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# Reading *Hard Times*: Literature, History, and Education

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## Abstract

Charles Dickens's fiction has been credited with effecting social reforms, with bringing about changes in understanding by the use of stories which are not factual. This thesis follows a pathway into Dickens's world of fact and fancy, looking for how a literary work might relate to the fundamentals of human thought and how an examination of *Hard Times* might add to our knowledge of the educational implications of literature. How might fancy, as not-fact, influence human thought?

My examination of *Hard Times* considers the nature of the relationship between the reader and the text from a perspective hinted at by Dickens. I begin with an examination of existing studies from across disciplines, particularly biology and psychology, seeking a possible physical source for the ability of non-factual information to influence human thinking. The study of *Hard Times* begins with a history of the author and the influences upon him; the times in which he lived and set the novel are examined, drawing heavily on history and sociology. Throughout the thesis Paulo Freire's early work has provided a framework to assist the analysis of the text and Dickens's depiction of his times.

Dickens's life and personality shed light on his interests in education, and the philosophy that he developed. A greater degree of historical accuracy in the representation of educational issues than has been customarily attributed to the text is demonstrated. Common ground is established between the early ideas of Paulo Freire and the observations of Dickens, with special attention being given to the role of education as it is controlled and utilised by the interests of industrial capitalism. Dickens's remarkable psychological insight into human behaviour is illustrated in an examination of the relationship between Thomas Gradgrind and Josiah Bounderby. Insights from Freire help in the identification of their inauthentic dialogue as an allegory for the conflicted interests of the state and the economic powers within it. Dickens, no theoretician, makes his case against allowing the interests of business to redirect education into the production of measurable outcomes, at the expense of human development. The final discussion on the nature of fancy, including the evolutionary importance of narrative thought, demonstrates that a literary work can indeed make a contribution to educational philosophy.

## Dedication

I am very pleased to be able to dedicate this work to my mum and dad; for lots of reasons that they know, and that no-one else needs to. Just for being there when the wheels got a bit wobbly. We got there in the end.

## Acknowledgements

It would be easy for me to say that without the assistance from my supervisors this thesis would never have been completed—and it would be true enough. However it would be to undervalue their input into my academic progress. Without them I would never have begun. Both my main supervisor, Dr Maxine Stephenson, and my second supervisor, Professor Peter Roberts, have been an important part of my life—academically and personally—for the last few years. I have them to thank not only for their assistance with this thesis, but for the journey through university. It was great to have good company, thank you.

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## 1. Introduction

This introduction is almost as much a personal introduction as it is an introduction to my thesis. That is because this journey has been a particularly long one for me, and many of the ideas represented here have grown as they travelled with me. However, for almost as long as I can remember reading has been associated with literacy, with education, with schooling, and with pleasure. I was lucky; all my life I have enjoyed reading, so it was a childhood joy not a task. I still remember the sense of achievement I felt when I finished Enid Blyton's *Fifteen Minute Tales*<sup>1</sup>; it was my first book without pictures. At an age at which John Stuart Mill had read *Aesop's Fables*, Xenophon's *Anabasis*, the whole of Herodotus, and was moving on to read Plato and Demosthenes, I began to read *Biggles*<sup>2</sup> books. I learnt from this that there was a hierarchy of literary worthiness, and that some books were mysteriously 'better' than others; *Biggles* books were not available through the public libraries. The librarian did not say that they had failed some test of virtue or merit, just that they were unsuitable material for a library. Nevertheless, I read them; I tracked them down in second hand bookshops, and at school fairs, and bought them. I thrilled to the adventures of this most English of heroes, particularly those of his early days as a fighter pilot in the RFC during the Great War. Some of the attitudes that were represented in *Biggles* are no longer acceptable. However, for me at the time, James Bigglesworth was a hero who embodied the principles of loyalty, courage, and fair play.

Importantly, the battles, moral and physical, of *Biggles* took place in my imagination rather than only on the pages of the books I read. To share his adventures required some identification with his values. The author, the self-styled Captain W.E. Johns, may have invented the character, but it was the imagination of thousands of small boys that gave him life. Perhaps, if the time comes that small boys no longer read the *Biggles* books, and

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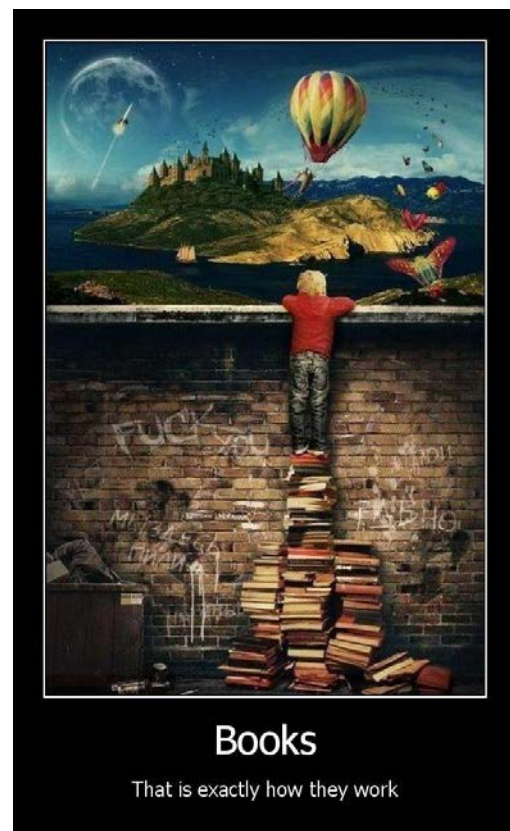
<sup>1</sup> *Fifteen Minute Tales* (Blyton, 1936) was an anthology of short stories taken from a series of cheap books called *Sunny Stories for Little Folk*, which was edited by Enid Blyton—in fact Blyton wrote each story, including rewriting popular tales like Robin Hood—and ran for 250 issues between 1926 and 1936.

<sup>2</sup> A series of over ninety books following the aviation career of the fictional James Bigglesworth, including his early days in the RFC. *Biggles Learns to Fly* (Johns, 1935/1965) is a collection of short stories that captures some of the tensions of the early years of air combat in the First World War. It seems to have been written for an older reader than the later texts. Biggles, as he is known, always fights fair and wins his battles honourably.



no longer keep him alive in their imagination, he will pass away. I think I can see him now, a small figure in an ancient biplane, disappearing over the horizon of changing childhoods. A fictional character must always be like the fairies in *Peter Pan* for whom a child's lack of belief meant death; it is only the mind of the reader that gives life to literary characters, whether they be Tinkerbell and Biggles, or Anna Karenina and the brothers Karamazov. As a child I was aware that my imagination was a special place where stories came to life and where fairies and fighter pilots could share the same space without conflict. I would lie reading each night, discovering new worlds and adventures, adding new experiences to my increasing store of childhood wonder.

I lived in a wonderful world; a night time world, under the bedcovers by torchlight, long after the lights were out. What adventures the books revealed: heroes and villains, pirates and princesses, drama and death. What a life I had! I shared *The Coral Island*<sup>3</sup> with Ralph, Martin and Peterkin and discovered footprints in the sand with *Robinson Crusoe*<sup>4</sup>. I was recreated as Allan Quatermain and so I rediscovered *King Solomon's Mines*<sup>5</sup> and finally faced my own mortality in *Allan Quatermain*<sup>6</sup>. The first woman I ever fell in love with was the fabulous She-who-must-be-obeyed, Ayesha in *She*<sup>7</sup>, and if I later felt somehow cheated that *Rumpole of the Bailey*<sup>8</sup> had reduced this majesty to an epithet for a disappointed housewife can I be blamed? Such evidence for the enduring power of fiction seemed less important than the overthrow of such a queen. I watched *Tarzan*<sup>9</sup> grow into manhood among the great apes and then go on to raise questions about the nature of a



(Gorbunova, 2010)

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<sup>3</sup> Ballantyne (1858)

<sup>4</sup> Defoe (1719/2001)

<sup>5</sup> Rider Haggard (1885)

<sup>6</sup> Rider Haggard (1887a)

<sup>7</sup> Rider Haggard (1887b)

<sup>8</sup> Mortimer (1978)

<sup>9</sup> Burroughs (1914)

gentleman. I was Christopher Carey as he fell, doing his duty, against Napoleon in Ronald Welch's *Captain of Foot*. By the time I had left school I had scraped through University Entrance on my second attempt, but more importantly, I had marched with Caesar's legions, and fought against him too. I had crossed the deserts of the American west, and walked down the dark alleys of Sam Spade's San Francisco. However, I was soon to learn that the world of my imagination was a negotiated space not an absolute. A book could seem different to another reader.

