics of Justice*; Gary Becker, *The Economic Approach to Human Behavior* (Chicago, 1976), and *A Treatise on the Family* (Cambridge, Mass., 1981). Especially instructive is the opening of Posner's *The Economics of Justice*, where he first introduces the “assumption that people are rational maximizers of their satisfactions,” noting that “the principles of economics are deductions from this assumption”—and then goes on to use the word “rational,” without further philosophical argument, as if it just meant “maximizers of satisfactions.” (See pp. 1–2.) One trenchant critique of Posner, with regard to the worth of one's personal integrity, is Margaret Jane Radin, “Market-Inalienability,” *Harvard Law Review*, 100 (1987), 1849 ff.

Gradgrind—who at least ends the novel by expressing remorse, and revealing, in the process, a certain human complexity.

“In this life, we want nothing but Facts, sir; nothing but Facts’ ” (47). This famous demand, announced in the Gradgrind schoolroom in the opening chapter of the novel (a chapter entitled “The One Thing Needful”), states the essence of the Gradgrind philosophy. And the novel shortly characterizes it further, speaking for Mr. Gradgrind in the hard blunt confrontational sentences that seem well suited to express the quality of his mind: “Thomas Gradgrind, sir. A man of realities. A man of fact and calculations. A man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four, and nothing over, and who is not to be talked into allowing for anything over. Thomas Gradgrind, sir—peremptorily Thomas—Thomas Gradgrind. 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, and tell you exactly what it comes to. It is a mere question of figures, a case of simple arithmetic” (48). Gradgrind’s political economy claims to be a science, to offer facts in place of idle fancy, objectivity in place of mere subjective impressions, the precision of mathematical calculation instead of the intractable elusiveness of qualitative distinctions. “The reason is (as you know),” he remarks to Bounderby, “the only faculty to which education should be addressed” (62). And Gradgrind economics claims proudly to approach the world with reason rather than sentiment—and with the detached theoretical and calculative power of the mathematical intellect, rather than any more qualitative type of reasoned deliberation. Gradgrind intellect sees the heterogeneous furniture of the world, human beings included, as so many surfaces or “parcels” to be weighed and measured.

In this brief description we see four aspects of the economic-utilitarian mind, neatly encapsulated.⁶ First, it reduces qualitative differences to quantitative differences. Instead of Louisa, Tom, Stephen, Rachael, in all of their complex qualitative diversity, their historical particularity, we have simply so and so many quantifiable “parcels of human nature.” This effacement of qualitative difference is accomplished, we see, by a process of abstraction from all in people that is not easily funneled into mathematical formulae; so this mind, in order to measure what it measures, attends only to an abstract and highly general version of the human being, rather than to the diverse concreteness with which the novel confronts us. We see this abstracting mathematical mind at work in the Gradgrind school’s treatment of its students, called by number (“Girl number twenty”) rather than by name, and seen as an “inclined plane of little vessels then and there arranged in order, ready to have imperial

6. Some of these criticisms do apply, as well, to philosophical utilitarians, many of whom do treat values as commensurable by a single quantitative standard. See, for example, James Griffin, “Are There Incommensurable Values?” *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 7 (1977), 34–59, criticized in Martha C. Nussbaum, “The Discernment of Perception,” *Love’s Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature* (New York, 1990), pp. 54–105.

gallons of facts poured into them until they were full to the brim" (47-48). We see it at work in the treatment of the workers of Coketown as so and so many "hands and stomachs" (102-3), as "teeming myriads" whose destinies could be reckoned on a slate (131-32), their qualitative differences as irrelevant as those of "ants and beetles" "passing to and from their nests" (187).⁷

Second, the Gradgrind mind, bent on calculation, is determined to aggregate the data gained about and from individual lives, arriving at a picture of total or average utility that effaces personal separateness as well as qualitative difference.⁸ The individual is not even as distinct as a distinct countable insect; for in Mr. Gradgrind's calculation it becomes simply an input into a complex mathematical operation that treats the social unit as a single large system in which the preferences and satisfactions of all are combined and melded. Thus, in Louisa's education, the working classes become:

Something to be worked so much and paid so much, and there ended; something to be infallibly settled by laws of supply and demand; something that blundered against those laws, and floundered into difficulty; something that was a little pinched when wheat was dear, and over-ate itself when wheat was cheap; something that increased at such a rate of percentage, and yielded such another percentage of crime, and such another percentage of pauperism; something wholesale, of which vast fortunes were made; something that occasionally rose like the sea, and did some harm and waste (chiefly to itself), and fell again; this she knew the Coketown hands to be. But, she had scarcely thought more of separating them into units, than of separating the sea itself into its component drops. (187-88)

Lives are drops in an undermarked ocean; and the question how the group is doing is a question whose economic resolution requires effacing the separate life and agency of each.⁹

Mr. Gradgrind does not achieve this goal perfectly in his school, where students, though numbered rather than named, retain their distinct levels of performance, their abilities to think and speak as separate centers of choice, and even some measure of qualitative distinctness. He does not achieve this goal perfectly, we are bound to observe, in his relation to himself: for his internal rhetoric, in the passage cited, insists on the separateness and the qualitative difference of his own mind from those of others: "You might hope to get some other nonsensical belief into the

7. The workers complain that their lives are constrained by an enforced "sameness" (180), an absence of qualitative variation. It is no wonder that a theory bent on eliminating qualitative distinctions would treat them in this way.

8. See the good account of this feature in Sen and Williams, Introduction to *Utilitarianism and Beyond*.

9. Shortly after this, hearing of Stephen's misfortunes, Louisa remarks that she had previously heard them mentioned, "though I was not attending to the particulars at the time" (188).

head of George Gradgrind, or Augustus Gradgrind, or John Gradgrind, or Joseph Gradgrind (all supposititious, nonexistent persons), but into the head of Thomas Gradgrind—no sir!" (48). It is a subtle point in the novel that the measure of personal autonomy and self-respect that Mr. Gradgrind wishes to claim for himself requires him to view himself with a distinctness denied in his calculations—and even to indulge in a rare bit of (however crude) fiction-making.¹

But within his immediate family, he fares better. For he does manage, most of the time, to perceive his own children in more or less the way that political economy recommends.² When Louisa, in inner agony about her impending marriage to Bounderby, bursts out: "Father, I have often thought that life is very short," her baffled father replies:

"It is short, no doubt, my dear. Still, the average duration of human life is proved to have increased of late years. The calculations of various life assurance and annuity offices, among other figures which cannot go wrong, have established the fact."

"I speak of my own life, father."

"O indeed? Still," said Mr. Gradgrind, "I need not point out to you, Louisa, that it is governed by the laws which govern lives in the aggregate." (135)³.

And in one of the novel's most chilling and brilliant moments, we see what it can be like to see one's own self through the eyes of political economy. Mrs. Gradgrind, subservient and with an always fragile sense both of her own qualitative distinctness and of her separate boundaries, her separate agency, lies on what will soon be her deathbed. "Are you in pain, dear mother?" asks Louisa. The answer comes back. "I think there's a pain somewhere in the room," said Mrs. Gradgrind, "but I couldn't positively say that I have got it" (224). Political economy sees only pains and satisfactions and their general location: it does not see persons as distinctly bounded centers of satisfaction, far less as agents whose active planning is essential to the humanness of whatever satisfaction they will achieve. Mrs. Gradgrind has learned her lesson well.

If we return now to the initial description of Mr. Gradgrind, we see in it a third feature of the political-economical mind: its determination to find a clear and precise solution for any human problem.⁴ Mr. Grad-

1. For another example of crude economic fiction-making, see the account of the "leaden little books . . . showing how the good grown-up baby invariably got to the Savings-bank, and the bad grown-up baby invariably got transported" (90).

2. That this is no mere fiction can be confirmed by reading Becker's *A Treatise on the Family*.

3. Contrast p. 241, where Louisa now sees that her marriage failed because of "all those causes of disparity which arise out of our two individual natures, and which no general laws shall ever rule or state for me, father, until they shall be able to direct the anatomist where to strike his knife into the secrets of my soul."

4. This lies very deep in the motivation behind utilitarianism in general, and inspires some of its deliberate departures from ordinary belief. Henry Sidgwick, for example, conceding that to adopt a single metric of choice is to depart from ordinary belief, writes, "If we are not to systematize human activities by taking Universal Happiness as their common end, on what

grind, we recall, is prepared "to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to" (48). And his study, later on, is described as a "charmed apartment" in which "the most complicated social questions were cast up, got into exact totals, and finally settled" (131–32). Because it has from the start cast the human data into "tabular form," the economic mind finds it easy to view the lives of human beings as a problem in (relatively elementary) mathematics that has a definite solution—ignoring the mystery and complexity that are within each life, in its puzzlement and pain about its choices, in its tangled loves, in its attempt to grapple with the mysterious and awful fact of its own mortality.⁵ The cheerful fact-calculating mind plays round the surfaces of these lives, as if it had no need to look within, as if, indeed, it "could settle all their destinies on a slate" (132). Gradgrind children are taught from an early age to approach the world of nature without any sense of mystery, awe, and depth. Thus Bitzer's definition of a horse, which gives a remarkably flat and abstract description of the surface features of that animal, refusing to imagine either its own complex form of life or its significances in the lives of humans who love and care for horses. So too with human lives. Mr. Gradgrind does not even understand the significance of his own child's outburst, when she speaks obscurely of a fire that bursts forth at night, and wonders about the shortness of her life (135). How much less, then, does he feel a sense of mystery and wonder before the distant human beings who work in the factories of Coketown. In one of the most striking incursions of a first-person voice into this novel * * * this habit of mind is described, and criticized:

So many hundred Hands in this Mill; so many hundred horse Steam Power. It is known, to the force of a single pound weight, what the engine will do; but, not all the calculators of the National Debt can tell me the capacity for good or evil, for love or hatred, for patriotism or discontent, for the decomposition of virtue into vice, or the reverse, at any single moment in the soul of one of these its quiet servants, with the composed faces and the regulated actions. There is no mystery in it; there is an unfathomable mystery in the meanest of them, for ever.—Supposing we were to reserve our arithmetic for material objects, and to govern these awful unknown quantities by other means! (108)

If political economy does not include the complexities of the inner moral life of each human being, its strivings and perplexities, its complicated emotions, its perplexity and terror, if it does not distinguish in its descrip-

other principles are we to systematize them?"—and remarks that such departures are always found when a science is born (*Methods of Ethics*, 7th ed. [London, 1907], pp. 401, 406, 425).

5. Just before we hear of the "leaden books," the narrator himself describes the people of Coketown as "walking against time towards the infinite world" (90).

tions between a human life and a machine, then we should regard with suspicion its claim to govern a nation of human beings; and we should ask ourselves whether, having seen us as little different from inanimate objects, it might not be capable of treating us with a certain lack of tenderness.

And this brings us directly to the fourth characteristic of economic rationality with which the novel acquaints us. Seeing human beings as counters in a mathematical game, and refusing to see their mysterious inner world, the Gradgrind philosophy is able to adopt a theory of human motivation that is elegant and simple, well suited for the game of calculation, but whose relation to the more complicated laws that govern the inner world of a human being should be viewed with skepticism. In accordance with Gradgrind's view of himself as a down-to-earth realistic man, a man of cold, hard fact rather than airy fancy, the theory has an air of hard-nosed realism about it, suggesting the unmasking of pleasant but airy fiction. Human beings, this unsentimental view teaches, are all motivated by self-interest in all of their actions.⁶ The all-too-perfect Gradgrind pupil Bitzer, at the novel's end, reveals the principle on which he was raised. As the chastened Mr. Gradgrind attempts to appeal to his gratitude and love, Bitzer cuts in:

"I beg your pardon for interrupting you, sir," returned Bitzer; "but I am sure you know that the whole social system is a question of self-interest. What you must always appeal to, is a person's self-interest. It's your only hold. We are so constituted. I was brought up in that catechism when I was very young, sir, as you are aware." (303).

Bitzer, the perfect product of political economy, refuses to acknowledge even those residual motivations of love and altruism that now deeply grip the heart of Mr. Gradgrind himself. For that is the philosophy on which he was raised. And this philosophy leads to odd and implausible interpretations of the world.

Earlier in the novel, when Sissy Jupe's father has left her, and her own first tendency is to impute to him altruistic motives, projects for her good, Bounderby will have none of it. She had better know, he says, the hard bad facts of her situation: she has simply been abandoned, her father has simply pleased himself and run off. The novel pointedly leaves this particular case unresolved; its function is to point up different behavioral assumptions, different ways of construing the world. The novel as a whole convinces the reader (and Mr. Gradgrind) that Gradgrind is wrong to deny the possibility of genuinely altruistic and other-regarding action. But if there exists this other possibility, then Bounderby has construed Sissy's situation hastily, and also ungenerously. The suggestion is that

6. For a trenchant documentation and critique of these behavioral assumptions, see Amartya Sen, "Rational Fools," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 6 (1976-77), 317-44.

the economist's habit of reducing everything to calculation, combined with the need for an extremely simple theory of human action, produces a tendency to see calculation everywhere, rather than commitment and sympathy. "Every inch of the existence of mankind, from birth to death, was to be a bargain across a counter" (304). This tendency leads to crude analysis, and frequently to error. Even when it does not lead to error, it leads to an ungenerous perception of people and events. And, worst of all, taught from an early age, it produces pupils in its own image.

In short, the claim of political economy to present all and only the facts of human life needs to be viewed with skepticism, if by "facts" we mean "truths." And its claim to stand for "reason" must also be viewed with skepticism, if by "reason" we mean a faculty that is self-critical and committed to truth. For the "facts" of political economy are actually reductive and incomplete perceptions, and to "reason" is a dogmatic operation of intellect that looks, frequently, both incomplete and unreliable. The fact-finding intellect plays around the surfaces of objects, not even obtaining very adequate perceptual data—Mr. Gradgrind's study is compared to an astronomical observatory without windows, where the astronomer arranges the world "solely by pen, ink, and paper" (131), determined to perceive only those abstract features of people and situations that can easily be translated into economic calculations. From its own point of view it has positive motivations for this way of proceeding in its determination to be realistic and not sentimental, its determination to be exact, and even its determination not to be biased in favor of what is near at hand. (For Mr. Gradgrind reflects that Louisa "Would have been self-willed . . . but for her bringing-up" [57].) The novel permits us to see these positive goals.⁷ Its very sentences express a commitment to be detached, and realistic, and unbiased—in their blunt square shape, their syntactical plainness, their hard sound and rhythm. (We must, however, note that the prose the novel imputes to the Gradgrind imagination is far more expressive, more succinct, more rhythmical, more *pleasing* in its odd squareness, than the flat unexpressive jargon-laden prose that is actually used by most economists of the Gradgrind type. Dickens has been able to make Mr. Gradgrind a lively character in a readable novel only by to this extent changing him.)