### **Different readers – different readings**

At some point, I watched the filmed version of Alistair MacLean's thriller *The Guns of Navarone*. It starred Gregory Peck as the main character, a New Zealander named Keith Mallory speaking with a disconcertingly American accent. Earlier, in my last year of primary school, my mother had bought me a copy of the book through the Scholastic Book Club. I didn't read it immediately, but a year or two later I did so. It was more demanding than *Biggles*, but more rewarding as well. So it was that I climbed the storm battered cliffs of Navarone with Mallory as surely as I had learned to fly a Sopwith Pup with Biggles. However, although the story in the book and that of the movie were much the same, there were important differences between the two; the characters of my imagination were not those that appeared on screen. Looking back I now see that Anthony Quinn's rendition of Colonel Andrea Stavros has become my memory of the character in the book. In itself, this seems to suggest something both about his performance, and about the nature of memory. In a similar vein, another of my favourite books at about that same time was *When Eight Bells Toll*<sup>10</sup>. I recently reread the book, and I watched the movie again; I loved the book and hated the movie. I can still remember the opening pages of the book, a wryly written rambling dissertation by the main character on the destructive effects of the Colt 45 – as he came to grips with the fact that one was pointed at him. The gun remained in the film, but it was simply a gun. Neither the tension nor the humour had survived the transition from imagination to film. How was it that so often a book was more exciting, more vivid, more memorable, and somehow more real than its screen adaptation? I cannot pretend for one moment that this was the beginning of

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<sup>10</sup> MacLean (1966/2005)

a lifelong quest that resulted in this thesis; it was not. Nonetheless, since childhood I have had a feeling that books are in some way special, and that reading is special.

It needs to be admitted that my taste in fiction can most generously be described as eclectic, a word which allows me to sidestep the fact that I have read a lot more westerns and thrillers than I have great works of English literature. Even recently, I read my way through the collected works of Dick Francis, enjoying both the reading and the collecting. This feels like the admission of some childish sin. Yet, if I had made the same claim about the works of Charles Dickens I could have claimed that they had some literary merit, and I could have claimed that I was somehow on a path of virtuous self-improvement. The same notion of varying degrees of worthiness that kept Biggles books from my childhood library still exists. Plato's *Apology of Socrates*, a report of the defence Socrates put forward at his trial, is good worthy reading, as is Portia's overly technical defence of Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice*. It cannot be the courtroom setting that defines them as worthy, nor even the justice of their respective cases, for none of the spirited defences by Perry Mason are likely to make any list of significant literary works. Never mind that there were 135 million copies of Perry Mason books in circulation at the time of the author's death (for examples see Symons, 1993, p. 97), a figure that even with an additional 2000 years of public exposure is not likely to have been equalled by Plato. It seemed interesting to me as a schoolboy, and seems interesting to me now, that it is not those books that are most loved, and most read that are the most highly regarded by those who decide these things. Dickens made this same point in *Hard Times*, and I think it's an important one. It seems that the citizens of Coketown resisted reading the great literature that others felt would be improving for them; instead they:

wondered about human nature, human passions, human hopes and fears, the struggles, triumphs and defeats, the cares and joys and sorrows, the lives and deaths of common men and women! They sometimes, after fifteen hours' work, sat down to read mere fables about men and women, more or less like themselves, and about children, more or less like their own. (*HT*, p. 42)<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Throughout this thesis all references to *Hard Times* will be to the Norton Critical Edition, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition: Dickens, C. (1854/2001). *Hard Times* (3rd ed.). New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc. (Original Work Published 1854).

As Gradgrind ruefully observed, “[t]hey took De foe to their bosoms, instead of Euclid”. Perhaps, it is the popular story tellers who are in the best position to influence the widest audience, even if they are not always the most acceptable to librarians and critics.

Charles Dickens is one of the most popular story tellers in the English language, and his works reached the widest audience of any writer of his day. In his own time he was recognised as a ‘best-selling’ author, even if the importance and longevity of his work was not universally accepted (Collins, 1995). However, Dickens also seems to have polarised people more than any other author of the day and it appears to have been the accessibility of his work to a working class audience that was largely the cause. English society had—and indeed still has—a very strong class structure, and class boundaries were widely understood to be natural and indicative of essential difference. If we are to judge by contemporary criticism of his work (for examples see Collins, 1995), Dickens was seen to be a little ‘lowbrow’; his critics accepted his descriptions of the working class more readily than they accepted his comments on the middle and upper classes (e.g. Sinnett, 1854). However, even his critics accepted that his writing had the power to influence its readers. Anthony Trollope acknowledged of Dickens, albeit with clear disapproval, that “ridicule is found to be more convincing than argument, imaginary agonies touch more than true sorrows, and monthly novels convince, when learned quartos fail to do so” (Trollope, 1855/1900, p. 186). I will return to this point later, but at my first reading the full significance of Trollope’s observation escaped me—it is a comment on the power of the irrational over the rational. Trollope went on to have his character assume of Dickens’s work that “the absurdly strong colouring of the picture would disenable the work from doing either good or harm.” He followed this with a perceptive editorial comment; “[h]e was wrong. The artist who paints for the million must use glaring colours” (p. 189). These ‘glaring colours’ were particularly obvious in Dickens’s *Hard Times*. So much so that they caused one contemporary critic to question whether “his descriptions will be so intelligible fifty years hence: it is a language which speaks especially to the present generation” (Sinnett, 1854, p. 607), whereas another commentator claimed this same text to be “one written ‘for these times’ that will be claimed for future times” (Forster, 1854, p. 569). The same text, with different readers, produces different understandings.

## One reader but two texts

Forster's prediction of longevity for the work was more accurate than Mrs Sinnett's suggestion of transience. The work they were reviewing, *Hard Times*, was a text that I was also to have occasion to read—although long after I had closed my last Biggles book. In 2006, as part of the assessment for a paper towards an Honours degree, I was required to do a presentation 'addressing an important educational and/or philosophical question in the light of one or more literary works'. I was told that Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* included some perspectives on educational matters, and that it may be of interest, so I chose to read it and see how it might contribute to my presentation. The first thing that came from my choice of text was a fascination with the work itself; it seemed a strange mixture of genuine tragedy and syrupy sentimentality, presented in the form of a thinly disguised lecture. Yet, it was noticeably different from the few other Dickens' books that I had read; it had a fire within it that scorched the writer's normal good humoured wit. In addition, I noticed some very clear parallels to Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, most obviously the well-known metaphor of a banking education. Clearly, I had the basis for my presentation; it would be an analysis of *Hard Times* through a Freirean lens.

I had been introduced to the work of Paulo Freire during the course of a Bachelor of Arts degree. I had taken a couple of Philosophy of Education papers, and enjoyed them. It was in one of these papers that I had an introduction to some educational theorists and writers, and Freire was among these. His most famous work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, was both easy to read and highly entertaining. It was also as alien to me in terms of time and place as *Hard Times* would later be; each of these texts revealed an intellectual and social world I had not previously attempted to engage with. My first encounter with Freire's work was an intellectual challenge—an attempt to understand his world in terms of my own, and my world in terms of his—but it was simply part of the university experience, rather than anything deeper. My research for the presentation led me to a growing conviction that much of that which Paulo Freire had said, Dickens had said 100 years earlier, and in some cases Dickens's observations seemed not only more acute, but more universal. Furthermore, it seemed to me that the similarities, and the differences, were not just coincidental, *Hard Times* was not just another Dickens' novel; it read as a conscious effort to present ideas that the author felt had great social and educational significance for his readers.

I completed my presentation, but found that there were a number of issues that had arisen during its preparation, and they remained unaddressed. It is easy enough to make the claim that Dickens was trying to say something of significance, but claiming it falls short of demonstrating it. What was he trying to say and how could I be sure—and why was I even still thinking about it? One of the reasons that I was still thinking about it was a historical fascination; it is easy to overlook the fact that a novel can be a primary source of historical information. *Hard Times* was written by a very observant and influential figure of his time, and that time was immediately prior to the main involvement of the state in education. The time was also one when industrialisation had been in progress long enough for the major social changes that it had caused to become visible, and those changes were cause for concern and discussion. Education, usually of a strongly religious nature, was promoted by some as a cure for social problems. It was a time when the nature, purpose and provision of education were up for debate, and such a discourse, historical or contemporary, belongs within the philosophy of education. *Hard Times*, with its clear focus on education, seemed a contemporary response to some important philosophical issues of the day; it addressed what Dickens considered to be the salient points of a long running discussion. Interestingly, it addressed truth but presented fiction. Forster claimed, in his review of *Hard Times* at its release as a single volume, that “no thesis can be argued in a novel” (1854, p. 568); a statement that seems to recognise that Dickens at least approaches doing so with this work. However, not arguing a thesis is not the same as not presenting important ideas. In addition, a thesis has a pre-determined conclusion; surely it should be possible for a writer to identify social problems without necessarily providing their solutions. So, there still seemed to be a useful connection between the ideas of Dickens and those of Freire. I felt the need to do a closer reading of *Hard Times* than I had previously done, in an effort to better understand Dickens and his educational thinking. Would his ideas support the prediction made by Forster, and “be claimed for future times”, or would they remain embedded in Dickens’s times?

### **Literature or narrative**

In the original proposal for my PhD, it had been my intention to examine Dickens’s *Hard Times* through the early work of Paulo Freire, his famous *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. This was a logical extension of the presentation that I had earlier done. There was, in addition, an irony in comparing these small texts on education; one text had been the

foundation of a reputation, the other had long been considered something of an aberration. *Hard Times* was a mild embarrassment to Dickens's admirers; Gissing (1898) described it as "the one novel which I cannot but think a failure", commenting that "it is practically a forgotten book, and little in it demands attention" (p. 201). The contrast seemed intriguing, given the obvious parallels. One of the questions that I had originally decided to address through this analysis was "what unique contribution could literature make to educational philosophy?" The question had been intended to mean something like "what is it that literature can supply to educational philosophy that cannot be obtained any other way?" However, over time, I became less sure that I had framed the question correctly. Part of this doubt had a personal, perhaps trivial, basis; it bothered me that both Biggles books and westerns had, in my own mind at least, influenced my moral development, and so had a philosophical value. For my original question to stand, this would seem to either require literature to be merely that which is written, or for Biggles to be literature; there seemed to be a tension here. Plato, in his dialogues on education in *The Republic*, had suggested that literature, albeit in the form of poetry, needed to be carefully selected because of the powerful effect that it had on the students, their beliefs and their understandings of the world. He claimed that most poetry was both theologically and morally threatening because by describing various forms of moral weakness it acted to encourage them (Plato, 1987). The core of this argument is that literature can influence the moral and ethical development of those exposed to it. He couldn't have meant westerns, and surely not Biggles, and not only for the anachronism involved. They're not *literature*, they're only stories, potboilers; they are books of no consequence. Or, is it possible, that Plato cast his net into too shallow water? Perhaps the stories of children are as influential as the literature of adults.

Dickens certainly thought that children's stories were important to the development of the individual. He said so. One of my favourite places where he does so is an article called *Where We Stopped Growing*. This appeared in *Household Words* in early 1853, and in it he outlined the lingering effects of the books he had read. Rather astutely, he also claimed that we didn't move on from those childhood influences, at some point we 'stopped growing' and those childhood memories of adventure and ethical thought became a permanent part of us. He was adamant about the importance of this, and explicitly made a link between moral growth and reading.

Our growth stopped, when Don Quixote might have been right after all in going about to succour the distressed, and when the priest and the barber were no more justified in burning his books than they would have been in making a bonfire of our own two bed-room shelves. (Dickens, 1853b, p. 361)

Biggles would have been pleased at this small vote of support from such a librarian's favourite as Dickens. It seems certain then, that Dickens had the intention of pointing out what he viewed as a serious educational deficit in the Gradgrind children when he wrote that:

No little Gradgrind had ever associated a cow in a field with that famous cow with the crumpled horn who tossed the dog who worried the cat who killed the rat who ate the malt, or with that yet more famous cow who swallowed Tom Thumb. (*HT*, p. 11)

The Gradgrind family as a whole proves to have a lack of moral awareness; is it possible that Dickens was suggesting that increased exposure to fairy tales could have avoided this? Could there be something morally constructive, instructive, or destructive not just in Plato's poetry but in a child's nursery rhymes? Dickens thought so. Certainly, almost from the moment of publication, *Hard Times* has been critiqued as presenting a clumsy contrast of the effects of 'fact and fancy' in education. The contrast is there, but the clumsiness seemed to me to lie in the shallow analysis of the critics. There seems little doubt that Dickens is indeed suggesting that a life without imagination would be an arid and malformed existence, however this is a recurring theme throughout his work (see Collins, 1961 for a more detailed discussion). In *Hard Times*, Dickens goes further and presents two explicit claims. Firstly, that the adult never escapes the upbringing of the child; this has serious and obvious implications for education however it is defined. Secondly, Dickens proposes that imaginative stories have an important role—one additional to rather than exclusive of facts—in the education of a functionally just society. Dickens, I suggest, sees the freedom of the individual as inextricably bound to social obligation.

Interestingly, for me anyway, the character in *Hard Times* whose existence owes most to the imagination is Josiah Bounderby; his whole life history is an imagination, a work of fancy. His self-constructed narrative of his own past is shown to be a fabrication, and



quite possibly even his name is a fiction. In spite of this creative use of his imagination, Bounderby's life is as deformed as any other in the story; he displays no sign of any conscience, far less a social one, and is incapable of any emotional engagement with others. For a minor character, Bounderby takes up a lot of space in the book, which made me wonder whether his significance may have been misunderstood, or even overlooked. Bounderby and 'fancy' seemed likely to repay closer scrutiny. Returning now to my original question on the role of literature within educational philosophy, Bounderby's character made it more evident that the question was too broad and that the focus should be on a particular text. A more approachable question was suggesting itself as something like: "what contribution can a reading of *Hard Times* make to our understanding of education in its historical context?" Bounderby exists only as a self-created narrative, and all the relationships within the novel presuppose an underlying truth—the possibility of Freirean authentic dialogue—whereas there is only a fiction. By doing this, Dickens seems to hint at an almost post-modern vision of interwoven life stories and multiple perspectives creating realities and personal fictions. In *Hard Times* there is no traditional hero or villain; there is no resolution or happy ending. There is only a story—uncertainly located in time—that illustrates the effects of educational assumptions played out in different lives. This seemed a rather more complex text than I had initially thought.

### **Great books and good books**

The educational benefits of reading have often been associated with the material that is read. Literature, as much as literacy, has had a long association with western educational thought. Indeed, moral and ethical development has long been understood to have a symbiotic relationship with literature, as evidenced by Plato's caution noted earlier. The 1611 publication of the *King James Bible* in English was arguably the genesis of accessible literature being used as a referential educational text in the western world. Interpretations of the philosophy and instruction contained within it dominated western thought until the late nineteenth century, and still exert a considerable influence. The influence of Christian thinking on their respective authors is clearly apparent in both *Hard Times* and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, albeit in very different ways. Central to Freire's work is the idea of a human "ontological and historical vocation" (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 37), which can perhaps best—and possibly only—be understood as having a divine component. If not, what does it mean? Dickens, although *Hard Times* is replete

with biblical allusions, displays a more humanist outlook, and seeks social justice based on shared humanity, rather than divine command. Although *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* echoes many of the ideas and metaphors found in *Hard Times*, their epistemological foundations are different, as are their educational ambitions.

There is a body of literature advocating an educational curriculum based on ‘Great Books’ (e.g. Adler, 1977; Bloom, 1994); a descriptor which usually includes the *King James Bible*. Although exactly which books would constitute the canonical list of ‘Great Books’ has been debated, the principles are generally accepted; the books should represent the best that has been thought and written in the (Western) world, the reading of which will help to create well educated individuals (Hartley, 2001). This is the basis of modern liberal education, having students study “with the proper care the great books which the greatest minds have left behind” so that each of them becomes “a cultured human being” within their society (Strauss, 1959/2003, p. 31). This definition requires some agreement on who are likely to have constituted ‘the greatest minds’, and as Roberts (1996) points out, some reformists have noted that writers from groups such as women and ethnic minorities are inadequately represented on many core reading lists, and that long-dead Greek and Roman males figure particularly prominently. I notice, with regret, that the creators of *Biggles* and of *Ayesha*, and even of *Fifteen Minute Tales* are also absent from these lists. Nonetheless, there appears to be general acceptance that there is some special educational insight to be gained by studying particular works of literature.