But, the novel shows, in its determination to see only what can enter into utilitarian calculations, the economic mind is blind: blind to the qualitative richness of the perceptible world; to the separateness of its people, to their inner depths, their hopes and loves and fears; blind to what it is like to live a human life and to try to endow it with a human meaning. Blind, above all, to the fact that human life is something mysterious and not altogether fathomable, something that demands to be

7. Indeed, if we bear in mind that one of utilitarianism's central claims on its own behalf is that it can take seriously the pain of the poor, we see the novel as offering, in addition, a devastating *internal* critique.

approached with faculties of mind and resources of language that are suited to the expression of that complexity. In the name of science, the wonder that illuminates and prompts the most creative and deepest science has been jettisoned.⁸ And we have, simply, a reductive charade of science in which some small part of human life appears, as figures on slate.

* * *

I must now insist that in this novel—and in my own view—there is no disparagement of reason or of the scientific search for truth. What I am criticizing is a pseudo-science that claims to stand for truth and for reason. What I am saying about it is that it fails to stand for truth insofar as it dogmatically misrepresents the complexity of human beings and human life. It fails to stand for reason when it uncritically trusts half-baked perceptions and crude psychological theories in order not to complicate its elegant models. The novel speaks not of dismissing reason, but of coming upon it in a way illuminated by fancy, which is here seen as a faculty at once both creative and veridical. The alternative I am proposing is not Sleary's circus. The circus offers the reader essential metaphors of art, discipline, play, and love; but even within the novel its attitudes are shown as politically incomplete, too ill-educated and whimsical to govern a nation. The novel offers us an alternative: itself, its complex combination of qualitatively rich description with critical social reflection. And it indicates that political and economic treatises of a more abstract and mathematical sort would be perfectly consistent with its purpose—so long as the view of the human being underlying the treatises was the richer view available in the novel; so long as they do not lose sight of what they are, for efficiency, omitting. Government cannot investigate the life story of every citizen in the way a novel does with its characters; it can, however, know *that* each citizen has a complex history of this sort, and it can remain aware that the norm in principle would be to acknowledge the separateness and qualitative difference of each in the manner of the novel.

In one particular way the novel, as genre, is strongly in league with a certain norm of rationality: namely, in its insistence on the fundamental role, in its own construction, of a general notion of the *human being*. The description of the Coketown library speaks of "human nature, human passions, human hopes and fears," the subject matter of the novel. In so doing it reminds us that the novel does not purchase its attention to social context and to individual variety at the price of jettisoning a sense of human community. It forges a complex relationship with its reader in which, on the one hand, the reader is urged to care

8. At the same time, the utilitarian's particular conception of science owes something to the Cartesian conception of nature as a machine: this shows up especially clearly in the attitudes to animals in the Gradgrind schoolroom.

about concrete features of circumstance and history, and to see these as relevant for social choice; but is, on the other hand, urged always to recognize that human beings in different spheres do have common passions, hopes, and fears, the need to confront the mystery of death, the desire for learning, the deep bonds of the family. Its hypothetical reader is explicitly addressed as one whose sphere of life is different from that of the author—with different concrete choices and possibilities. And yet it is assumed that the reader can still identify with the characters and events of the novel as with possibilities for human life in general, and think how “such things” can be instantiated in his or her own concrete life.⁹ This complex movement of imagination and reason, from the concrete to the general back to the concrete, through both sympathy and identification, is built into the genre, as *Hard Times* correctly states. And in real life one does find that works of imaginative literature are frequently far more supple and versatile deliberative agents across cultural boundaries than are philosophical treatises, with their time-bound and culture-bound terms of art, their frequent lack of engagement with common hopes and fears.

In its engagement with a general notion of the human being, this novel (like many novels) is, I think, while particularistic, not relativistic. That is, it recognizes human needs that transcend boundaries of time, place, class, religion, and ethnicity, and it makes the focus of its moral deliberation the question of their adequate fulfillment. Its criticism of concrete political and social situations relies on a notion of what it is for a human being to flourish, and this notion itself, while extremely general and in need of further specification, is neither local nor sectarian. On the other hand, part of the content of the idea of flourishing is a deep respect for qualitative difference—so the norm enjoins that governments, wherever they are, should attend to citizens in all their concreteness and variety, and should respond in a sensitive way to particular historical and personal contingencies. But the point is, that is itself a universal injunction, and part of a universal picture of humanness. And it is by relying on this universal ideal that the novel, so different from a guidebook or even an anthropological field report, makes the reader a participant in the lives of people very different from herself and also a critic of the class distinctions that give people similarly constructed an unequal access to flourishing.¹ Thus the novel, in its structure and aspiration, is, I think, a

9. For more on this, see Martha C. Nussbaum, “Aristotelian Social Democracy,” in *Liberalism and the Good*, ed. R. Bruce Douglass, Gerald M. Mara, and Henry S. Richardson (New York, 1990), pp. 203–52; “Aristotle on Human Nature and the Foundations of Ethics,” in a volume in honor of Bernard Williams, ed. Ross Harrison and J. E. G. Altham (forthcoming [Cambridge, 1991]); and “Human Functioning and Social Justice: In Defense of Aristotelian Essentialism,” read at the Institute for Humanities at the University of Chicago (forthcoming in *Political Theory*).

1. See Amartya Sen, *Choice, Welfare, and Measurement* (Oxford, 1982); *Resources, Value, and Development* (Oxford, 1984); *Commodities and Capabilities* (North-Holland, 1985); *The Standard of Living* (Cambridge, 1987).

defender of enlightenment ideals of the equality and dignity of all human life—not of traditionalism or parochialism. It is opposed to the perversion of that ideal in the name of the pseudo-science of economics, and also to its insensitive application with insufficient respect for stories told within a concrete historical context—not to the ideal itself.

DAVID L. COWLES

Having It Both Ways:
Gender and Paradox in *Hard Times*†

Hearing that her husband has apprehended Tom and Louisa peeping into Sleary's circus, Mrs. Gradgrind exclaims: "I declare you're enough to make one regret ever having had a family at all. I have a great mind to say I wish I hadn't. *Then* what would you have done, I should like to know'" (61; bk. 1. ch. 4). Dickens obviously intends us to laugh at this obvious paradox: Mrs. Gradgrind could only prove her suffering to her wayward children if they did not exist. Yet such self-contradiction typifies Dickens's own dependence on paradox in *Hard Times*, particularly regarding gender issues.

Throughout Dickens's works, treatments of women probably engender more unintentional self-contradiction than any other topic. Like all great artists, Dickens typifies as much as he transcends the conceptual languages of his age, and for the mid-Victorians "the woman question" was a linguistic Tower of Babel. Examining aspects of gender in *Hard Times*, especially as they relate to Louisa Gradgrind/Bounderby, reveals irreconcilable contradictions in Dickens's treatment of women and suggests other crucial ways in which the text differs from itself.

Hard Times provides two portraits of idealized Dickensian women: Sissy Jupe and Rachael. Both characters exhibit standard Victorian feminine virtues: extraordinary devotion (especially to a needy male), remarkable love-based powers of intuition, firm but modest assertion of heart-felt values, great spiritual strength and endurance. Throughout his novels, Dickens identifies these traits as inherently feminine, natural to all good-hearted women. The sensitive male gratefully admires a woman's natural devotion to him, and does not stand between her and self-sacrificing feminine fulfillment. This obvious projection of male desire, of course, conveniently excuses men for using the women who love them. The man's own worthiness in the formula is largely irrelevant—especially if he is a father or brother. Indeed, as with Nancy, Florence Dombey, Little Dorrit, and Lizzie Hexam, the worse the man, the

† *Dickens Quarterly* 8.2 (June 1991): 79–84.

more admirable the woman's loyalty. Such devotion is a sure sign of inner goodness, even in otherwise wicked or insensitive female characters like Nancy and Pleasant Riderhood. Sissy and Rachael, sensitive to their own hearts and to others' needs, clearly exhibit all these characteristics.

Louisa, too, feels intimations of these "natural" womanly traits, especially as she functions as daughter, sister, and wife—roles that always call for selfless devotion in Dickens. Yet Louisa's Utilitarian education—normally reserved for boys and particularly hostile to the traditional female virtues so essential to her "real" nature—has largely incapacitated her for these all-important relationships. Moreover, in Louisa's case these roles require simultaneous loyalty and disloyalty to the particular males involved. She can exhibit "natural" loving loyalty to her father only by rejecting everything he sincerely stands for. Sacrificing herself for Tom means marrying a man to whom she cannot offer loving devotion. And wifely loyalty to Bounderby—a man embodying the opposite of all her inner yearnings—is unthinkable. Indeed, Dickens places Louisa in an impossible position, and in the end he punishes her for her inability to bridge gaps inherent in his own contradictory beliefs about women.

These contradictions reveal themselves whenever gender issues arise. Consider, for example, Tom's attitude about his sister's female duty toward him. In an early conversation with Tom, Louisa laments that she cannot make his life comfortable in traditionally feminine ways. Clearly Tom considers this desire perfectly natural. After all, he points out, "You are a girl, too, and a girl comes out of it better than a boy does" (92; bk. 1, ch. 8). 'But Tom selfishly trades on Louisa's devotion without proper appreciation for her sacrifices. He later calls her a "capital girl" (131; bk. 1, ch. 14), indicating the economic (mis)use to which he puts her. Tom explains to Harthouse why Louisa married Bounderby: "Not that it was altogether so important to her as it was to me, . . . because my liberty and comfort, and perhaps my getting on, depended on it. . . . A girl can get on anywhere. . . . Girls can always get on, somehow'" (167–68; bk. 2, ch. 3).

Dickens unquestionably condemns Tom for his insensitive, gender-based demands on Louisa's devoted service as his natural male right, as well as for his repeated statements that her loving sensitivity is just "another of the advantages . . . of being a girl" (93; bk. 1, ch. 8). In fact, Dickens blames Tom for not being more like Louisa. On the other hand, Dickens has taken pains to show that Tom and Louisa have had identical educational and family experiences, and that the primary differences between the siblings are gender-determined. Further, though he shows disdain for Tom's attitude, Dickens clearly approves of Louisa's desire to serve Tom in the ways he expects—and certainly because Dickens, too, sees female self-sacrifice as natural. In effect, Dickens puts himself exactly in Tom's position by praising Louisa, Rachael, and Sissy for doing

just the sort of things Tom desires. Like Tom, Dickens believes that through unselfish devotion "girls can always get on, somehow." Dickens simultaneously uses the same attitude, in effect, to condemn Tom and praise Louisa.

In another telling passage, when Gradgrind catches young Louisa and Tom at the forbidden circus, he blames Tom for instigating the venture, assuming that the boy, though younger, naturally leads. But Gradgrind is mistaken. Louisa haughtily insists she led Tom. Indeed, "Louisa looked at her father with more boldness," and the children's "air of jaded sullenness" was evident "particularly in the girl" (57; bk. 1, ch. 3). Once again Dickens plays both sides of the gender issue. First, he clearly shows that Gradgrind really *is* wrong in assuming that the boy naturally leads. Louisa, Tom tells her afterward, "can always lead me as you like" through her deeply-buried but irrepressible feminine instincts (92; bk. 1, ch. 8). Dickens wants us to admire Louisa for confidently following her heart beyond Gradgrind's limited teachings and for bringing Tom along after her. At the same time, however, Dickens *condemns* Louisa's unladylike and disobedient independence. Her unfeminine disloyalty to her father must be ascribed to her unfortunate education. So Dickens asks us simultaneously to approve Louisa's independence from her father's system, while blaming that same system for it. Similarly, we must respect Louisa's intellectual capacities even as we blame Gradgrind's system for forcing her to develop them instead of the natural womanly skills involved in making men comfortable. Further, Louisa's haughty reply to her father is itself a loyal defense of her younger brother, whelp though he is. Yet this very loyalty to Tom requires equal disloyalty to her father, toward whom she holds the same womanly duty. Again, Dickens plays both sides at once: We are to respect Louisa's natural womanly feelings in her loyalty to her brother; while simultaneously blaming Gradgrind's system for her disloyalty to him.

Ultimately, Louisa manages to resolve the conflict between father and brother. She returns to her father—who now needs and deserves her affectionate care. Louisa, increasingly "feminine" in outlook, now separates her father from his system: "I have never blamed you, and I never shall" (245; bk. 3, ch. 1). She also remains faithful to Tom—even protecting him from justice. Unlike Bounderby's betrayed mother, Mrs. Peggler (who is correspondingly less admirable), Louisa has no illusions about Tom's guilt; she senses it intuitively from the start. Dickens clearly presents Louisa's loyalty despite Tom's unworthiness as admirably feminine. Ironically, however, this very faithfulness causes her inappropriate relationship with Harthouse—both because Harthouse manipulates her through it, and because it motivates her decision to enter an unsatisfying marriage. More importantly, in order to achieve loyalty to father and brother and attain partial feminine fulfillment, Louisa must actually abandon her husband. Dickens asks us to blame Bounderby, who is

made to reject her—though not until after she has already left him. Bounderby's unworthiness somehow excuses Louisa for violating her womanly duty to support her husband. Dickens makes us feel that her mistake was marrying Bounderby in the first place, largely under her father and brother's near-criminal influence. Her loyalty to them, despite the limitations and suffering they impose on her, seems even more admirable because they do not deserve it. Yet her disloyalty to Bounderby is made to appear equally admirable, precisely *because* she must escape the same kinds of insensitive limitations and suffering from him.

Moreover, despite Dickens's clear efforts to excuse Louisa, in the end he punishes her for her unfeminine actions and attributes, but mitigates her suffering because she has a naturally loving feminine heart after all. Part of Louisa's sin against her woman's nature is clearly sexual. She has desired a man who is not her husband. Further, she has married a man she despises, who is old enough to be her father—a near-incestuous fate Esther Summerson narrowly avoids in *Bleak House*, written just before *Hard Times*. In the moral system of Dickens's novels, a woman who has sold herself sexually, for whatever reason, is forever denied the comfort and fulfillment of husband and family. Typical of Dickens's good-hearted but fallen women, Louisa must live a life dedicated to serving her father, separated forever from her beloved brother. Though her fate is less harsh than those of Nancy, Little Em'ly, or, more to the point, Edith Dombey, Dickens describes what is denied Louisa in such desirable terms that it is difficult not to see her state as a punishment.