Many of the criteria often cited as characteristic of a great book seem to indicate more approachable texts than most liberal arts reading lists would imply. For example, five criteria were selected by Buchanan, the first of which strongly suggests that the text should have popular appeal;

- (1) a great book is one that has been read by the largest number of persons ...
- (2) a great book has the largest number of possible interpretations [indicating the] inexhaustibility of its substance ...
- (3) a great book should raise the persistent unanswerable questions ...
- (4) a great book must be a fine work of art ...
- (5) a great book must be a masterpiece of the liberal arts. (Buchanan, 1938, cited in Hartley, 2001, p. 149)

If the first requirement allows H. Rider Haggard, W.E. Johns, R.M. Ballantyne, and Enid Blyton into consideration, then the next two dismiss them, not for lack of readership but for lack of substance. Surprisingly, to me at least, this is a charge that has also been laid against the work of Charles Dickens. F.R. Leavis, the champion of *Hard Times*, did not admit Dickens as a great writer but rather as a great entertainer, observing that “[t]he adult mind doesn’t as a rule find in Dickens a challenge to unusual and sustained seriousness” (1962, p. 29); he considered that only *Hard Times* was an exception in Dickens’s work. Lack of substance is a charge that a work may be defended against—I hope that someday Ayesha will find her champion—by demonstrating the importance of the ideas presented. The second and the third criteria highlight this importance; the text should provoke a critical intellectual response in the reader, raising questions rather than providing answers; in itself this implies that greatness lies in the discussion rather than the resolution of problem. This in no way excludes the possibility of the reader also having an emotional response to a text.

A book that is worthy of study, it seems, is more than merely an object of study, and more than just the site of an interaction between the reader and the text. It must elicit a contribution from the reader towards its understanding; a contribution that brings the text into contact with the real world experience of the reader. This is an essential element in the Freirean notion of critical literacy, that reading a text is an active process “structured and informed by presuppositions about the way the world is and ought to be” (Roberts, 1996, p. 152). In such a case then, the difference between a literary work and other fiction is that there is something within literature that transcends the time and place in which it is written, and that goes beyond the bounds of simple story telling and enters the wider realm of revealing universal insights into the problems of being human. Perhaps it even creates new myths, but certainly it is providing new ways of interpreting and understanding reality. To the extent that this argument holds, the intention of the writer is no longer the most important feature of any work; it is the interpreted experience of the reader that has that role. Professor Monod—whose assessment of Dickens differs from that of Leavis—has argued that “Dickens, like all truly great writers, cannot but ... mean different things for different readers, and these things all in him, whether he was aware of all these implications or not” (Ford, Johnson, Miller, & Monod, 1962, p. 6). Freire stressed the importance of reading the world in order to read the word, and the reader’s world is a historically located context for reading. A great book need not have been

considered so by its original author, nor are the interpretations of the text confined to the historical location of the author.

Hartley supplements Buchanan's 1938 list by drawing on the work of Adler, to include four additional qualifiers for a book to be considered a great book:

1. They must be eminently discussable books by virtue of the fact that they deal in a variety of ways with basic ideas and issues.
2. The great books are not only worth reading more than once, but must be read many times to be fully understood.
3. The great book must be written by a generalist, whether or not the author is also a specialist in some particular field, and it must be written for the curious, intelligent layman, not for the specialist author's peers – other specialists in his field.
4. The great books are to be drawn from all types of imaginative and narrative literature, and from all areas of human learning. They are not to be limited to great epics, novels or plays. (Adler, 1988, cited in Hartley, 2001, p. 149)

It is in the spirit of these understandings that *Hard Times* belongs on the shelf of great literary works. It is also my claim that regardless of what Dickens intentionally placed in his text of *Hard Times*, there are interpretations that can be made of it that have application to contemporary issues, as Forster had predicted. Indeed, I will argue that this extends beyond literature; Dickens was such an acute observer of the human condition that in *Hard Times* he successfully presents case-notes to the modern reader, of the human outcomes of an instrumental education about which he could never have theorized.

### **The evolution of a thesis**

I mentioned earlier that my original question had become simplified. However, reading *Hard Times* in the context of Dickens's other works and activities complicated it once again. His notion of 'fancy', his references to animals and talking ravens all seemed to hint at how Dickens thought his writing was able to affect his readers. If fiction, whether literature or not, is capable of influencing people, there must be a mechanism by which

this occurs. Is the power of the word simply a product of its presentation and distribution, or is there something more? Dickens was explicit in his thoughts on the matter: “[T]o stimulate and rouse the public soul to a compassionate or indignant feeling ... I believe to be one of fiction’s highest uses” (Dickens in Story, Tillotson, & Easson, 1993, p. 405). However, he was less clear about any possible mechanism by which such rousing might occur. He did provide some hints: Thomas Gradgrind opens *Hard Times* with a speech on the virtues of a fact-based education. Dickens also has him seem to refer to his students as “reasoning animals” in that same opening address. I wondered why. After all, in 1854, human beings were widely regarded as being a special creation rather than animals. So, why that phrase and why in that particular speech in this particular book? Some years earlier Dickens had written a flattering review of the book *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, a book that had introduced the possibility of evolution to the general public. In fact, it had also introduced the idea that the human species was the final step on an evolutionary ladder. Dickens had opened *Bleak House* with a dinosaur; did he also open *Hard Times*—his next work—with a reference to an ancient past? Is Dickens suggesting that the human propensity for story, and its rousing effects, came about through evolution? I wondered.

Regardless of the provenance of the sentiment, it is just that; it is sentiment, an emotional response to black marks on pieces of paper. Why does writing affect us? Oscar Wilde is popularly—although not necessarily correctly—reputed to have said that one must have a heart of stone to read the death of Little Nell without laughing. How can this—or any other—emotional response to a text be explained? It was my attempts to follow Dickens’s hints and locate a possible basis for the ability of a literary work to influence human emotions, understandings and attitudes, particularly within education, that gave me the final shape for this thesis. If I had not quite found a scientific answer, I at least felt that I had established the value of following Dickens’s trail of clues. Those clues always seemed to point to animals informing our understanding of ourselves. Four years before *Hard Times*—and nine years before Darwin’s great work—Dickens has a horse say that it understands man to be “a powerful species of monkey” (Dickens, 1850c, p. 506), which seems a remarkably prescient observation. Equally suggestive is the talking raven which made its appearance in *Barnaby Rudge*—and was later immortalised by Edgar Allen Poe. It is described “as if he had been some supernatural agent” (1841, p. 36), and Dickens seems to be hinting at secret knowledge when, expecting a noise to be caused by the

raven, the question is asked “What was that—him tapping at the door?” and draws the response “[t]is someone knocking softly at the shutter” (p. 32). It seemed to me that Dickens had suggested where I needed to begin this thesis: I should look for signs from the animal world, and particularly from birds. I should look for behaviours that could indicate a possible developmental pathway for the human ability to create and understand stories. Are there some indications of a narrative type of thought-processing in animals that may justify Dickens’s almost-hints about our own human relationship with his literary works?

I remembered the famous pigeon study by B.F. Skinner, about which he wrote, “The experiment might be said to demonstrate a sort of superstition. The bird behaves as if there were a causal relation between its behavior and the presentation of food, although such a relation is lacking” (1948, p. 171). Regardless of whether it was a superstitious behaviour, it was an interesting one. Surely it demonstrated that pigeons had some sort of ‘cause and effect’ understanding of their relationship with the world, and what is narrative if not a ‘cause and effect’ presentation of information, with its temporal implications? Birds separated from the human evolutionary line a long time ago, so long ago that their closest living relative is the crocodile. If pigeons display behaviour which suggests that narrative-type processing of data may be a biologically selected element in their thinking, then it has implications for our own thinking. This would lend support to Trollope’s comment that “monthly novels convince, when learned quartos fail to do so”, and provide a possible explanation for it. Perhaps rational thought is not as natural a process as I had assumed; perhaps some narrative-type processing is the fundamental form of thinking and rationality only a subsequent possibility. That would certainly have implications for education. If it were not possible for humans to escape the results of ‘cause and effect’, narrative-type, superstitious thinking patterns, it would raise questions about both purpose and method within systems of education. In what way, then, might this line of thinking influence a reading of *Hard Times*, and introduce new ideas into the understanding of the text?

Human beings have a well-developed, and well known, tendency to identify patterns in the world around them, faces in clouds and so on, and this may underlie both our story telling (Boyd, 2009) and our thinking. In the construction of a narrative we create a pattern from events, firstly by ordering information and then by supplying such links as

bind it together as an entity. In a social context, a particular narrative ‘reconstruction’ of some events can provide an advantage to the narrator. In such a case the presentation becomes a perspective rather than a lie; we see examples in the clumsily elaborate fabrications of children who are seeking both to avoid blame and to avoid lying. However, the narrative now conveys information that is beyond the facts; it has a social component. The first step has been made from recounting events to portraying events, and for a people that can interpret symbols we no longer need the event, only the portrait. With the ability to write it becomes possible to transmit the portrait beyond the bounds of time and place. The narrative creates rather than reflects reality; this seems a likely beginning for the development of abstract thought. Those who could most readily convey and understand the patterns of life would be the most successful. Philosophy, of course, is the development of this negotiation over the relationship between truth and knowledge. How do we know what we think we know?