Herself again a wife—a mother—lovingly watchful of her children, ever careful that they should have a childhood of the mind no less than a childhood of the body, as knowing it to be even a more beautiful thing, and a possession, any hoarded scrap of which, is a blessing and happiness to the wisest? Did Louisa see this? Such a thing was never to be. (313; bk. 3, ch. 9).

Dickens attempts to mitigate Louisa's suffering by assuring us that other people's children will love her, but the elements of punishment are unmistakable.

Other characters reflect and complicate Dickens's treatment of Louisa. Indeed, nearly every important character functions as part of a large pattern of abandonment. Some desert loved ones for admirable, unselfish purposes. Sissy Jupe's father runs away from her, but, as the eternally loyal Sissy asserts, "he left me for my good—he never would have left me for his own" (98; bk. 1, ch. 9). Stephen rejects his fellow workers, but in doing so maintains a higher loyalty to Rachael. Stephen must also leave Rachael, "thinking unselfishly that at least his being obliged to go away was good for her" (185; bk. 2, ch. 6). Other characters abandon duty to others for selfish reasons. Tom largely ignores his sister as soon as he escapes his father's house—except when he needs her to

sacrifice something for him. Stephen's fellow Hands reject his honest refusal to join their union. Bounderby fires Stephen and later Mrs. Sparsit for egocentric reasons. Bitzer denies all loyalty toward Gradgrind. Even Mrs. Sparsit's late husband abandoned her shortly after their marriage.

Several cases of abandonment warrant special consideration in relation to Louisa leaving Bounderby. First, Dickens clearly condemns Stephen's wife for leaving him, something similar to what he approves in Louisa. Here the main difference is that the longsuffering Stephen deserves better while Bounderby does not. Dickens also emphasizes distinctions between the two women. Louisa marries Bounderby as an unselfish sacrifice for Tom and manages to evade at least the consummation of her dubious relationship with Harthouse. Stephen's wife is "foul" in her "moral infamy" and confronts Stephen with the threat that she will "sell thee off agen . . . a score of times" (106-07; bk. 1, ch. 10). Consequently, we blame Stephen's wife in ways we do not blame Louisa, and we also recognize Stephen's need for divorce—though Louisa's desire for separation hardly fits into the same class.

Dickens also emphasizes Bounderby's disloyalty to Louisa—and to anyone else. His marriage, like his relationships with Mrs. Sparsit, his mother, and even Gradgrind, is intended to enhance his self-image and social position as self-made man. Despite what he tells Stephen about "a sanctity in this relation of life" that "must be kept up" (112; bk. 1, ch. 11), when Stephen describes his patience toward his wayward wife, Bounderby thinks, "The more fool you"—foreshadowing the policy he later adopts toward Louisa. In discussing Louisa's flight with Gradgrind, Bounderby complains that he has not been "as dutifully and submissively treated by your daughter, as Josiah Bounderby of Coketown ought to be treated by his wife" (260; bk. 3, ch. 3). Indeed, Bounderby remarks that he does not wish to quarrel about Louisa, because "to tell you the truth, I don't think it would be worthy of my reputation to quarrel on such a subject" (265; bk. 3, ch. 3). Bounderby's rejection of Louisa is unquestionably the best thing that could happen to her. She cannot go back to him; womanly loyalty to her husband is now impossible. But because Dickens makes Bounderby reject *her* (an act aggravated by his treatment of his mother), Louisa's desertion is presented as one more count against *him*, and actually becomes a point in her favor, despite violating a central tenet of the Dickensian female code.

Finally, Dickens's treatment of disempowered workers like Stephen and Rachael parallels his contradictory attitude toward disempowered women. As Dickens condemns Tom's selfish wishes regarding Louisa while simultaneously approving Louisa's desire to gratify them, so Dickens criticizes the mill owners' view of their workers as mere Hands, but asks us to admire those willing to act as little else. Like the owners, Dickens essentially treats workers in *Hard Times* as Hands. When Louisa

visits Stephen's home, Dickens remarks that "for the first time in her life, Louisa had come into one of the dwellings of the Coketown Hands; for the first time in her life, she was face to face with anything like individuality in connexion with them" (187; bk. 2, ch. 6). Dickens himself never manages this in the novel. He even identifies them primarily as "men and brothers" (169; bk. 2, ch. 4), despite the many female workers. As with Louisa, Dickens's "good" workers inhabit both sides of crucial divisions, as when Stephen addresses Bounderby: "He spoke with the rugged earnestness of his place and character—deepened perhaps by a proud consciousness that he was faithful to his class under all their mistrust; but he fully remembered where he was, and did not even raise his voice" (179; bk. 2, ch. 5).

Moreover, Dickens expects both Stephen and Louisa to endure injustice and limited opportunities for growth and self-fulfillment by taking whatever happiness (or solace) they can in self-sacrifice for others who are unworthy of their efforts, and who are clearly incapable of setting the agendas in question fairly. Dickens appears to suggest that workers, like wives, daughters, mothers, and sisters, should merely put faith in their oppressors, represented in *Hard Times* by Bounderby—hardly a rational way to improve their situation. In his ending portraits, Dickens admiringly describes Rachael as "a woman working, ever working, but content to do it, and preferring to do it as her natural lot, until she should be too old to labour any more" (313; bk. 3, ch. 9), at which time presumably she should do the proper thing and die—not that she would have other options. Do your duty, Dickens urges. Take joy or solace there. Meanwhile, I will work to make the owners more sympathetic. This is precisely what he recommends to women. That, too, is why Louisa's bolting from Bounderby seems so uncharacteristic.

In unconsciously playing both sides of irreconcilable contradictions, especially regarding gender issues, Dickens undermines many of his own thematic assertions. Yet he does so in ways harmonious with his time, sex, and class (and therefore largely invisible to his contemporary readers) through conceptual languages he could not escape any more than we can escape our own linguistic and interpretive limitations. As much as any other Dickens novel, *Hard Times* reveals the kinds of cover-ups empowered mid-Victorians needed to hide essential contradictions inherent in pat answers to "the woman question."

JEAN FERGUSON CARR

Writing as a Woman: Dickens, *Hard Times* and
Feminine Discourses†

* * *

I would like to focus on what has usually been cited as a negative portrait of women, the failure to create a strong, likable heroine or a credible mother figure in *Hard Times* (1854). The novel itself is an instance of the conditions of feminine discourse, written not in any expansive artistic mode, but under the urgency of periodical publishing, as a project his printers hoped would attract readers to *Household Words*. Dickens disliked the conditions of weekly publication and deplored as 'CRUSHING' the consequent lack of 'elbow-room' and 'open places in perspective'.¹ But the process must have underscored the constraints embedded in the social and material production of discourse. Indeed much of the novel explores what cannot be said or explained, what cannot be portrayed. The women of this fictional world in particular are restricted by and to their social positions, defined within narrow ideological bounds that afford little relief. The characters do not operate primarily in personal relationships to each other, nor do they 'forget' their social positioning, or the polarities that operate in Coketown. They are constructed in oppositions, as women and men, mothers and daughters, middle-class thinkers and lower-class workers. The usual cultural positions for women remain curiously unpopulated, incomplete, present but not functioning as they ought. This schematic underdevelopment need not be explained away as a technological effect of the novel's weekly form, or as a style of abstraction.² The ideological and technical constraints also create the possibility for Dickens to write as if from within the realm that Lewes marks off for women writers—a realm of fancy, romance, ordinary events, and mass production; a realm that remains apart from what fastidious or learned readers will value.

The novel is constrained from the beginning by the powerful social

† *Dickens Studies Annual* 18 (1989): 161–78.

1. Letter to John Forster, [February 1854], *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Walter Dexter, vol. 2 (London: Nonesuch Press, 1937–38): 543. To Mrs Richard Watson, Nov. 1, 1854, he wrote that he felt "used up" after *Hard Times* and that 'the compression and close condensation necessary for that disjointed form of publication gave me perpetual trouble' (2. 602). See his letter to Miss Coutts, Jan. 23, 1854 (2. 537) for a description of his printers' urging to write the novel. In *Dickens' Working Notes for his Novels* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1987), Harry Stone discusses Dickens' efforts to accommodate his working procedures to the constraints of weekly serialization (p. 249), and the plans show his calculations for the unfamiliar size of a weekly part (pp. 251–53).
2. See, for example, David Craig's discussion of the novel's 'simplifying mode,' in his introduction to *Hard Times: For These Times* (New York: Penguin, 1969), p. 28. All following page references are to the Penguin edition.

discourse of the Gradgrind system, which exists in the novel as what Bakhtin called 'the word of the fathers'. Bakhtin argues that such a word need not be repeated or reinforced or even made persuasive, but has 'its authority already fused to it':

The authoritative word demands that we acknowledge it, that we make it our own; it binds us, quite independent of any power it might have to persuade us internally; we encounter it with its authority already fused to it . . . It is, so to speak, the word of the fathers. Its authority was already *acknowledged* in the past. It is a *prior* discourse. It is therefore not a question of choosing it from among other possible discourses that are its equal.³

Against such a word, opposition or argument is already preempted, made secondary or unhearable. Unlike the opposing terms of 'wonder' and 'fancy,' which require constant justification in the novel, the simplest reference to 'fact' evokes the authority of learning and scientific knowledge. The effect of such an authority is to make all private exchanges in the book dependent on arguments that cannot be imagined within the novel's authorized categories, so that the characters speak a kind of shadow dialogue.

The effect of this social construction is especially destructive to the transparent figure who serves as the heroine's mother. In a more self-consciously 'feminist' novel, Mrs Gradgrind might be expected to suggest the alternative to patriarchal discourses. In *Hard Times*, the mother is comically ineffectual and trivial, represented not as a person but as an object, as a 'feminine dormouse' (102) and a 'bundle of shawls' (59). Yet she is not even a particularly satisfactory object. Her central representation, repeated three times, is as a 'faint transparency' that is 'presented' to its audience in various unimpressive attitudes.⁴

Mrs Gradgrind, weakly smiling and giving no other sign of vitality, looked (as she always did) like an indifferently executed transparency of a small female figure, without enough light behind it. (60)

A transparency is an art form popularized by the dioramas in which a translucent image painted on cloth is made visible by backlighting.⁵ Its fragility and potential for varying production make the transparency a

3. M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin and London: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 342.

4. See also 137, 224. This passage is one of the few references to Mrs Gradgrind in Dickens's working plans for the novel (Stone, 253): 'Mrs Gradgrind—badly done transparency, without enough light behind.'

5. In *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978). Richard D. Altick defines transparencies as 'pictures made with translucent paints on materials like calico, linen, or oiled paper and lighted from behind in the manner of stained glass' (p. 95) and discusses their popularity in the Chinese shadow and magic-lantern shows of the 1770s (p. 119) and in the dioramas of the 1820s on (pp. 169–70). In Daguerre's 'double-effect' technique, transparencies were painted on both sides, their appearance transformed by the amount and angle of light shown through the image (pp. 169–70). Transparencies, or lithophanes as they were sometimes called, could also be small porcelain figures held against a light.

felicitous medium to suggest Mrs Gradgrind's ambivalent positioning. The failure of the transparency renders her almost invisible in the novel, making her neither a pleasing image nor one that is easily readable. But the particularity of the image insists on a producer as well as a product, raising the issue of what painter 'executes' her so indifferently, what producer withholds the light that might have made her more substantial, in other words, why she has been neglected as a cultural formation. Vaguely discernible through the translucent object, the producer remains a shadowy, unnamed, prior force, whom we know by traces and effects. At Mrs Gradgrind's death, for example, we are told of an effect, but not of a cause—'the light that had always been feeble and dim behind the weak transparency, went out' (226). And the physical depiction of her as recumbent, 'stunned by some weighty piece of fact tumbling on her' (59; see also 60, 62, 137) leaves unnamed the force that stuns her with its weight and carelessness. We are left with an authorless piece of evidence, a 'piece of fact'; but in *Hard Times* 'fact' is easily traced back to the Gradgrind system. When we are told that finding herself alone with Gradgrind and Mr Bounderby is 'sufficient to stun this admirable lady again, without collision between herself and any other fact' (62), we know what constitutes her as an object of its gaze. It is under her husband's 'wintry' eye that Mrs Gradgrind becomes 'torpid again' (102); under Sissy Jupe's care or even in Louisa's presence, she can be rendered almost energetic' (94). Both fact and its proponents are equally capable of rendering Mrs Gradgrind nonexistent, a product of a careless fancy: 'So, she once more died away, and nobody minded her' (62).

Mrs Gradgrind has been so slighted as a 'subject' that she is surprised when Louisa asks about her: 'You want to hear of me, my dear? That's something new, I am sure, when anybody wants to hear of me' (224). And the outcome of such a lifetime of being constituted by others is that she cannot even claim to feel her own pain; when Louisa asks after her health, she answers with what the narrator calls 'this strange speech': 'I think there's a pain somewhere in the room but I couldn't positively say that I have got it' (224). She is certainly slighted by Dickens, appearing in only five of the novel's thirty-seven chapters, and then usually in the final pages or paragraphs. Even her introduction seems almost an afterthought, located not in the chapter with Mr Gradgrind, the children, or even the house (ch. 3), but in parenthetical position as audience for Mr Bounderby (ch. 4).⁶ But if Dickens is cavalier about her presence, he strongly marks her absence from that nineteenth-century site for Mother, as idealized figure in her children's memories or in their imaginative dreams of virtue.⁷ Mrs Gradgrind's expected place as her chil-

6. Dickens changed his mind about its positioning, marking in his working plans its postponement from ch. 3 ('No not yet') to ch. 4 ('Now, Mrs Gradgrind') (Stone, p. 253)

7. His working plans indicate an early decision about whether to make it 'Mrs Gradgrind or Miss? Wife or sister? Wife' (Stone, p. 253). In *Dickens at Work* (London: Methuen, 1957), John Butt

dren's earliest memory has been usurped by the father who appears as a 'dry Ogre chalking ghastly white figures' on a 'large black board' (54). Louisa's return 'home' for her mother's death evokes none of the 'dreams of childhood—its airy fables' and 'impossible adornments' that Dickens describes as 'the best influences of old home'; such dreams are only evoked as a lengthy litany of what her mother has *not* provided for her child (223).