One of the things that bothered me is the ‘nature of truth’ kind of epistemological argument. Hume’s dismissal of inductive reasoning, or at least his argument that we cannot be sure of anything inductively, seems wrong in some real-world way. It violates the concept of learning and of experience, because we cannot learn predictable ‘truths’ from our experiences. This thinking seems to belong at the local Philosophy Club, rather than providing solutions to the problems that individuals face in their daily existence. Similarly with the argument that we cannot comprehend reality, or identify objective truth; perhaps we cannot be sure that what we see is an accurate representation of what exists. Again, this seems less than useful; perhaps that object that I identify as a large truck is not real in the way that I perceive it to be, and doubtless its impact will be subjective—or illusory—if I choose not to move from its path.

Evolution does not need reality or truth in any philosophical sense, and neither do the creatures that live their lives under its shadow. Trollope seems more right than wrong about the inability of rational thought to trump emotion. Individuals of any species only need to respond to their perceived world, with a greater or lesser understanding of surrounding events and circumstances. Of course, it can never be true for an individual that ‘any interpretation is as good as any other interpretation’ when there is the potential for natural selection. It may be possible in literary analysis, but it’s a dangerous assumption in nature. The storyteller, however, can allow the audience to share in and to

learn from situations that are not easily observed—or survived—in the world beyond the narrative.

In some ways this is a return to my starting point, for part of me was still looking for the significance of Biggles, and an understanding of how I could have an emotional response to Ayesha. I was aware that they existed only somewhere between the pages and my mind, and that they were in part my own construction, but in some way they still seemed real. I also had a very anecdotal feeling that the books I had read had helped to shape my beliefs that ‘right’ should triumph over ‘wrong’, that making correct moral decisions was an important part of being a ‘good’ person, that the misuse of power to control others was ‘bad’. Dickens was certainly not thinking of Biggles or Ayesha when he wrote:

It would be hard to estimate the amount of gentleness and mercy that has made its way among us through these slight channels. Forbearance, courtesy, consideration for poor and aged, kind treatment of animals, love of nature, abhorrence of tyranny and brute force—many such good things have been first nourished in the child's heart by this powerful aid. (Dickens, 1854a, p. 97)

However, he was writing of the books, not only the stories, which fill a fortunate child’s life<sup>12</sup>. The question that I had originally proposed to answer—“what unique contribution could literature make to educational philosophy?”—had now firmly been reframed as “what contribution can a reading of *Hard Times* make to philosophical and historical discussions around education, with particular attention being paid to how any such contribution might be demonstrated through an analysis of educational themes and relationships within the text?”

I had now developed my thinking to the point that my thesis would posit the possibility that the processes that underpin narrative thought make a unique contribution to human understanding. Furthermore, I would argue that this distinctive contribution can be demonstrated through an analysis of educational themes and relationships in Dickens’s *Hard Times*. To do this I still felt that the work of Paulo Freire would be helpful in identifying and informing such an analysis, particularly using a Freirean perspective to

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<sup>12</sup> Dickens uses Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, as an example, so he is discussing the imaginative fiction that children read, not limited to that which we might consider ‘fairy stories’ today. *Robinson Crusoe* must have been a personal favourite of Dickens’s because he also makes reference to it in *Where We Stopped Growing* and in *Hard Times*.



examine the relationships between the characters and their world, and to illuminate educational themes. In particular, Freire's notions of praxis, of reflective action, and conscientization enable an understanding of *Hard Times* that was not available to its contemporary reviewers. Dickens's *Hard Times* is illuminated, not only as Ruskin (1860/1866) had claimed "by a circle of stage fire" (p. 24), but by the flickering light of modern science; it is not as bright as gaslight, but neither does it easily extinguish.

### **One slender track not overgrown with weeds, where we may walk with children**

The heading for this section is taken directly from *Frauds on the Fairies*, an 1854 article written by Dickens and published in *Household Words*. Perhaps there are more weeds than it seems Dickens is suggesting, but the track is still there; a faint and ancient path through time and connected childhoods, "where we may walk with children, sharing their delights" (1854a, p. 97). It reaches back into our evolutionary past, and can be faintly seen near the horizon ahead—in my imagination, I fancy that I can just make out a tiny airplane; perhaps it is Biggles—a slender thread that binds us. The stories that make up this pathway link cultures, but the use of narrative itself links humanity. The first section of my thesis is therefore devoted to evidence assembled from across disciplines.

From evolutionary biology and psychology I will argue that narrative-type thought processes may be an important part of our human interactions with the external world. In fact the evidence suggests that they are an important way of interpreting the events and circumstances of our natural world; that we use them to link these isolated pieces of information to form an acceptable understanding. Perhaps because at the time when this tendency was first formed there were few ways of verifying many of the stories, or more likely because truth is more academic than is survival—sometimes fear is more useful than analysis—our mechanism for testing their validity seems less well developed than our mechanism for creating them. Accepted stories can become the yardstick by which new information is judged, and possibly a mechanism by which new cultures are formed. Perhaps, again, the life of Josiah Bounderby provides some insight into our ways of understanding; the narrative he constructs becomes the truth for him. Neither his dialogic exchanges nor his behaviour in *Hard Times* would necessarily have been different if his life story had been as he claimed. Dickens, it seems, had some idea that all culture: individual, communal, social, and epistemic might have its own creation narrative.

Through education people become more or less capable of deductive rational thought, and, potentially at least, more or less human in a Freirean sense. If humanization, as Freire understands it, involves the removal of social and cultural limitations to an individual's understanding of the world, and agency within that world, then it has epistemological implications. In fact it may have epistemological imperatives; it seems difficult to have agency without a propositional understanding of the world. Such propositional knowledge, of itself, introduces limits to the agency of the subject. Gradgrind's education of 'facts', Dickens suggests to us, creates a limit to agency in some way—a limit-situation, in Freirean terms, an obstacle to full humanization. Neither Louisa and Tom, nor Bitzer are illustrated as even being in the process of becoming more fully human. This is an interesting insight by Dickens, and seems unlikely to be unintentional. However, there is a word of caution needed, because any systematic educational process must introduce, or utilise, ways of understanding the world, of reading it. Shaull, in his foreword to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, proposed the dilemma to be:

Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity or it becomes the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (1970/1996, p. 16)

That seems to represent Freire's position in the text, but such a simple dichotomy relies on one particular reading of the world, and nowhere is evidence adduced that might support the stated claim that these are the only possibilities. Of course, if Freirean education is a process of becoming less certain of certainties (Roberts, 2007), then openness towards a wider range of possibilities must be inherent, regardless of this simple 'either/or' presentation. So, as part of questioning the underlying tensions in life and understanding their nature as constructed and changeable, this foundational pedagogical perspective can be used to illustrate the complexity of Dickens's position. Similarly, to the extent that Freire's observations of dehumanization are not a vague concept, but a reality involving the denial or restriction of opportunity to go beyond an animal existence, they too help illuminate *Hard Times*. Dickens, although differing from Freire in some aspects, indicates a similar—although I think more nuanced—understanding of the

potential for education to liberate or enslave. Certainly, there are facts about the world that can be discovered, and they exist outside our personal interpretations and lie in the realm of scientific data and theory. However, as both Dickens and Freire suggest, it is what we think ought to be, and what we think is, that defines the world in which we each operate—and both Dickens and Freire present a vision of what they believe ought to be, in education and society.

### **Why Freire and in what way?**

It is a significant part of my thesis not only that *Hard Times* can be read as more than simply a ‘good yarn’, but that Dickens intended it to be so. Therefore, I need to demonstrate that a particular interpretation of the work can be shown to be so unified with the known intentions, personality and interests of the author that a good case can be made that the interpretation presented is the interpretation intended by Dickens. The author himself assisted me in this process, because he published a single volume edition of *Hard Times*; this he had done with his previous works, and would continue to do with those subsequent. However, with *Hard Times* he extended the title from that of the original serialised version by the addition of the phrase *for these times*. This is easily understood as an authorial highlighting of the contemporary importance and relevance of the work to its day, rather than being an attempt to restrict the scope of the text to the period of its publication. The change was an emphasis not a limitation and it is a change that Dickens thought worthwhile. It is in the spirit of re-framing some of Dickens’s ideas into the words of these times that I turn to the early and most influential work of Paulo Freire. It is my contention that Freire’s work, and especially *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, allows us to see *Hard Times* as the coherent work of educational philosophy that I maintain it to be.

Paulo Freire was one of the most influential writers, in the field of education, of the late twentieth century. His most famous work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, has been widely read, discussed, referenced, and—of course—criticised and critiqued. Writing from a point of view that was heavily influenced by a Marxist metanarrative and the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, Freire proposed that the goal of education was liberation, “knowing [reality] better, [so] he or she can better transform it” (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 21). Freire proposed that ‘reading the world’—a reader’s personal interpretation and understanding of the relationship between themselves and their environment—is an

essential precursor to ‘reading the word’ of a text. This is, on one level, almost self-evidently true. Any reader brings their own understanding of the world into the interpretation of a text. That is why, for example, second language readers—and probably native language readers as well—have more difficulty understanding a text in which the subject matter is outside of their experience; I daresay that an article on soccer makes easier reading to most Brazilians than one on cricket, even in Portuguese. Important though this is—and it is part of the justification for including the historical information in my thesis—Freire means something more when he claims that reading is a process of “searching for, seeking to create an understanding of what is read”, critically interpreted through the “previous reading of the world” (Freire, 1998, pp. 18-19). It is this active process of engaging with a text, rather than simply absorbing the words, and ‘creating’ rather than accepting an understanding that makes Freire so helpful for a reading of *Hard Times*. My second question then becomes: “to what extent and in what ways might the work of Paulo Freire be helpful for informing my analysis; particularly how a Freirean perspective on the relationships between the characters might illuminate educational themes?” However, having said that, it is important to state that this thesis is not about Paulo Freire, I draw upon Freire’s work in places, but only in order to illuminate aspects of Dickens’s text.

I have already mentioned the similarities between Dickens’s Gradgrindian education and Freire’s famous critique of ‘banking education’ where education is an act of depositing knowledge, and “students are the depositories, and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating the teacher issues communiques” (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 53). Compare this with Dickens’s description of an “inclined plane of little vessels then and there arranged in order, ready to have imperial gallons of facts poured into them until they were full to the brim” (*HT*, pp. 5-6). Surely we are looking at the same thing—and both owe a debt to Locke’s tabula rasa—but Dickens goes on to critique rather than just describe this model. His metaphor has its origins in childhood literature—*The Arabian Nights’ Entertainment*<sup>13</sup>—where Ali Baba’s slave kills the forty thieves by pouring boiling oil into the jars in which they were concealed. Dickens asks whether pouring facts into

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<sup>13</sup> There is no accepted canonical version of this very popular anthology from the Islamic golden age. It is popularly known as *The Arabian Nights* or as *One Thousand and One Nights*, and it introduced Aladdin, Sinbad, and Ali Baba to a western readership. A very popular translation—and bowdlerisation—by Edward Lane (*Arabian Nights*, 1840) had been published in a three volume set in 1840 and was almost certainly that known to Dickens.

children will serve to “always kill outright the robber Fancy lurking within—or sometimes only maim him and distort him!” (*HT*, p. 10). This is a scathing comment on the ability of education to corrupt as well as to liberate. Similarly, it is apparent that Dickens recognises that education can disempower the individual and take away their ability to act upon and transform the world; “Bring to me ... yonder baby just able to walk, and I will engage that it shall never wonder” (*HT*, p. 41), he has his schoolmaster rather menacingly assure the reader<sup>14</sup>. Such an education must be to the advantage of someone other than the student; an assertion that both Dickens and Freire address.

Jean-François Lyotard, French philosopher and literary theorist, suggested that where the production of knowledge becomes separate and exterior to the knower and the learning process, “Knowledge ceases to be an end in itself, it loses its ‘use-value’” (Lyotard, 1984, p. 5). This exteriorized, packaged and commodified knowledge is one of the changes brought by the rise of industrialisation, and capitalism. For many people, education has become a way of improving the market value of their labour, as employment has become increasingly distanced from work. Education itself has increasingly been structured to produce outcomes which fill the requirements of industry, and in doing so has created a society in which an individual’s social value is described by their education and their occupation. This has become accepted as customary, and is the “ideological basis for forms of knowledge and pedagogy which refuse to interrogate public forms and which deny difference as a fundamental referent for a democratic society” (Giroux, 1988, p. 172). Freire has identified the results of such practices in his model of ‘banking education’, and distinguishes it from a pedagogy which legitimates questioning ‘the world’. Freire contrasts the practices of ‘banking education’ with ‘problem posing’ education, and proposes an ideological difference—although the notion of a democratic society is problematic in the texts of both Dickens and Freire. One writer promoted revolution, whereas the other seems to view social class as unproblematic. Dickens, as indicated earlier, evinced in *Hard Times* a similar concern to that of Freire. Neither argued for education as a simple process of information transfer. What Freire’s work will help me to demonstrate is that Dickens not only questioned the relationship between

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<sup>14</sup> This comment, rather ironically and perhaps not accidentally, echoes that attributed to the founders of the Jesuit order; “Give me a child until he is seven and I will give you the man”. The relationship between education and indoctrination has always been a troubled one and Dickens’s anti-catholic sentiment is no secret (Gardiner, 2011).

education, valuable knowledge, and the demands of commerce, but demonstrated the conflicts of interest inherent within it.

Even the most casual of readers will quickly identify education as having some importance within *Hard Times*; such a reader need scarcely be any more attentive to observe that fact and fancy are, in some way, set in opposition to each other as the basis of education. In fact, education is in itself almost a character in the text—a brooding darkness obstructing the light—so strong is its presence, but it cannot be assumed that a trivial form of ‘fact vs fancy’ was the target of Dickens’s attention, for it was not. Dickens’s text with its predictions of future outcomes—I call it a mid-Victorian thought experiment—shows that education is too important to the individual to be controlled by business interests, for it can be in the interests of profit to reduce people to “reasoning animals” (*HT*, p. 5) or to those “generically called ‘the Hands,’” (*HT*, p. 52). Such interests are incommensurable with human personal development, because they measure the value of human existence as a quantitative outcome. Economic returns may be judged in such a way, but human existence cannot ethically be so reduced. Freire stressed with his ‘problem posing’ view of education that knowledge is attached to reality, and to be useful in understanding the world it must link the knower, the knowledge, and the known in an interdependent relationship. Freire’s literacy work argued for the importance of ‘reading the world’, but his philosophy of education went further, and claimed the importance of changing the world; the reflective action of praxis. Freire constructed an image—perhaps even a codification<sup>15</sup>—of liberation through education, with education shown as the tool for change, not the objective of it. His famous term conscientization—*conscientização* in the original—refers to “learning to perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the oppressive elements of reality” (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 19, Translator's note ). Dickens had proposed that the economic considerations of industry, with the power that the owners of industry then wielded over the economy of the state, was in danger of becoming just such an oppressive element in the lives of members of the working class.

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<sup>15</sup> Freire’s political literacy program used illustrations called codifications; each of these was an image shown to the peasant learners. By eliciting responses from the learners—as done in communicative language teaching today— they were guided towards the chosen learning objective.

Importantly, with problem-posing education Freire claims a dialogic relationship between the teacher and the student, as distinct from the monologic base represented in his banking metaphor. An important feature of dialogue is its mutuality, both teacher and student gain. The purpose of dialogue is to encourage discovery of both the subjective and objective realities of the concrete world in which the learners live, as Freire notes;

In problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically **the way they exist** in the world **with which** and **in which** they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation. (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 64, emphasis in the original)

They do this through *conscientização* as an ability to understand the underlying causes of the current reality as experienced by themselves as subject. Freire's view of growth by discussion of differing viewpoints, to reach a mutual understanding through dialogue has its roots in Hegelian dialectic, but like Marx, he believes it must be understood through thought and practice. Freire interprets the interdependence of oppressor and oppressed as a dehumanizing relationship of mutual disadvantage. Partly this is because Freire sees an absolute dichotomy between the positions of oppressor and oppressed and denies the possibility of any meaningful dialogue between them. There are no negotiable subject positions possible in his reading of this world, because "any apparent dialogue or communication between the elites and the masses is really the depositing of 'communiqués', whose contents are intended to exercise a domesticating influence" (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 112).