Mrs Gradgrind does not offer a counter position—covert or otherwise—to the world of fact and ashes. She cannot overtly defy her husband, nor can she save herself from her daughter's scorn. Her advice to Louisa reflects this helplessness, and its incomprehension of the accepted referents makes her ridiculous in her child's eyes: 'Go and be somethingological directly,' she says (61), and 'turn all your ological studies to good account' (137). When she is dying, Mrs Gradgrind tries to express her loss—of something and of words with which to articulate it—to her daughter:

But there is something—not an Ology at all—that your father has missed, or forgotten, Louisa. I don't know what it is . . . I shall never get its name now. But your father may. It makes me restless. I want to write to him, to find out for God's sake, what it is. Give me a pen, give me a pen. (225)

To the transparent Mrs Gradgrind, all authoritative knowledge must come from the father, yet she worries that he has missed or forgotten something. She does not imagine herself finding or naming it, but remembers it as unsaid. The outcome of this 'insight' is invisible to the patriarchal eye; it disappears as 'figures of wonderful no-meaning she began to trace upon her wrappers' (225–26). When Louisa tries to fashion a meaning of her mother's words, her aim is to 'link such faint and broken sounds into any chain of connexion' (225), in other words, to translate her mother into the Gradgrind discourse. Mrs Gradgrind emerges 'from the shadow' and takes 'upon her the dead solemnity of the sages and patriarchs' (226)—she 'hears the last of it'—only by dying, not as a living speaker addressing her daughter knowingly and directly. She remains stubbornly unincorporated by the novel's powerful discourses, a no-meaning that can be neither heard nor reformed.

But the mother is ridiculous, rather than tragic, only within the father's terms of judgment—terms which a society divided into opposites cannot unimagine or unspeak, and against which the lower-class opposition of fancy and heart will have little impact. The mother's very imprecision undercuts the authority of the father's discourses, making them a lesson

and Kathleen Tillotson argue that the choice of wife over 'sister' emphasizes 'more powerfully' the absolute influence of Gradgrind over his children (p. 206).

imperfectly learned and badly recited. The novel cannot construct an imagined alternate culture, in which Mrs Gradgrind would 'discover' the language to define the '*something missing*,' in which 'ological' would not be required as an ending that validates an object's existence. Instead it unfolds the boundaries and effects of such a system. Louisa learns painfully that Mrs Gradgrind's point-of-view has been confined to its position of 'no-meaning' (225) by concerted efforts by her father and his system of definition. Towards the end of the novel, Louisa reverses the charge of 'no-meaning' and demands that her father justify instead what his 'meaning' has produced: 'Where are the graces of my soul? Where are the sentiments of my heart? What have you done. O father, what have you, with the garden that should have bloomed once, in this great wilderness here!' (239). In this confrontation, Louisa recognizes the contest her father has suppressed and her mother has barely suggested, a contest for how to determine the shape and value of the social realms:

I have grown up, battling every inch of my way . . . What I have learned has left me doubting, misbelieving, despising, regretting, what I have not learned; and my dismal resource has been to think that life would soon go by, and that nothing in it could be worth the pain and trouble of a contest.

(240-41)

The novel presents several scenes between Louisa and her father in which this authority is examined and questioned, scenes which pointedly exclude Mrs Gradgrind, as someone whose objections or interests are irrelevant. The chapter 'Father and Daughter' opens with an oblique questioning of the absolute value of such authority (131-32), but only once the 'business' is resolved does Gradgrind suggest, 'now let us go and find your mother' (137). Yet the exploration of Gradgrind's power makes an obscure and unacknowledged connection between his power and her mother's 'death' from the novel. By what seems a frivolous word-game on the part of the narrator, Gradgrind's governmental blue books (the emblem of his power) are associated with an infamous wife-killer: 'Although Mr Gradgrind did not take after Blue Beard, his room was quite a blue chamber in its abundance of blue books' (131). The narrator denies that this 'error' has any meaning, thus resisting the implication that Gradgrind's intellectual system of power has something to do with the oppressed status of his wife. The blue books are accorded the power of fact, which is to prove 'usually anything you like,' but the narrator's flight of fancy is not to prove anything. It refers, not to the authoritative realms of statistics and science, but to fairy-tales. It is not a 'fact' derived from texts, but is '*something missing*,' an association produced by the unconscious. It remains, at best, as a kind of insider's joke, in which readers can remember that its 'power' derives from texts with which

Dickens was aligned, both in general (fiction and fairy tale), and explicitly (Blue Beard is the basis for Dickens' Captain Murderer, whose tale he published in 1860 as one of his 'Nurse's Stories').⁸

The reference to the wife-killer, Blue Beard, who charms all with his show of courtesy and devotion before devouring his wives in the privacy of their home, is an 'error' that suggests the gap between public and private, between acknowledged power and covert violence. Like the marginalized tensions created by Mrs Gradgrind throughout the novel, this slip of the pen provokes despite its claim to marginality. The error is allowed to stand, thereby suggesting what would otherwise be too bizarre to consider. It reminds us that Gradgrind has been a social 'wife-killer,' obliterating his wife's role as mother to her daughter and keeping her from fuller participation in the daughter's narrative. He has 'formed his daughter on his own model' (168), and she is known to all as "Tom Gradgrind's daughter" (143). He has isolated Louisa in his masculine realm, depriving her of any of the usual female resources with which to oppose his power; as Tom mentions with devastating casualness, Louisa 'used to complain to me that she had nothing to fall back upon, that girls usually fall back upon' (168). The reference to Blue Beard reminds us that Gradgrind's realm is *not* absolute except by force and mystification, that his 'charmed apartment' depends on the exclusion of a more powerful, more resistant 'other'. The rest of the chapter teases out the possibilities that his power can be questioned. Through a series of fanciful images—that make the narrator not an unworthy companion of Mrs Gradgrind—the absolute value of his authority is obliquely undermined. Gradgrind is presented as needing to enforce his positions with military might, relying on his books as an 'army constantly strengthening by the arrival of new recruits'. His solutions persist because they are isolated within a necromancer's circle, protected from critique or even outside knowledge. From his enclosed, abstracted fortress, he orders the world as if 'the astronomer within should arrange the starry universe solely by pen, ink and paper, . . . could settle all their destinies on a slate, and wipe out all their tears with one dirty little bit of sponge' (131–32). All these questions about Gradgrind's power are delivered as amusing details, as arguments the novelist is not able to give serious articulation. Yet the details attack not the effect of Gradgrind's power, as Louisa does with hopeless inertia, but the claim to power, its genealogy and maintenance.

It is not surprising that Louisa and her mother, and even Dickens, cannot find words for what is missing from their lives, words having been

8. Reprinted in *Charles Dickens: Selected Short Fiction*, ed. Deborah A. Thomas (New York: Penguin, 1976), pp. 218–29. The naive narrator of the tale assumes Captain Murderer 'must have been an offshoot of the Blue Beard family, but I had no suspicion of the consanguinity in those times.' Like Gradgrind, Captain Murderer's 'warning name would seem to have awakened no general prejudice against him, for he was admitted into the best society and possessed immense wealth' (p. 221). And, like Gradgrind, much of his power comes from being the determiner of meanings and names.

usurped as the tools of the Gradgrind system, defined and delimited by male authority. Mrs Gradgrind does not articulate an opposition, nor does the novel openly pursue the traces of her petulant complaints. *She* remains unaware that her headaches and worries are symptoms of a cultural dissatisfaction, although she knows that her head began 'to split' as soon as she was married (137). She complains to Louisa about the trouble that comes from speaking—'You must remember, my dear, that whenever I have said anything, on any subject, I have never heard the last of it; and consequently, that I have long left off saying anything' (225), but the ideological implications of these remarks are short-circuited by the personal contexts in which she declines to speak. These scenes do not transform Mrs Gradgrind into a covert rebel, but represent her as willful and self-absorbed, betraying Sissy and Louisa by her silence and diverting attention from their more pressing needs.

In fact, Mrs Gradgrind seems to exist primarily as the cautionary exemplum of the Gradgrind system, having been married for the 'purity' of being as free from nonsense 'as any human being not arrived at the perfection of an absolute idiot, ever was' (62). She proves her usefulness to the system, admirably serving as the negative against which the father seems more caring, more responsive than he seems in isolation. Her mother seems unsympathetic to Louisa's discontent, worrying over it as 'one of those subjects I shall never hear the last of' (138). And she serves as the agent who reinscribes the ideological positions of the Gradgrind system, who insists on reality being defined as what is kept 'in cabinets' or about which one can 'attend lectures' (61). Louisa is scolded for running off to look at the forbidden circus by her mother, not by the father whose prohibition it is and who has caught her in the crime. The hapless Mrs Gradgrind 'whimpers' to her daughter; 'I wonder at you. I declare you're enough to make one regret ever having had a family at all. I have a great mind to say I wish I hadn't. *Then* what would you have done, I should like to know' (61). Yet in this pathetic effort to enforce her husband's laws, Mrs Gradgrind has unknowingly allied herself with her child's rebellion. Her words give her away: she has 'wondered' (a crime against reason), she has 'regretted' (a crime against fact), and she has 'wished' (a crime against her husband). Dickens notes that 'Mr Gradgrind did not seem favourably impressed by these cogent remarks'. Yet what seems initially a silly, self-indulgent speech has deflected the father's wrath from his daughter and has suggested the terms for opposition—wonder, regret, desire.

Hard Times appears to authorize an oppositional discourse of fancy, which is lisped by the circus-master Sleary and represented in Sissy Jupe, the substitute mother whom Gradgrind praises as the 'good fairy in his house' who can 'effect' what 10,000 pounds cannot (294). Gradgrind's approval, and the conventionality of Sissy's depiction as a house fairy, devalues her status as an opposition figure. Indeed Sissy rarely speaks in

opposition, or at all. Her power is cited by men like Harthouse and Gradgrind, and by the narrator. Unlike Mrs Gradgrind, Sissy cannot be mocked for 'cogent remarks,' but simply *looks* at Louisa 'in wonder, in pity, in sorrow, in doubt, in a multitude of emotions' (138). Her effect is largely due to the novelty of her discourse, a novelty produced by her status as an outsider who does not understand the conventions of the system. 'Possessed of no facts' (49), girl number twenty does not recognize that 'fancy' is a significant term, but uses it unthinkingly. She silences the cynical Harthouse by presenting 'something in which he was so inexperienced, and against which he knew any of his usual weapons would fall so powerless; that not a word could he rally to his relief'. Sissy insists on her words to Harthouse remaining a 'secret' and relies on a 'child-like ingenuousness' to sway her listener. And what Harthouse notices is her 'most confiding eyes' and her 'most earnest (though so quiet)' voice (252-57). Sissy's 'wonder' is powerful only as long as she does not 'speak' it in her own right, but presents it in her disengaged role as go-between. Her 'power' depends on 'her entire forgetfulness of herself in her earnest quiet holding to the object' (253)—depends, in other words, on a strenuous denial of herself as a contestant for power. The narrator comments that 'if she had shown, or felt the slightest trace of any sensitiveness to his ridicule or astonishment, or any remonstrance he might offer; he would have carried it against her at this point' (255).

Sissy's discourse derives its power, not from any essential woman's knowledge that Louisa and her mother could share, but from her experience as a working-class child who knows counter examples and a different word than 'fact'. Louisa acquires from Sissy not the power to be 'a mother—lovingly watchful of her children' but to be 'learned in childish lore; thinking no innocent and pretty fancy ever to be despised' (313). The opposition Sissy seems to represent—of imagination, emotion, questioning of patriarchal discourses—stands like the circus-master's fancy, a fantastic dream that amuses children but does not displace Gradgrindian fact. It has no ability to construct a shared feminine discourse that can alter the rigid polarities of fact and fancy, meaning and no-meaning. When Louisa tries to inquire about such forbidden topics as love, she is on her own, pursuing a 'strong, wild, wandering interest peculiar to her, an interest gone astray like a banished creature, and hiding in solitary places' (98).

In her dramatic confrontation with her father (238-42), Louisa tries to construct a realm outside the powerful sway of reason and logic. Yet she can imagine this realm only as the 'immaterial part of my life,' marking it as that which has no material existence or is irrelevant. She thereby perpetuates the construction of her world as absolute in its polarities—as a world that is either material or immaterial, fact or fancy, reason or

nonsense.⁹ To use Bakhtin's terms, she remains 'bound' to 'the authoritative word' in its totality; she cannot 'divide it up,' or 'play with the context framing it' or 'play with its borders' (Bakhtin, 343). She suggests she might have come closer to a desired end 'if I had been stone blind; if I had groped my way by my sense of touch, and had been free, while I knew the shapes and surfaces of things, to exercise my fancy somewhat, in regard to them' (240). Passionate as this scene is, Louisa's specific argument shows the difficulty of evading the power of patriarchal discourse; she can only 'prove' the worth of an oppositional realm by the tools she has learned from her father. Her vision remains defined as 'no-meaning,' as existing only in opposition to what persists as 'meaning,' Louisa tries to imagine a realm 'defying all the calculations ever made by man, and no more known to his arithmetic than his Creator is,' but ends up describing herself as 'a million times wiser, happier'. Like her mother, her power lies in speaking the father's word imperfectly, making her father's statistical practices meaningless by her exaggerated application. Like her mother, Louisa's complaints refer only to 'something' missing; there are no words for what might be gained. The Gradgrind system is too powerful to allow Louisa or her mother to break away or to communicate very well with each other. All they can do, in their separate ways and unbeknownst to each other, is to disrupt the functioning of the father's word, and to indicate a lack, an incompleteness.

The schematic quality of *Hard Times* indicates a broader lack or incompleteness in the authoritative discourses of Dickens' social and literary world. Like Louisa and Mrs Gradgrind, Dickens must articulate his valuing of 'fancy' and his concern about crossing proscribed boundaries in language devalued by the patriarchal discourses of reason and fact. That Lewes sees him as hallucinating a world no wise man would recognize indicates the disturbing effect of this crossing of boundaries. Both Lewes and Dickens identify the disturbance as somehow connected with women, seeing women as touched by issues that more successfully acculturated males do not notice. Lewes saw much of Dickens' power—and what made him a disturbing novelist—as the ability to represent something that could not otherwise be acknowledged. 'What seems preposterous, impossible to us,' he wrote in 1872, 'seemed to him simple fact of observation' (Lewes, 145). Writing as a woman places Dickens in a position to observe what seems 'preposterous, impossible'.

At the same time, of course, for a powerful male novelist like Dickens, the position of outsider is exaggerated. Dickens can be seen as exploiting the exclusion and material oppression of women and the poor when they serve as analogies for his own more temperate marginality as a lower-middle class writer of fiction in a literary culture that preferred educated

9. Several of Dickens' initial titles in his working plans for the novel reflect this insistence on polarity: 'Hard heads and soft hearts,' 'Heads and Tales,' and 'Black and White' (Stone, p. 251).

reason over experienced fancy. For male writers like Dickens and Trollope, writing 'as a woman' brought literary respect and considerable financial return, whereas a writer like Charlotte Brontë was censured for her unwomanly productions and underpaid by her publisher.¹ Unlike women who transgress the boundaries of the literary establishment, Dickens could signal his difference as significant rather than ridiculous. Unlike the poor with whom he was so closely identified, Dickens had access to the means of publication; he had the influence and position to pressure contemporary methods of production and dissemination of literary and social discourse. Such was his influence as spokesman of social discontent, that women writers of the nineteenth century, in both England and America, had to come to terms with his boundaries and codes, with his literary conventions for observing the social world and its institutions. Writers like Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Elizabeth Gaskell, Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, and Rebecca Harding Davis both quote and revise his portrayal of women's writing and social position. Their attempts to write as women are circumscribed within Dickens' example and within the audience that he so powerfully swayed.

This assessment of Dickens' sympathetic identification with feminine discourses in the 1850s returns to the intertwined, ideological interests involved in any attempt to write 'as a woman,' in any project that *assumes* the position of an outsider, of an other. Dickens' experimentation with excluded positions of women and the poor provided him with a way of disrupting the status quo of the literary establishment. But, ironically, his experimentation also helped him capitalize on his status as an outsider in that literary realm. The inarticulate masses became, in effect, his constituency and his subject matter, supporting his powerful position within the literary and social establishment as arbiter of how to write about cultural exclusion. Dickens' growing influence as an editor and public spokesman for the literary world makes his representations of women's writing dominate the literary scene. His example carves out a possible space for women writers in his culture, but it also takes over that space as its own. His assumed position as outsider complicates assumptions about gender difference in writing and problematizes what Lewes so confidently called 'genuine female experience'. It disrupts and forces out into the open the lit-

1. See Margot Peters's discussion of the inequity of publishers' payments, in *Unquiet Soul: A Biography of Charlotte Brontë* (1975; reprinted New York: Atheneum, 1986), pp. 355-56. Brontë received the same unsatisfying sum of £500 for her third novel *Villette* as she had for the first two, as compared to Thackeray's £4200 for *The Virginians* or the £1000 Dickens could command for a short story. Peters quotes George Gissing's telling comment about author-publisher relations:

A big, blustering, genial brute of a Trollope could very fairly hold his own, and exact at all events an acceptable share in the profits of his work. A shrewd and vigorous man of business such as Dickens . . . could do even better. But pray, what of Charlotte Brontë? Think of that grey, pinched life, . . . which would have been so brightened had [she] received but . . . one-third of what in the same space of time, the publisher gained by her books. (355-56)

erary establishment's defensive cultural narratives, and, in the process, constructs its own protective practices and standards. In writing as a woman, in speaking for a silenced group, Dickens both makes possible and makes complicated a challenge to 'the father's word' by those who use 'the mother-tongue'.

ERIC P. LEVY

Dickens' Pathology of Time in *Hard Times*†

While depicting the wretched environment of Coketown and elaborating the doctrine of self-interest on which it depends, *Times* provides a profound analysis of the unconscious motive for sustaining such a society. As we shall find, the formative principle of Coketown is the need to create an artificial time that repudiates the natural temporal tendency toward change and decay.

* * *

At the most profound level, time has value in Coketown only through its monotony. For during the unvarying succession of its units, one after another, the illusion is created that nothing can happen but more of the same. This is the time monitored in Mr. Gradgrind's Observatory: "a stern room, with a deadly statistical clock in it, which measured every second and with a beat like a rap upon a coffin-lid" (132). As the quotation suggests, time has one purpose in Coketown: to negate its own movement. Though time itself cannot be stopped, its very passage can be made to signify stasis; for here time is merely the measure of mechanical repetition involving addition and subtraction which cancel each other out: "Time went on in Coketown like its own machinery: so much material wrought up, so much fuel consumed" (126). There is no possibility of change—genuinely organic change, the very process from which Mr. Jupe suffers. Hence, monotony is not merely the obvious condition, but also the hidden *telos* or goal of Coketown, where "the piston of the steam-engine [works] monotonously up and down" (65) and "monotonous smoke" (135) lingers in the air. For the ultimate purpose of this monotony is to perpetuate the need to "kill time" (155). Only through the tedium of such innumerable renewed redundancy can time itself or, more precisely, the cumulative changes it entails, be provisionally overcome.

* * *

† *Philological Quarterly* 74.2 (1995): 189–207.

But ideal monotony requires sameness in both time *and* space. Hence Coketown is described as an assemblage of homologous parts such that sameness in space assures sameness of time: "It contained several large streets all very like one another, and many small streets still more like one another, inhabited by people equally like one another, who all went in and out at the same hours, with the same sound upon the same pavements, to do the same work, and to whom every day was the same as yesterday and tomorrow, and every year the counterpart of the last and the next" (65). Yet the monotony of Coketown is itself founded on impatience; for the ubiquitous sameness defining the city derives, not from conscious planning, but importunate impulse: "the labyrinth of narrow courts upon courts, and close streets upon streets, which had come into existence piecemeal, *every piece in a violent hurry for some man's purpose*, and the whole an unnatural family, shouldering, and trampling, and pressing one another to death" ([102] my emphasis).

Understanding how, in Coketown, impatience is the *cause* of monotony and not merely its effect will tighten our grasp of *Hard Times*. Considered in the most general terms, impatience is the refusal to wait for satisfaction (in the case of desire) or relief (in the case of suffering). It is the need to nullify or at least contract the time intervening between project and fulfillment. But more fundamental than the impatience which concerns particular satisfactions or reliefs is the impatience with time itself. This metaphysical impatience demands the eradication of all waiting—but not through the fantasy of instant gratification. Instead, it seeks the eradication of time itself. Louisa's despair provides an excellent example; for here she views her life in terms of its imminent mortality: "looking at the red sparks dropping out of the fire, and whitening and dying. It made me think, after all, how short my life would be, and how little I could hope to do in it" (94). But as she herself later reveals, the deepest motive of this despair is an impatience for her life to be over, so that she will be excused from struggle during it: "my dismal resource has been to think that life would soon go by, and that nothing in it could be worth the pain and trouble of a contest" (241).

Her strategy deepens the significance of an object already noted: the "statistical clock" that "measured every second with a beat like a rap upon a coffin-lid" (132). As we have seen, the reflex to dispose of the present, moment after moment, is the essence of the monotony whose aim is to forestall change by turning time into mere repetition compulsion. But this very repetitiveness is driven by an impatience with time as acute as that inside Louisa's despair. The only difference is the time frame concerned. Whereas the impatience sustaining Louisa's despair seeks to accelerate the elapsing of her entire lifetime, the impatience expressed through the monotonous clock is confined to each new moment which is "measured" by "a rap upon a coffin-lid," as if the only purpose of time were to be over and done with. Since the impatient wish

to be done with time, to be past or beyond the struggles which time entails, cannot be fulfilled all at once as in Louisa's fantasy, it must be accomplished moment by moment. If time has no end, its very endlessness can be made to signify termination; for time now goes no further than an ever repeating present.

The pathology of this project to abbreviate time can be highlighted through reference to its philosophical contrary: Bergson's notion of duration through which, as explicated by Jacques Maritain, "we are aware of advancing through time and enduring through change indivisibly, yet that we are growing richer in quality and triumphing over the inertia of matter."¹ Bergson himself defines duration as "the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances."² In place of this *cumulative* time, Coketown establishes a *momentaneous* time that resumes with each successive instant.

In this context, the primacy of Mr. Bounderby becomes more significant. On the literal level, his dominance in Coketown derives from his position as factory owner. But the more profound meaning of his authority emerges through his description as an incarnation of *impatience*: the very principle which, as we have just seen, is the prime mover of Coketown. Mr. Bounderby seems always at the point of "bursting" (211), as if the emotion in question, vanity or "indignation" (262), were too important to control. Two examples will vividly illustrate: "So he left Mr. Bounderby swelling at his own portrait on the wall as if he were going to explode himself into it" (114); "The blustrous Bounderby crimsoned and swelled to such an extent on hearing these words, that he seemed to be, and probably was, on the brink of a fit" (262). As some critics have noted, this swelling tendency has unavoidably phallic implications, especially in the following passage where Mr. Bounderby resembles a giant erection: "A man with a great puffed head and forehead, swelled veins in his temples, and such a strained skin to his face. . . . A man with a pervading appearance on him of being inflated like a balloon, and ready to start" (58).³ Yet, though Mr. Bounderby can be interpreted in Freudian terms, the phallic lust which he seems to embody is more important as an index of impatience than as a symbol of repressed sexuality. Indeed, in his own account of it, Mr. Bounderby's willful impatience assumes a quasi-orgasmic urgency: "I always come to a decision . . . and whatever I do, I do at once" (265).

His haste corresponds exactly to the impetuous purposiveness, noted earlier, responsible for the "piecemeal" construction of Coketown: "every piece in a violent hurry for some man's purpose" (102). But the

1. Jacques Maritain, *A Preface to Metaphysics: Seven Lectures on Being* (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1939), 47.
2. Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, tr. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Modern Library, 1944), 7.
3. For an excellent study of Dickens' use of the erection motif, see Robert E. Lougy, "Repressive and Expressive Forms: The Bodies of Comedy and Desire in *Martin Chuzzlewit*," *Dickens Studies Annual* 21 (1992): 44-48, 53-55.

full meaning of Mr. Bounderby's impatient tumescence emerges through the weightless floating associated with it, as when he is compared to a "soap-bubble" (292) or "balloon" (58). By this self-inflation, he counters a pernicious gravity in the novel—an irresistible force which drags its victims down toward an utterly isolated helplessness.

Chief victims of this gravity are (a) Louisa descending Mrs. Sparsit's imaginary staircase, "like a weight in deep water," toward the shame of adultery "at the bottom" (230); (b) Louisa falling helplessly at her father's feet after fleeing from this temptation at the last moment (242); (c) Stephen plummeting down the Old Hell Shaft; (d) Mrs. Gradgrind near death when "the sound of another voice addressing her seemed to take such a long time in getting down to her ears, that she might have been lying at the bottom of a well" (224); (e) Mrs. Sparsit falling at Bounderby's feet after telling him of Louisa's disappearance (258). Against this background of sinking or falling figures, Mr. Bounderby's extraordinary levity (to use the word in its original sense of lightness or buoyancy) can be more profoundly understood.

To begin with, there is an obvious opposition between the *impatience* connected with Mr. Bounderby's levity ("like a balloon, and ready to start" [58]) and the apparent *slowing* of time which is always associated with the contrasting experience of reaching the bottom. A brief review of the evidence will illustrate. As noted, when Mrs. Gradgrind lies dying, as if "at the bottom of a well," sounds seem "to take such a *long time*" to reach her ([224] my emphasis). Similarly, after falling in despair at her father's feet, Louisa goes through a period of delayed response: "A curious passive inattention had such possession of her, that the presence of her little sister in the room did not attract her notice *for some time*" ([243] my emphasis). But as the case of Mrs. Gradgrind shows, this languor is the last bastion of self-interest; for it defends against exposure to *other* people's needs: "Upon my word and honour I seem to be fated, and destined, and ordained, to live in the midst of things that I am never to hear the last of" (102). After saying this, Mrs. Gradgrind becomes "torpid again" (102).

The levity of Mr. Bounderby and the languor of Louisa and Mrs. Gradgrind have further implications. In one case, self-interest is expressed through impulsive attention to one's own needs; in the other, through "passive *inattention*" ([243] my emphasis) to the needs—and even the presence—of others. Hence in the first, time seems rapid; for the governing principle is impatience for one's own satisfaction. In the second, time seems stagnant, for the dominant principle is obliviousness to what happens to others. Though these responses appear as opposites, they are in fact reciprocal expressions of the same mentality of self-interest. The obverse of importunate selfishness is unconcern for others, as demonstrated by the example of Mr. Bounderby whose impatient preoccupation with his own needs leads him to ignore or misconstrue

the needs of others, with the result that any Hand "not entirely satisfied" with his situation is accused of expecting "to be set up in a coach and six, and to be fed on turtle soup and venison, with a gold spoon" (109).

The opposition between fast and slow time is even more obvious in Stephen's case. Just before tumbling into the Old Hell Shaft, he is consumed with impatience: "When I fell, I were in anger wi' her [Louisa], and hurryin on t' be as onjust t' her as oothers was t' me" (290). But at the bottom of the pit, time seems hardly to move at all; for there Stephen suffers "dreadful, dree, and long" (289). In fact, at the deepest level, he is suffering from time or, more precisely, from the moral insularity which slow time in the novel symbolizes. Indeed, his pain disappears ("tis ower now") once he learns compassionate patience: "But in our judgments, like as in our doins, we mun bear and forbear" (290-91). Thus, after recognizing how impatient and self-preoccupied anger plunged him into disastrous isolation, Stephen acknowledges sympathetic understanding as the higher principle by which human life can be guided: "my dyin prayer that aw th' world may on'y coom together more, and get a better unnerstan'in o' one another" (291). Significantly, when he is raised from the pit by collective effort, those witnessing the rescue are united in "a low murmur of pity" (289). Hence, just as the gravity which pulled Stephen down is associated in the novel with the tendency of self-interest to deepen isolation, so rescue from this gravity is enabled by compassionate community.