Intention and outcome are not synonymous, and so any domesticating influence need not be intentional. Freire makes, I think, too big a claim, and so when he concludes that "[s]ince oppressors and oppressed are antithetical, what serves the interests of one group disserves the interests of the others" (p. 126) he has gone beyond his evidence. At best, this seems a trivially true dichotomy, but it is a very simple analysis and no better supported—and perhaps less true—than Dickens's claim of common interests confused by conflicting perspectives. It is difficult to see what homogenous cluster of "interests" could be so clearly allocated to each of two groups within a single society as to be completely antithetical. Even in a capitalist society it is not necessary—although it is typical—that poverty is an outcome of wealth.

In a Freirean universe, oppressed and oppressor are always in absolute opposition, whereas Dickens argues for the legitimacy of difference and an acceptance of a commonality. It would be easy to argue that this is a naïve view, but is it any more so than the proposition that revolution will change human nature? Dickens expresses his views directly when he writes of the “gulf of separation” between employers and employed, whose “interests must be understood to be identical or must be destroyed” (Dickens, 1854c, p. 558). This understanding may be compared with that of Marx, echoing as it does the famous opening claim of the *Communist Manifesto* (Marx & Engels, 1844/1998) that “[t]he history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles” with the “oppressor and oppressed ... in constant opposition to one another”, with a likely outcome being “the common ruin of the contending classes” (p. 50). It is through Marx that Freire and Dickens are linked most clearly. Freire read the words of Marx, whereas Dickens read the world of Marx. *Hard Times* can be read as an illustration accompanying the *Communist Manifesto*, as a critique of the rise of self-absorbed industrial capitalism. As Marx also noted: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it” (Tucker, 1978, p. 145), and both Charles Dickens and Paulo Freire wanted to change the world. However, Freire understood revolution to be part of the educational process; freedom and humanisation would be “achieved with neither verbalism nor activism, but rather with praxis, that is, with *reflection* and *action* directed at the structures to be transformed” (1970/1996, p. 107). Freire sought change through revolution: Dickens sought change to prevent it.

A central concept in Freire’s work is what he labels dehumanisation, and he discusses it in both social and animalistic terms. Socially, he uses his understanding of Marxist class struggle to argue that;

The struggle [for humanization] is possible only because dehumanization, although a historical fact, is not a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed. (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 26)

Here, dehumanization is clearly a result of the “free competition, accompanied by a social and political constitution adapted to it, and by the economic and political sway of the bourgeois class” (Marx & Engels, 1844/1998, p. 57) that concerned Marx—and



Dickens. It was the reduction of the human worker to the condition of being “an appendage of the machine” (p. 58), a “hand” like Stephen Blackpool, being worked “no nigher to ony dis’ant object — ceptin awlus, Death” (*HT*, p. 115). Dickens shares this view, and Freire’s text sheds a useful light on that of Dickens. Less helpful is the animalistic concept of dehumanization, as explained by Freire. Animals, as interpreted by Freire through Marx, are fundamentally—and metaphysically—different from human beings, and dehumanization denies what Freire sees as these fundamental differences by treating humans as animals. This position is difficult to sustain beyond the metaphorical without some rather speculative interpretations of the relationship of people to animals. Animals, for example, are defined, by Freire and for Freire, by their lack of ability to construct or modify the nature of their own existence—their decisions belong to their species rather than the individual—and they are unable to objectify or give meaning to their world. However, modern scientific thinking now questions whether this is as clear-cut as Freire had imagined. Once we also disregard Freire’s impossible-to-prove metaphysical claim of an “ontological and historical vocation of becoming more fully human” (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 65), we are left with his Marxist iteration of the idea that it is the decision to value all human beings as inherently equal, and subsequent action to organise society to reflect that understanding, that constitutes a transformation towards social justice.

Educators such as John Dewey—whose major writings on education were between 1897 and 1938—had already rejected ‘banking education’ (although without naming it) and argued that students needed to be engaged in meaningful activities which would allow them to apply the concepts they learned. In many ways Dewey’s ideas, although based in childhood education, seem very Freirean as he rejects a strictly top-down educative process;

Save as the efforts of the educator connect with some activity which the child is carrying on of his own initiative independent of the educator, education becomes reduced to a pressure from without ... [and] cannot truly be called educative. (Dewey, 1959, p. 20)

Indeed, Dewey had even identified a similar tension within education as that which Shaul was to mention in his introduction to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, that there exists in the

activity of education a political aspect with regard to both oppression and liberation. Dewey noted that:

[T]he social definition of education, as getting adjusted to civilization, makes of it a forced and external process, and results in subordinating the freedom of the individual to a preconceived social and political status ... the only possible adjustment which we can give the child under existing conditions, is that which arises through putting him in complete possession of all his powers. (Dewey, 1959, p. 21)

Paulo Freire's linking of a particular understanding of human nature with a proper formation of the individual and society is, in fact, part of a long tradition of Western philosophy. It can be traced through Dewey—and, I suggest, Dickens—at least as far back as Plato and his exposition of the nature of justice, in *The Republic*. That is, that there is a purpose to education, that is to shape and nurture human nature into specific forms that enable the realization of what is best for a community. It is natural for any thinker to embody the thoughts of others in his own understandings, and Freire built his ideas onto an existing philosophical foundation which included a tradition of purpose-based education. One of the educational positions which Dickens, Dewey, and Freire attempt to defend is that there should be no point at which the interest of the individual gets subsumed into that of the wider society; while still maintaining that the individual has obligations to that society.

### **And so it goes**

To develop my claims regarding *Hard Times*, the second part of my thesis needs to move across the disciplines into history, sociology and literary analysis. I will begin by examining the times in which *Hard Times* was written, the background that this provides, and the man who wrote it. This is a return to those unanswered questions that I mentioned earlier, what was Dickens trying to do with *Hard Times*, and how can we know this? It is also a historical excursion into the mid-Victorian industrial and intellectual landscape; a journey to the sources of Dickens's social commentary that will highlight the accuracy of his facts and the perspicacity of his fictions. I will begin with a brief and selective biography of Charles Huffam Dickens, to help illuminate the arguments he was making

about education in *Hard Times*. Although I argue for the universal nature of many of the insights provided in the text, the fact remains that both the author and his work have a historical location. My own journey back to the origins of the man and of *Hard Times* enhanced my understanding of the text and its implications. I have therefore included some of this work, knowing that it will help the contemporary reader to locate the text more clearly in time, all the while allowing its universal ideas to be more clearly displayed.

It is an important theoretical observation—and one of which I may remind the reader on occasion—that not only was Dickens not a critic of social class, he was writing before social class had become a central component of social critique. Similarly, not only was no evolutionary interpretation of the natural world available to him, all scientific and social discussion needed to make room for a white, English, protestant god. Dickens's biographical sketch, therefore, is necessary to illustrate not only his upbringing but the intellectual and cultural environment in which he formed his views of the world. It will be seen that education was important to him from very early in his life, and it remained so. The story of his life illustrates his growing interest in education as a social good, rather than as the more limited private good that is now so commonplace.

It will also become apparent that there are points of contact between Dickens's own life and the text that is *Hard Times*. Furthermore, these points, and the overall work, are such that not only does Dickens's biography illuminate aspects of the text, but the text itself sheds some light on the man. Some of the things that Dickens was saying, such as the importance of childhood to development and the difficulty of overcoming the problems caused in childhood now have a scientific basis. As does the importance of imagination and that of Fairy-tales. Louisa would have understood her situation much better if her childhood had given her the tools. Indeed, it is a strength of literature that it provides the opportunity for a writer who is not a philosopher, a politician, or a theorist, to present his ideas to an audience that includes those who are not philosophers, politicians, or theorists. It is a problem-posing form of intellectual democracy, and it encourages engagement with the ideas presented.

An internet search for 'Josiah Bounderby' returned only 7960 results, whereas 'Thomas Gradgrind' laid claim to 22800 and 'Louisa Gradgrind' 3910. Even 'Mrs Sparsit' outdoes

Josiah with 8300 results and ‘Sissy Jupe’ returns a staggering 126,000. Although I am surprised at Sissy’s popularity, it is Bounderby’s modest tally that is significant. There are very few minor characters in *Hard Times*, and Bounderby is certainly not one of them. He seemed ripe for analysis, even the name Bounderby—redolent with the scent of an invasive social climber in full bloom—is evocative of the disparaging term ‘bounder’<sup>16</sup>. The communications between Bounderby and Gradgrind also seemed interesting when considered within a framework of Freirean authentic/inauthentic dialogic exchanges. I have, therefore, devoted a considerable part of this work to arguing that we are well advised to accept the accuracy of Dickens’s observations and writing, and that there is no reason that Bounderby should not also be judged this way. He was more rewarding to investigate than I had expected—both as a metaphorical device and individual—and amply demonstrated the ability of literature to present ideas as serious as any thesis.