Moreover, the overcoming in this scene of the isolating mentality of self-interest is foreshadowed by the circumstances immediately preceding the discovery of Stephen at the bottom of the shaft. While walking with Louisa in the countryside outside Coketown, Sissy suddenly notices "rotten fragments of fence upon the ground" and realizes that the barrier "has not been broken very long" (284). This detail gains its full force when we remember that the self-interest mentality has earlier been associated with the imagery of barriers, suggesting the need to exclude everything not pertinent to self-concern. With Stephen's rescue, this mental barrier is finally broken. Hence the falls in *Hard Times* are not uniformly negative; for, like the *felix culpa* in the Garden of Eden, they have the potential to confer a knowledge of good and evil by revealing both the destructiveness of the self-interest attitude and the need for some alternative to it. We see this clearly in Louisa's fall at her father's feet: "your philosophy and your teaching . . . have brought me to this. Save me by some other means!" (242). In contrast, through his self-inflating egotism, Mr. Bounderby protects himself against the fall, but at the same time remains obstinately enclosed in his own mentality: "'I don't see it at all, sir,' returned the obstinate Bounderby" (261); "'I don't understand you, yet,' said Bounderby, with determined obstinacy" (261).

Further analysis will clarify the opposition between fast and slow time or impatience and languor central to the novel. Impatience results from

the conviction that nothing has importance but immediate satisfaction of one's own needs. But the tyrannical imperative of this impatience reduces everything else to the servile status of mere means by which the end, satisfaction, can be achieved. Self-interest thus involves a paradox. If nothing has importance except as the means for satisfaction, then satisfaction ultimately becomes meaningless; for it can be realized only through that which its own importunity has debased. Hence, impatience and languor tend to reinforce each other. By regarding the world as a collection of means with no intrinsic value, impatience for satisfaction tends inevitably toward the condition of languor where the quest for satisfaction offers no more than a modulation of boredom. But boredom, in turn, tends eventually to increase impatience for satisfaction.

A striking victim of this vicious circle is Mr. James Harthouse, the man with whom Louisa almost commits adultery. He is introduced to the reader as an incarnation of languor whose search for satisfaction has led him to be "bored everywhere" (158). In his initial conversation with Mrs. Sparsit, Mr. Harthouse displays languor with a gesture that subtly suggests his servitude to time: "It seemed scarcely worthwhile to finish the sentence, so he *played with his watch-chain wearily*" ([154] my emphasis). A little later he "*languidly wave[s] his hand*" ([155] my emphasis). Moreover, in his first conversation with Louisa, Mr. Harthouse mentions "the varieties of boredom" which he has "undergone" (162). Yet much later in their relationship, after Louisa fails to show up for their assignation, Mr. Harthouse's relation to time changes. Languor is replaced by frantic impatience as he waits for "a whole night and a day in a state of so much hurry" (249), for some sign from Louisa. No longer encouraging frivolity, boredom becomes intolerable torment: "he was so horribly bored by existing circumstances" (249).

On the surface, his impatience results from the frustrated desire to renew communication with Louisa. But at the deepest his impatience simply abbreviates his habitual languor. For in both impatience and languor, his one goal is to "g[e]t through the *intervening time* as well as he could" ([250] my emphasis). The only difference is the amount of time involved. In the state of impatience, that "*intervening time*" concerns the delay between a specific desire and its anticipated satisfaction. But in the state of languor, the time intervening between desire and ultimate satisfaction expands indefinitely with the result that the passage of time, instead of intensifying expectation of fulfillment, makes expectation seem increasingly pointless. Harthouse languid expects no satisfaction other than "varieties of boredom" (162). Harthouse impatient suffers the boredom of awaiting satisfaction. His love values Louisa, not so much as an end in herself (to borrow for a moment from the Kantian notion of morality), but as a means of accelerating

his own habitual languor by restoring, at least temporarily, the conviction that time can move him closer to genuine fulfillment.⁴

Just as consideration of Mr. Harthouse, Louisa's thwarted seducer, elucidates the two poles of languor and impatience sustained by the self-interest mentality, so the related opposition between "self-suppression" (195) and recklessness can be clarified through an examination of Louisa's brother. Tom, the feckless "whelp" (169) whose gambling compulsion forces him to solicit funds from his sister and eventually to steal from Mr Bounderby's bank, while framing Stephen for the crime. By these actions, Tom is revealed as "incapable of governing himself" (165). At first glance, his immature recklessness in early adulthood appears to be a reaction against the stringent Gradgrind discipline preceding it. For as a child, Tom was "brought up under *one continuous system of unnatural restraint*" which ensured that he "had *never been left to his own guidance for five consecutive minutes*" ([165] my emphasis). But closer inspection reveals that, far from rebelling against his upbringing, Tom is actually fulfilling it.

As the passage just quoted shows, parental discipline in Tom's childhood was virtually as "continuous" as time itself, since he was never without its direction "for five consecutive minutes." In fact, as we shall soon establish, the effect of the self-interest regime is to make time itself a parental principle of regulation—to put time, that is, *in loco parentis* so that the individual can never fully assert his or her own independence. The great paradox of Mr. Gradgrind's pedagogy is that, while seeming through sheer strictness to drive its pupils "clean out of the regions of childhood" (48), what this system actually does is to render them incapable of achieving the mature individuality proper to adulthood. For under its tutelage, pupils are trained to have time for nothing but self-interest, with the result that they are molded into identical and "exactly regulated" (150) mechanisms, performing the "calculation" (150) of self-interest again and again with a methodical regularity analogous to that of Mr. Gradgrind's clock which "measured every second with a beat like a rap upon a coffin-lid" (132). Indeed, when snoring, Bitzer, the prize male product of this system, emits "sounds of a nature similar to what may be sometimes heard in *Dutch clocks*" ([209] my emphasis).

Perfect devotion to self-interest compromises Bitzer's adult independence. For the rigid self-discipline by which he sacrifices all "affections or passions" (150) to considerations of personal gain simply internalizes in adulthood the same regime of control that dominated his childhood. Hence, though Bitzer and Tom appear as contraries, they share the same immaturity, but simply express it in opposite ways. In one case, that immaturity is perpetuated through severe self-restraint; in the other, through irresponsible recklessness.

4. Immanuel Kant, *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. Lewis White Beck (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1959), 56.

The motif of immaturity or, more precisely, refusal of the temporal process of maturation, recurs in the figure of Mr. Bounderby, who is preoccupied with asserting his adult "independence" (160) by repudiating his mother, a woman later identified as Mrs. Pegler. To this end, he retails the myth of her abandonment of him in childhood and his resultant exposure to abuse and homelessness: "I am a bit of dirty riff-raff, and a genuine scrap of tag, rag, and bobtail" (160). But the deeper motive for this unfilial fabrication is suggested by a description of Mrs. Pegler before her identity as Mr. Bounderby's mother is revealed: "It was an old woman, tall and shapely still, though *withered by Time*" ([115] my emphasis). His repudiation of her is fundamentally a repudiation of the process of aging to which she obviously succumbs. The connection between this repudiation and aging is reinforced when we remember the other case of parental desertion in the novel: Mr. Jupe's abandonment of Sissy. There, as discussed earlier, the reason for abandonment was the father's wish both to escape the "shame and disgrace" of his own aging (100) and to protect his daughter against the same vulnerability, by sending her to Coketown—a place whose monotonous repetition simulates the stasis of time.

Ironically, though designed to avoid the shame of aging, the mentality of self-interest increases vulnerability to shame of another kind, but some analysis will be needed to explain it. In a society founded on the principle that "every man is selfish in everything he does" (205), self-interest is not only the sole appropriate motive of action but also the moral standard by which the worth of an individual is judged. For in this context, self-interest signifies much more than preoccupation with personal gain. At the deepest level, it demands from the individual an unflinching "independence" (160) that is "self-reliant" (161), "logical" (303), and impervious to the need for pity, either in him/herself or another: "Nobody was ever on any account to give anybody anything, or render anybody help without purchase" (304). The cash nexus must replace both compassion and the "gratitude" (304) which it usually evokes.

In such a society, the need for pity is a shameful anomaly. Hence Mrs. Sparsit can wreak no more humiliating revenge on Mr. Bounderby for marrying Louisa than to feign "compassion on him, as a Victim" (141) for doing so. Later, after fleeing both her marriage and the adulterously inclined Mr. Harthouse, Louisa resents the exposure of her plight to Sissy, the great purveyor of compassion in the novel: "A dull anger that she should be seen in her distress . . . smouldered within her like an unwholesome fire" (216–47). In fact, the intense need to avoid or at least abbreviate the shame of having weakness exposed deepens the significance of the impatience that we have found central to the novel. For example, after the spuriousness of his story about abandonment in childhood is exposed, Mr. Bounderby paces "up and down" in "*impatient*

mortification" until the "spectators" of his predicament finally disperse ([279] my emphasis).

The shaming gaze which here discomfits Mr. Bounderby is not a local phenomenon. It is ubiquitous in Coketown, and cannot be dismissed as long as self-interest remains the dominant point of view. For vulnerability to shame is simply the reciprocal of self-interest. In a world where personal gain alone matters, and hence where each sees others only as instruments for his or her own advantage, any weakness perceived in another becomes the means of enhancing oneself. But conversely, the mere failure to achieve personal gain, even the need to depend on another's help in order to achieve it (as with Mr. Bounderby and his mother), risk exposure to disgrace, since in this context the very notion of esteem is predicated on the triumph of unassisted selfishness. Moreover, for those unable to satisfy their own self-interest, and who instead are either victims of someone else's selfish exploitation (as are the Hands) or dependent on someone else's patronage (as is Mrs. Sparsit), the best protection against shaming gaze is to focus it on another. Hence, at the instigation of Slackbridge, the blameless Stephen Blackpool quickly becomes "an object for the undying finger of scorn to point at, and for the avenging fire of every free and thinking mind, to scorch and sear" (268). Hence also, Mrs. Sparsit stares fixedly at the approaching shame of her rival, Louisa: "she kept her black eyes wide open, with no touch of pity, with no touch of compunction, all absorbed in interest" (229–30).

Thus, self-interest posits a world without compassion, where all are vulnerable to a collective and condemning gaze—exactly as depicted in Stephen's nightmare: "there was not one pitying or friendly eye among the millions that were fastened on his face" (123). If this gaze cannot be deflected onto another, as in the examples just cited, then the sole remaining recourse is to sink ever lower into ignominy, until the gaze itself is shamed by what it perceives.⁵ This is precisely the tactic adopted by Stephen's dissolute wife: "A creature so foul to look at . . . that it was a shameful thing even to see her" (106). It appears also to be Stephen's own unconscious or unwitting strategy; for by a series of actions, such as seeking Mr. Bounderby's advice concerning divorce, refusing to join the workers' combination, and waiting on successive evenings (at Tom's request) in front of the very bank which Tom later robs, Stephen draws increasing suspicion and obloquy upon himself. Indeed, just as his wife through moral dereliction is a "self-made outcast" (121), so too through his unfortunate decisions is Stephen—until his dramatic rescue from the Old Hell Shaft. Moreover, the wife's role as a vivid correlative of

5. Yet, according to Cynthia Northcutt Malone ("The Fixed Eye and the Rolling Eye: Surveillance and Discipline in *Hard Times*," *Studies in the Novel* 21.1 [1989]), the gaze "induces conformity to bourgeois codes of sexual behaviour" (16).

Stephen's own plight is reinforced by another connection. Rachael refers to her as "wandering and lost. . . . Wounded too, and bruised" (120)—a condition corresponding to Stephen's when he, "the lost man" (288), lies "mangled" (288) at the bottom of the Shaft.

Once he is brought back to the surface through the perseverance of those committed to his rescue, Stephen changes from an object of "scorn" (268) to an object of pity: "A low murmur of pity went round the throng" (289). Weakness and vulnerability are no longer sources of isolating shame, but elicitors of a collective compassion by which all are united through the act of selfless giving—the exact opposite of the "bargain across a counter" (304) mentality fostered by self-interest. This extraordinary shift in attitude toward a fellow "human creature" (289) is enabled by an even more extraordinary shift in the experiencing of time. During the course of the rescue, before Stephen finally emerges, time is accorded tremendous narrative emphasis. The two poles of impatience and languor are replaced by the will to help.

Instead of selfish impatience there is now a sense of compassionate urgency, as Sissy's remark to Rachael shows: "You wouldn't leave him lying maimed at the bottom of this dreadful place, a moment, if you could bring help to him!" (285). The haste then manifested concerns, not the imperious and self-interested demand for satisfaction, but the determination to reduce the duration of another's suffering. Similarly, indifferent languor is transformed into the "wrapt suspense" (288) felt by those waiting for Stephen to be raised to the surface. Accordingly, the time "elapsed" (287) is measured, not by Mr. Gradgrind's "statistical clock" (132) which asserts the futility of time "with a beat like a rap upon a coffin-lid" (132), but by the surgeon's "watch" (287). Moreover, the transition from the isolation caused by self-interest to the community of compassion is reinforced by the synchronization of human efforts with the declension of the sun, the archetypal timepiece which illumines all equally: "The sun was four hours lower than when Sissy and Rachael had first sat down upon the grass" (287); "The sun was setting now; and the red, light in the evening sky *touched every face there*" (288—my emphasis). Thus, through acceptance of the natural movement of time, the isolating gravity associated with the shaming gaze is finally overcome.

In the context of this opposition between two types of time, the natural and the "statistical," the closing of the novel can be better understood. There the narrator suddenly projects his story "into futurity" (311), and considers the respective fates of the major characters. All except Mr. Bounderby are depicted as having undergone psychological development or change to the limits of their capacity for it. Mr. Gradgrind, for example, is described as "making his facts and figures subservient to Faith, Hope, and Charity" (312), while Sissy blossoms into a wife and mother. But Mr. Bounderby, who dies of a "fit" (312) in the street, remains the same to the very end. In fact, his culminating project is to

perpetuate his unchanging identity through endowing in his will twenty-five representatives of himself. The passage enumerating their duties and circumstances repeats the words "for ever" six times: "each . . . should for ever dine in Bounderby Hall, for ever lodge in Bounderby Buildings, for ever attend a Bounderby chapel, for ever go to sleep under a Bounderby chaplain, for ever be supported out of a Bounderby estate, and for ever nauseate all healthy stomachs with a vast amount of Bounderby balderdash and bluster" (312). This artificial perpetuity epitomizes the time dominant in Coketown; for it is nothing more than an extension of the present—and one undertaken in order to deny that change (and ultimately death) have happened. As we remember, it was precisely this desperate need to find protection against change that led Mr. Jupe to send Sissy to Coketown.⁶

LEONA TOKER

Hard Times and a Critique of Utopia: A Typological Study†

* * *

As Sir Isaiah Berlin has argued, the main reason for the decline of utopian thinking in our times is the relatively recent recognition of the incommensurability of different people's views of happiness and value. Dickens's novel¹ was ahead of its time not so much in showing that there is more than "One Thing Needful" (47, 243) for social justice and private contentment as in suggesting that the very nature of things needful in individual pursuits of happiness may vary in many ways.² In *Hard Times* a well-meaning social reformer who upholds essentially progressive ideas is shown inadvertently promoting some of the most dangerous tendencies of the society which he strives to perfect

Thomas Gradgrind's case is one of the earliest literary studies of near-

6. It is hoped that the foregoing analysis of time in *Hard Times* rescues Dickens from the criticism of Gwen Watkins, *Dickens in Search of Himself: Recurrent Themes and Characters in the World of Charles Dickens* (London: Macmillan, 1987): "Perhaps there were too many themes in one short book for him to examine any profoundly. . . ." (78).

† *Narrative* 4.3 (October 1996): 218–234.

1. All citations from *Hard Times* are from the Penguin Edition, edited by David Craig (Harmondsworth, 1969).

2. The incommensurability of systems of values was also recognized by Dickens's contemporary Lytton. In his semi-satirical Utopia *The Coming Race* (1871) Lytton's protagonist, a stranger in what he considers a quite perfect society, admits that "if you would take a thousand of the best and most philosophical of human beings you could find in London, Paris, Berlin, New York, and even Boston, and place them as citizens in this beatified community, my belief is, that in less than a year they would either die of ennui, or attempt some revolution by which they would militate against the good of the community" (381).

dystopian results of misguided idealism. Whereas seeds of dystopian possibilities can be detected in most Utopian works (including the book that has given the genre its name), it usually takes a narrative rather than a descriptive discourse to reveal their force. In Plato's *Republic*, Socrates only explains the principles on which his idea of the perfect society should be based; Thomas Moore takes a step further by imagining how such a society would be statically described by an enchanted traveler. Later Utopian works, such as Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward* or William Morris's *News from Nowhere*, invent functional narrative plots in which a visitor from the contemporary world chances into and is shown around a future earthly paradise, or else a paradisiac enclave in the modern world—as in B. F. Skinner's *Walden II*. And when such plots break away from their functional matrix and give play to nondidactic imagination (even if minimally, as in Butler's *Erewhon* and Edward Bulwer Lytton's *The Coming Race*) the utopian idyll almost inevitably begins to turn into a nightmare, whether an inchoate one of *Gulliver's Travels* or a full-fledged one of Orwell's 1984. Narrative art tests systems of thinking about social realities, revealing their hidden flaws and potential liabilities (cf. Iser 72–79); it is less apt to promulgate a specific vision of social good. Dickens's *critical* exploration of the nature and the results of Gradgrind's single-minded adherence to a Utopian vision is thus associated not only with the liminal place of *Hard Times* in the history of ideas, but also with the general tendencies of a fictional narrative's processing of ideological systems.

The most prominent morphological feature³ of utopian/dystopian literature is the presence of a *foundational principle*, a philosophical or sociological idea which forms the deep structure of a Utopian setting. Such an idea may, however, take a somewhat debased surface form. Thus, the surface form of Gradgrind's Utopianism is its total valorization of factual knowledge⁴ and total exclusion of anything that can fall under the heading of "fancy." The deep structure of Gradgrind's utopia is, of course, a benevolent utilitarianism, à la Jeremy Bentham.

Bentham sought scientifically based social and legal reform. His ideas can be called "utopian" in the sense that Karl Mannheim has given to this word: they are "situationally transcendent ideas . . . which . . . have a transforming effect upon the existing historical-social order." Thus defined, "Utopianism" is opposed to "ideology"—a system of thinking that is oriented towards the perpetuation of the existing order of things.⁵

3. Recurrent *themes* of the Utopian genre are surveyed in, for instance, Chad Walsh, *From Utopia to Nightmare* (London, 1962), pp. 135–65. The "morphological" features that I discuss span both the thematic and the structural aspects of the Utopian/dystopian narratives.

4. Cf. E. Joan Klingel's discussion ("Dickens's First Epistle to the Utilitarians," *Dickens Quarterly* 3 [1986], 124–28) of *Hard Times* as a commentary on St. Paul's attack on the so-called "Knowledge Party" in the Corinthian Church in First Epistle to the Corinthians.

5. Karl Mannheim, in *Ideology and Utopia* (New York, 1955), notes, in addition, that "[w]e begin

The Benthamite Thomas Gradgrind is a Utopian in the sense that he has mapped out and started following a specific path towards an expected improvement of the social order. Paradoxically, this is a path that Dickens himself may have trodden for part of the way: the most poignant critique of utopia often comes from utopian idealists who have become disillusioned.

* * *

What makes Gradgrind a genuine Utopian is that he identifies with his principles in a total way. A Utopian temperament is *totalitarian*: Gradgrind, indeed, does not confine his activities to the promotion of his vision on the sociopolitical arena but endeavors to live his idea, to be both its spokesman and its visible embodiment. He speaks to himself in the same way, "whether to his private circle of acquaintance, or to the public in general" (48). His adherence to hard facts is manifest in his precise, pointed, and unimaginative manner of speech, in his marriage, in his house where life goes "monotonously round like a piece of machinery which discourages human interference" (96) in the school he has endowed, and, of course, in the names and education of his own children.

In Dickens's novels houses usually reflect, in a vast variety of ways, the personalities of their inhabitants. Architecture being the most Utopian of all arts⁶ Gradgrind's house is a deliberate expression of his philosophical stance. Its square shape is geometrically the most sensible arrangement of space; its lack of adornments and "the primest quality" (55) of its materials and contraptions require no comment; the scientific cabinets in his children's apartments remind one of the work of another Thomas, Tommaso Campanella, in whose Utopian *City of the Sun* the walls of buildings double as museum-type exhibitions of substances found in nature and of other kinds of useful knowledge. The same unrelenting quasi-totalitarianism stands behind the remarks made in the schoolroom by another Utopian, the abovementioned Government official who seems to have it in his charge "to bring about the great public-office Millennium, when Commissioners should reign upon earth" (50)

to treat our adversary's views as ideologies only when we no longer consider them as calculated lies and when we sense in his total behavior an unreliability which we regard as a function of the social situation in which he finds himself. The particular conception of ideology therefore signifies a phenomenon intermediate between a simple lie at one pole, and an error, which is the result of a distorted and faulty conceptual apparatus, at the other. It refers to a sphere of errors, psychological in nature, which, unlike deliberate deception, are not intentional, but follow inevitably and unwittingly from certain casual determinants" (61).

6. "Architecture . . . has a longstanding concern with the marriage of mathematical and human forms, the finding of a harmony and correspondence between the mathematical relations of the cosmos and the forms and functions of the human body. Between the cosmic order of nature and the corporeal structure of man it interposes the ideal city, as the rationally designed mediator and link between the macrocosmic and microcosmic spheres." Kristen Kumar, *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern Times* (Oxford, UK, 1987), p. 5.

like philosophers in Plato's *Republic*. Quite in tune with Plato, this official believes that one should not have pictures of horses on wallpaper because horses do not walk up and down the sides of the room in reality. For the same reason one should not have "foreign birds or butterflies" painted on one's crockery or flower designs in one's carpet. Sissy's remark that one cannot hurt the flowers in the carpet by treading on them (52) belongs to an irrelevant sphere of discourse: the official knows that flowers in the carpet are not iconic and cannot be hurt, but the point for him is that the man-made part of the human environment should be a visible expression of foundational ideas. This episode is usually read as Dickens's somewhat misguided caricature of the "heavy-handed literal-mindedness" of the actually quite intelligent attacks on "the over-decorating side of Victorian taste,"⁷ but it can also be read as presenting a utopian totalizing vision of educational engineering meant to censor anything that conflicts with the foundational principle—here anything that might stimulate fancy: " 'Ay, ay, ay! But you musn't fancy,' cried the gentleman, quite elated by coming so happily to his point. 'That's it! You are never to fancy' " (52).

Indeed, it is a similarly motivated *censorship* that makes Gradgrind play false to the very Hard Fact that he worships. He does not want children to start thinking about the circus; therefore he forbids Sissy Jupe to mention her father's belonging to the circus horse-riders as if this occupation were an obscenity—just as in Huxley's *Brave New World*, where people must be prevented from longing for family feelings, the words "mother" and "father" are turned into obscenities. (The tradition can be traced back to Moore's *Utopia*, where, to prevent people from placing value on gold, this metal is made use of for making chamber pots.) Having elicited just enough flexible facts from Sissy to find a euphemism for Mr. Jupe's occupation, Gradgrind defines it as that of "a veterinary surgeon, a farrier and horse-breaker." To divert the audience from the sleight-of-hand nature of this Orwellian doublethink, Gradgrind demands a definition of the horse, establishes that Sissy does not know what a horse is, and then takes recourse to Bitzer's readiness to redescribe a horse beyond recognition in scientific terms (50).⁸ It is as if, through the use of analogy, Gradgrind attempts to present his little exercise in what Orwell would later call reality control as just another case of the use of 'proper' terminology.

As noted above, a utopian statement usually entails an implicit dystopian counterstatement. Accordingly, a *bona fide* utopian is almost inevitably followed by a *bend-sinister double*. It is, indeed, quite appropriate that from almost the beginning of the novel Thomas Gradgrind is shad-

7. See David Craig's notes to p. 51 of *Hard Times*: see also Phillip Collins, *Dickens and Education* (London, 1964), p. 157 and Nicholas Coles, "The Politics of *Hard Times*: Dickens the Novelist Versus Dickens the Reformer," *Dickens Studies Annual* 15 (1986), 152.

8. See David Sonstroem, "Fettered Fancy in *Hard Times*," *PMLA* 84 (1969), 521–22 for a discussion of Dickens's further use of the motif of the horse in the novel.

owed by the sinister figure of Josiah Bounderby, a powermonger trailing behind an idealist reformer. Their friendship is based on a misunderstanding: if for Gradgrind the study of hard fact is a way to social improvement, Bounderby is an ideologist of the present state of affairs; if, in Gradgrind's system, value is attached to the availability of fact (it being good to have facts about social conditions), in Bounderby's system, value is displaced to the contents of factual information. The *bend-sinister* double of the idealist reformer insists that the facts about social conditions in his little realm are not just good but the best: the Coketown smoke is "the healthiest thing in the world in all respects, and particularly for the lungs"; and the work in his mill is "the highest work there is, and it's the best paid work there is," and one "couldn't improve the mills themselves" unless one "laid down Turkey carpets on the floors" (159).

Bounderby does not care for the common good, like Gradgrind, but is concerned with his personal prestige as a self-made man. In the Coketown world he functions, among other things, as a stock character of the dystopian genre, a figure represented by, for instance, Miles Plastic in Evelyn Waugh's "Love among the Ruins"—the token *showcase* of the achievements of foundational principles, the Golden Youth, the fair-headed boy of his society. There is something in Bounderby to accommodate politicians of both temperaments: for the Utopians he is the rags-to-riches meritocratic hero,⁹ whereas for the ideologists he is "the Royal arms, the Union-Jack, Magna Carta, John Bull, Habeas Corpus, the Bill of Rights, An Englishman's house is his castle, Church and State, and God save the Queen, all put together" (84–85).

Two more utopian/dystopian issues are associated with Bounderby's image: (a) *the nonhereditary aristocracy*—in Josiah Bounderby of Coketown, "of" sounds like the "de" in the names of French gentry; (b) the so-called "*noble lie*": in Plato's *Republic* (IV.1) Socrates is shown inventing a "magnificent myth" of origins (sometimes translated as "the noble lie") that is supposed to carry enough conviction to justify the hierarchical order of his projected ideal society; in *Hard Times* the myth of origins is recycled into the "rags-to-riches"/"if-I-could-do-it-so-could-you" story epitomized by Bounderby's doublethink fantasies of having been born and bred in a ditch.

Bounderby's role being that of an "inflated-balloon" type of model specimen, he does not quite fit the bill as a potential totalitarian usurper. Indeed, he lacks the power mystique of Orwell's O'Brien or of Paduk in Nabokov's *Bend Sinister*: he does not display the sleazy Machiavellianism of a Uriah Heep. And yet Bounderby's wish to discard the people who knew him at the outset of his career (such as his own mother) is disconcertingly reminiscent of well-known twentieth-century tyrants. So

9. See Robin Gilmour, "Dickens and the Self Help Ideal," in *The Victorians and Social Protest: A Symposium*, ed. J. Batt and I. F. Clarke (Devon, UK, 1973), pp. 71–101 on the ambiguities and changes in Dickens's attitude to the implications of a self-made man's character and career.

is his reinvention of his identity and past. So is the "moral infection of clap-trap around him" (84), that is, his power to draw others into singing his praises and spreading his myths. So also is the cluster of consummate cynics in his retinue — Harthouse, Sparsit, and another fair-headed boy, Bitzer.

So is his use of language. The totalizing tendencies of the utopian state and its dystopian shadows are characterized by the shifts that take place in familiar linguistic forms. As is well known, twentieth-century totalitarian states had their own complex rules of political correctness in lexicology. And so did most of the twentieth-century utopian/dystopian fictions. For example, in the egalitarian feminist utopia envisioned in Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time*, the word "person" is used instead of both the masculine and feminine personal pronouns (no more "she or he") and the unisex neologism "per" replaces the possessives "his" and "her." Dickens's ironic exclamation "Fact forbid!" (54) may have been the source of Huxley's play with the substitution of "Ford" into the expressions that usually contain the words "God" or "Lord" in *Brave New World* (e.g., "cleanliness is next to fordliness"). A comic effect is produced by the characters' bland uses of familiar lexical and syntactic structures to express values that are totally opposite to the ones that we might expect in a realistic narrative. Says Mr. Gradgrind, appalled at his children having peeped into the circus pavilion: "I should as soon have expected to find my children reading poetry" (61), giving the reader's frame of reference a minor jolt.

The coining of new expressions supplements the subversion of old ones. Bounderby's rhetoric about the fact of smoke being good subverts and defuses the whole issue of the significance that scientifically studied fact may have for social improvement. Defusion of the semantic load of certain words is a characteristic feature of dystopian languages: strange things happen, for instance, to words like "sacrifice" in Zamiatin's *We*, "predestination" and "pneumatic" in *Brave New World*, "equal" in Orwell's *Animal Farm*, or "salvaging" in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. Bounderby boasts of calling a spade a spade, and so Gradgrind takes him for a hard-facts man: for Gradgrind the idiom means not seeing a spade, fancifully, as a fairy's wand or a torture instrument; for Bounderby, however, the same idiom suggests the absence of upper-class refinement — it is as if Bounderby prides himself on not calling a 'spade' a 'manual excavation instrument' just as he would not call it a 'bloody shovel.'

The would-be totalitarianism of utopian thinking would hardly have been complete without some form of *surveillance*. As early as in Thomas More, a belief in the potentialities of the human being is joined with a total mistrust of the man-in-the-street. Hence in More's *Utopia* and in Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*, quite as well as in Orwell's *1984* and in Nabokov's *Invitation to a Beheading*, everyone is supposed to be informing on everyone else; in *Brave New World* this seems to be happening naturally.

Coketown is not as dystopian a setting as, say Solzhenitsyn's *The First Circle*, but Bitzer, the young model product of Gradgrind's utopian system, is, of course, a full-time spy who would snoop for any convenient master. Public opinion, the god Ydgrun (Grundy) of *Erewhon*, is also a form of surveillance. This, of course, is typical of Victorian society in general, but in no other Dickens novel is a character as keenly aware of the panopticon of public opinion as is Rachael in *Hard Times*. Rachael's policy of not being seen too regularly in the streets with Stephen is a typological anticipation of *camouflaged relationships* in a dystopia, whether romantic relationships, as in *1984*, or homosocial ones, as in Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Surveillance is, of course, facilitated by *regimentation*. In *Hard Times* we first encounter this motif in the presentation of Gradgrind's school. The scholars are referred to by numbers rather than by names—as in Zamiatin's *We*, the first major twentieth-century Utopia, as, partly, in *1984*, and as in Nazi concentration camps and some Stalinist ones as well (all too many aspects of our century's history surpassed the gloomiest dystopian imagination). The teacher, moreover, is one of the mass-produced pedagogues, "some one hundred and forty other schoolmasters" who "had been lately turned out at the same time, in the same factory, on the same principles, like so many pianoforte legs" (52–53)—though not in quite the conveyor-line manner of the batches of low-IQ identical twins hatched and conditioned in the incubators of Huxley's *Brave New World*.

Regimentation and uniformity are features of the industrial cityscape. In Coketown there are "several large streets all very like one another, and many small streets even more like one another, inhabited by people equally like one another, and who all went in and out at the same hours, with the same sound on the same pavements, to do the same work" (65). This is relatively mild in comparison with the regimentation that transpires in industry-oriented Utopias, including even Bellamy's *Looking Backward*,¹ and the streamlined science fictions of our century. Uniformity is notably absent from those Utopian works where the foundational principle is counterindustrialist, as, for instance, in William Morris's *News from Nowhere*; similarly, there is little place for it in the natural setting of Golding's *Lord of the Flies*.

It has been suggested that the representation of the working class in literature may be affected by the conventional metonymic movement of the imagination: the image of working people is affected by the qualities of the objects with which they come in contact (such as the dull and potentially destructive mechanisms of production) and by the faceless,

1. Not only are production and marketing properly standardized in *Looking Backward* and not only does the narrator admire a regimented nineteenth-century parade, but, with a touch of unconscious auto-subversiveness, the author makes the heroine of the novel prefer the man from the past to her own contemporaries whom, owing perhaps to their uniformity, she does not expect to make sufficiently interesting lovers.

dull, and dingy setting in which they find themselves. It has been further suggested that Dickens refrained from extending to the workers a robot- or elephant-like "melancholy madness" (65), and that he thus broke at least partly free from the stereotypical metonymic literary imagination in which the features of the industrial environment rub off on the workers themselves. One can add that it is also quite in tune with Dickens's critique of Utopianism that the above suggestion of the sameness, the uniformity, of the industrial workers is withdrawn as soon as the narrative comes to dwell on the worker Stephen Blackpool and on his love for one particular irreplaceable woman.² One could argue that in his psychological make-up Stephen is, indeed, different from others—no wonder he gets himself ostracized—but his is just one of many ways of being different: most individuals will be found 'different' if one pays sufficient attention to them. The workers may be called on by Slackbridge to act in a united and uniform way, they may receive uniform treatment from the factory owner and from the undertaker, but Dickens reminds us of the uniqueness and irreplaceability of each person when he notes that what the undertaker removes from the poor houses is "all that was most precious in the world to a striving wife and a brood of hungry babies" (119). Moreover, Dickens does not fail to remind us of "those remarkable 'Hands', who, piecing together their broken intervals of leisure through many years, had mastered difficult sciences, and acquired a knowledge of most unlikely things" (103)—a reference perhaps to the Mechanics' Institutes of which there were hundreds in the industrial towns of Dickens's England yet which, apart from the above remark, have no place in the repertoire of the novel.³

Dickens's critique of industrialist uniformity, as well as his attacks on Utilitarian statistics, target dystopian *threats to the discreteness of an individual identity*. In a statistics-oriented picture of the world, "Lives are drops in an undemarcated ocean; and the question how the group is doing is a question whose economic resolution requires effacing the separate life and agency of each" (Nussbaum 884).⁴ Though Dickens

2. Cf. Williams's (in Raymond Williams, "The Reader in *Hard Times*," in *Writing in Society* [London, 1983]) accounting for this contradiction by the co-presence in the text of the theory "that environment influences and in some sense determines character" and of the belief that "some virtues and vices are original and both triumph over and in some cases can change any environment" (169).
3. On Mechanics' Institutes see D. W. Jefferson, "Mr. Gradgrind's Facts," *Essays in Criticism* 35 (1985), 200–1. Jefferson's general argument is that the repertoire of the novel is insufficiently grounded in the kind of facts with which Mr. Gradgrind might have operated.
4. Nussbaum, in "Literary Imagination in Public Life," *New Literary History* 22 (1991), 877–910, brings *Hard Times* to bear on the United Nations' project of finding ways of measuring the quality of life in developing countries. I must, however, put on record a disagreement with Nussbaum's interpretation of the dying Mrs. Gradgrind's famous statement: "I think there's a pain somewhere in the room... But I couldn't positively say that I have got it" (224). Nussbaum comments that "Political economy sees only pains and satisfaction and their general location: it does not see persons as distinctly bounded centers of satisfaction, far less as agents whose active planning is essential to the humaneness of whatever satisfaction they will achieve. Mrs. Gradgrind has learned her lesson well" (885). Mrs. Gradgrind, however, has been presented as a woman vaguely aware of lessons to be learned but never really learning even the names of

refers to workers ironically as Hands, and though he mentions Louisa's erstwhile view of them as "something that occasionally rose like a sea, and did some harm and waste (chiefly to itself), and fell again" (187-88), none of the body-language imagery for which the authorial narrator is directly responsible, not even that pertaining to the trade-union meeting, suggests the dissolution of the borderlines of the individual self or its merger with an undifferentiated force. The oil whose smell pervades Coketown on a hot day may "ooze" and "trickle" through the many stories of the mills but it "soils" only the dresses of the Hands (146), leaving no metaphoric stain on their identities and causing no metaphoric leaks. Dickens's quasi-reactionary satire on the trade-union movement is part of his attack on the forces that refuse to recognize and would zestfully crush the uniqueness and separateness of individual identities.

Among the almost omnipresent concerns of utopian literature are the issues of *euthanasia* and *eugenics*, wish-fulfilling fantasy transformations of the time-honored themes that realistic fiction knows by the names of death and love. Ironically, the idea of euthanasia raises its head for a minute in *Hard Times*, when Stephen Blackpool thinks about the "unequal" hand of Death which so often stretches itself out to "any human creature who [is] serviceable to, or beloved by, another" but does not take that "abandoned woman" (119), his wife. After such thoughts, and under the influence of nightmares and exhaustion, Stephen is unable to stop his wife when she is about to drink poisonous antiseptic in mistake for gin. This is presented as the moment of greatest peril to his soul; the situation is saved by Rachael's instinctive response.

Stephen's paralysis at the moment when his wife reaches for the wrong bottle is certainly associated with his wish that she should die—a wish that has nothing to do with any charitable form of euthanasia. Yet the episode can be read as a subversive commentary on the hollowness of fake euthanasia in utopian literature: it seems quite obvious that even in Thomas More's *Utopia* the mercy killing serves the interests of the thrift-minded community: a sick or very old person has to be *persuaded*, if not *bullied*, to accept this option. In Huxley's *Brave New World* one is not even given any other option when one's energies run out, and it is quite obvious that the poised, easeful, drug-promoted death of those who have grown weak is the society's way of minimizing the taxation, and the humanity, of the still young and restless.

Obviously, euthanasia, as of *Brave New World* or Waugh's "Love among the Ruins," is incompatible with Christian ethics; this motif is, indeed, one of the signs that Thomas More was not earnestly recom-

the "ologies" involved. Her agony, moreover, makes her see the insufficiency of those lessons. The words quoted above may be interpreted both as reflecting the effect of an opiate distancing one's pain as well as voicing an unwanted awareness of another sort of pain present in the room—the pain of Louisa. See also Nussbaum's essay [in this volume, above].

mending the ways of his *Utopia*. The para-utilitarian principle of minimizing the suffering of the sick and the expense of the energies of the healthy has no place in *Hard Times*. There is a brief account of a shortcut in funeral arrangements: instead of being carried down the narrow staircases, the bodies of the dead are removed through the windows and made to slide to the street down the undertaker's black ladder (105). Even this, however, is first and foremost a reflection on the structure of the houses occupied by the working class. Funerals, "the one poor ghastly pomp of the neighborhood" (105), are not treated lightly by working people.

An issue related to *eugenics* is briefly evoked in *Hard Times* when we learn that one of the Gradgrind children is named Malthus. Yet the square utopian Thomas Gradgrind does seem to have a notion of the right ways of pairing the citizens of his world. Happily free from passion, he has reduced the issue of the right marriage to "a question of figures" (62), and nothing short of major conversion, which does, indeed, take place, can make him revise this view. Even after the conversion, however, the change in divorce laws is unthinkable for Gradgrind: supporting his daughter's decision to live separately from her husband at the end of the novel is as far as he can possibly go. Gradgrind's own conjugal experience has evidently suggested to him that, in general, things are well enough and that well enough had better be left alone—otherwise, as his wife would put it, one would never hear the last of it. The experimentation with family restructuring is left for twentieth-century dystopian fictions and semipornographic romances that exploit utopian or dystopian frameworks for their own purposes.

And yet the sexual energies that may have called for such experimentation are hinted at in *Hard Times*. The undercurrent psychodrama of this novel has been variously interpreted. According to Robert Caserio, for instance, "Gradgrind, not Louisa, weds Bounderby; Louisa in effect marries her brother; Stephen yearns for bigamy; Mrs Pegler acts like Bounderby's secret paramour instead of like his mother . . . and Harthouse has a hothouse effect on both women and men, for he not only inflames Mrs. Sparsit and Louisa, but in a scene of homoerotic insinuation (II, 3) he seduces adoring, rapt Tom as a first step towards seducing Louisa." Caserio further suggests that Dickens does not present such relationships as perverse products of the Gradgrindian tyranny: "The Gradgrindian system asks to be read not as the perversion of a normative sexuality but as the obstruction of a polymorphous, unnameable sexual force. Harthouse makes trouble in Coketown, but he also makes Coketown know its anarchic desires in a way it had unhappily refused to know them so far."

However the case might be, it is the issue of love that can most clearly diagnose the vulnerability of a utopia. It is an unsolved problem in the criticism of utopian/dystopian fiction whether romantic love is or is not a subversive force. In the world of *Hard Times* every form of love provides

a subversive counterbalance to the evils of the social system, but of probably the greatest importance is the love between a father and a daughter—whether or not it can or should be reinterpreted as sublimating incestuous drives.⁵

There are usually three reasons for a Utopia's turning into a nightmare, and all three operate in *Hard Times*: (a) the foundational principle is flawed and so backfires (in the case of young Tom); (b) the implementation of the foundational principle succeeds only too well (Bitzer); and (c) too much is sacrificed in the effort of implementation. The third reason for the failure of Utopia is central to the novel. Dickens's critique of utopianism comes to a head in the two major interviews between Gradgrind and Louisa, the one when Louisa's marriage is agreed upon and the other when this marriage collapses.

* * *

Unlike a complex of other motifs in the novel, Gradgrind's famous conversion at the sight of Louisa's misery is *not* a typological anticipation of changes of heart among rulers of literary dystopias. Fictional dystopias are either shown to be grimly perpetual (as in Huxley and Orwell) or are cataclysmically destroyed by outside forces, or else are expected to run themselves down like hermetic closed systems. And yet critics who deny Dickens a prophetic stance can be invited to take another look.⁶ *Hard Times* does not, indeed, foreshadow any positive transformation of literary dystopias through their rulers' changes of heart, but it does foreshadow exactly this type of development on the actual sociopolitical arena of the late twentieth century. For several decades a debate has been going on between critics who praise and critics who disparage *Hard Times*.⁷ The unexpected predictive power of this novel should, I believe, lend additional support to those who believe it to be one of the more significant and artistically perceptive of Dickens's works.

5. For a mild suggestion of such an interpretation see Katherine Kearns, "A Tropology of Realism in *Hard Times*," *ELH* 59 (1992), 863.

6. Cf. John Holloway, "Hard Times: A History and a Criticism," in *Dickens and the Twentieth Century*, ed. John Gross and Gabriel Pearson (London, 1962), pp. 159-74: Dickens was not a profound and prophetic genius with insight into the deepest levels of human experience" (169).

7. An overview of this controversy is given in, for instance, Roger Fowler, "Polyphony and Problematic in *Hard Times*," in *The Changing World of Charles Dickens*, ed. Robert Giddings (1983, 91-93). The debate was ignited by F. R. Leavis's privileging of *Hard Times* over other works of Dickens (1948) and his further praise of it (1970). Ensuing discussions of the artistry of *Hard Times* explicitly or implicitly supported this view; yet Leavis's evaluation of the novel was challenged by, among others, Holloway, David H. Hirsch ("Hard Times and F. R. Leavis," *Criticism* 6 [1964], 1-16), and Jefferson.