Freire’s influential ideas help illuminate some of the thinking behind and within *Hard Times*. Neither Dickens nor Freire were educational theorists, they were both practical men who used their writing to disseminate their ideas. Freire’s ideas, applied to *Hard Times*, highlight Dickens’s thinking, added to modern science they allow us to examine our own world. Dickens, unlike Freire, was writing without the benefit of the work later provided by the two great theorists of his age Marx and Darwin. Instead he had Mill, Malthus, Ricardo and Bentham. He disagreed with these writers, and *Hard Times* is his response to supporters of their theories. Specifically, through his characters Bounderby and Gradgrind, in *Hard Times* he expresses his concern for instrumental education whether it is controlled by commercial or state interests. Education, for Dickens, is as much a process of freedom and humanisation as it is for Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is a revolutionary work rather than an academic one; its few references are often to the ideas of Fanon, Guevara, Marx and Mao. In it Freire calls not just for radical change, but literally for revolution, and he uses the language of the Marxist cause as he argues his position. Like Marx himself, Freire sees an unresolvable internal conflict between social classes; only by destroying the existing structures can a better society be built. The final words of the *Communist Manifesto* are a call to arms, a call for the

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<sup>16</sup> The earliest mention I can find of this derivation is Elizabeth Gordon’s 1917 article on names in Dickens’s work. The Oxford English Dictionary, however, finds no trace of ‘bounder’ as a socially disagreeable or dishonourable individual before the 1880s. I suspect, and suspicion is all it can be, that the word was in common street use in Dickens’s time, but seldom appeared in the more formal world of print. This is not as unlikely as it sounds; Professor Ian Gordon (1997) recorded his own discovery of some letters in which no less than three words were found to be 40 years earlier than the OED record.

working class of the mid nineteenth century to remake their circumstances into those of their own choosing.

The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. (Marx & Engels, 1844/1998)

The final words of *Hard Times* are more reflective than those of the *Manifesto*, but nonetheless recognise the need for social action. They too are a call for change, but the call is not for one part of society to rise up against another, but rather for each of us to reflect upon what a better society would be, and to take action within our own sphere to bring that about. Unlike Freire or Guevara, Marx or Mao, Dickens proposes no total solution and has no pre-determined solution to the problem he poses. However *Hard Times* encourages the reader to consider the role of education in promoting social justice, and Dickens seems to suggest that the Writing is on the Wall, and that it is only by protecting the equality of our humanity rather than the ideology of the economy that a society can prosper, in the fullest sense. Dickens closes the text as a narrator, first describing Louisa's future and then addressing the reader. He speaks of Louisa,

trying hard to know her humbler fellow creatures, and to beautify their lives of machinery and reality with those imaginative graces and delights, without which the heart of infancy will wither up, the sturdiest physical manhood will be morally stark death, and the plainest national prosperity figures can show, will be the Writing on the Wall,—she holding this course as part of no fantastic vow, or bond, or brotherhood, or sisterhood, or pledge, or covenant, or fancy dress, or fancy fair; but simply as a duty to be done,—did Louisa see these things of herself? These things were to be.

Dear reader! It rests with you and me, whether, in our two fields of action, similar things shall be or not. Let them be! We shall sit with lighter bosoms on the hearth, to see the ashes of our fires turn grey and cold. (*HT*, p. 222)

Dickens was no single-minded social reformer; he was a writer who showed great awareness of the inequalities within society and the injustices they sometimes represented. As Cunningham explains so clearly,

this does not mean ... that his reputation as a social reformer was undeserved; rather, his responses to particular issues were shaped by his abiding concern for decency and humanity, and not by any coherent doctrine of the proper role of the state. (2011, p. 159)

There is no theory of social justice—or anything else—that Dickens is proposing in *Hard Times*. However, through fiction, there is a sense of social justice that he attempts to induce in his readers. Perhaps he offers no solutions—although I think that he makes it clear what he thinks the solutions are—but that does not imply that he is unable to see the problems. It is modern academic work that tests theories for their explanatory power, but a novelist is permitted to examine outcomes in a different way. This analysis of *Hard Times* demonstrates that a literary work can also present claims—if not scientific theories—that have both explanatory and predictive powers. I suggest that the text transcends the time in which it was written—although history is useful to help us understand the original text—and can shed light upon, and encourage understandings of, events contemporary with both the writer and the reader. In short, that *Hard Times* is for all times.

And so it begins, my journey of enquiry to address the question of what contribution a reading of *Hard Times* might make to informing philosophical and historical discussions around education, with particular attention being paid to how any such contribution might be demonstrated through an analysis of educational themes and relationships within the text? This thesis will frame the enquiry within a historical investigation, but will draw upon the philosophy of the Brazilian educator and writer, Paulo Freire to address the question of: “in what ways might the work of Paulo Freire be helpful in informing my analysis, particularly how might a Freirean perspective on the relationships between the characters illuminate educational themes?”

## Chapter Summary and organisation of the thesis

The introductory chapter to this thesis has provided an overview of the scope and the direction of the study. It is a thesis grounded in personal experience, and grown from personal interest. The starting point is that for almost as long as I can remember, reading has been associated with education, with schooling, and with pleasure. This personal response has prompted me to explore some of the possibilities of narrative-type thought processes hinted at by Charles Dickens, and to ask why it might be that *Hard Times* seems to allow—or even promote—both educational and emotional responses.

*Hard Times*—as a literary work—and its relationship with the world of the reader, remains at the core of this thesis. I begin with a personal journey through the world of my own interactions with books, and the awareness that I had an emotional response, which sometimes seemed to have an ethical foundation, to stories that I knew were not true. The educational and moral benefits proposed for the reading of particular types of literature—often called ‘great books’—is examined in an effort to determine which forms of text might influence human thought, and why that might be so. I use the example of Charles Dickens’s 1854 novel *Hard Times* to assist in my determination of what might or might not be a text worthy of intellectual engagement, but which also generated a non-rational response in the reader. *Hard Times* seems to involve the reader in ideas of knowledge beyond fact, and also in the examination of social structures, inter-personal relationships, and the contribution of education to these. In the analysis of such structures and relationships—with particular attention to education—the early work of Paulo Freire is a useful tool, and I explain how and in what ways I draw upon it for insights into Dickens’s text and the analysis of repeating patterns of social and educational injustice. Dickens’s shortest novel was also chosen because it presents a case—as far as the novel form permits—for consideration of the relationship between ‘fact’ and ‘fancy’ in education. This raises the question of the nature of rational and irrational thought processes and their influence on human thought.

I introduce a fairly extensive section, following the clues that Dickens left, that explores the existing literature from across disciplines, in the hope that it may provide insights into the ways in which human thought might be receptive and responsive to non-factual learning—Dickens’s ‘fancy’ and my own emotional responses to fiction. I also introduce

the possibility that not only does narrative-type processing suggest itself as an important part of the human interaction with the world but that it may even lie close to foundations of thought itself. This may suggest new pathways for understanding *Hard Times*—as a fixed and re-examinable text—and its ability to influence the ideas and responses of its readers.

The body of the thesis is then introduced as an examination of *Hard Times*, a text that has had its share of critical attention. However, this thesis is not a study of the literary techniques Dickens employed nor an evaluation of the literary quality of the overall text—or even whether it achieved Dickens’s purported aims as an author or a social commentator. I propose that by reading *Hard Times* in concert with Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and the available historical evidence, it permits—or enables—an examination of the reality of the world in which Dickens set his narrative and of the educational and ethical claims that I consider him to be making in this, his most distinctive text. Importantly, it is *Hard Times*—including the nature of ‘fact’ and ‘fancy’—that is my object of study. The work of Freire is a valuable analytic tool in the process because it is a familiar and accessible window through which to look at structures of oppression in relation to employment and representation.

I propose that Josiah Bounderby is so central to understanding *Hard Times* as an educational text that he is likely to reward closer attention than he has so far received. There may be aspects of his relationships and dialogue with other characters that will illustrate both Dickens’s understandings of his own times, and a modern reader’s understandings of these times. So too might an examination of aspects of the author’s life, and the context in which he set the novel allow new readings of the literary work involved. The heavily historical flavour of this thesis reflects the importance of reading Dickens’s world—and the words with which he responded to it—with an attention to detail that seems unlikely to become available without comparing the text with the time in which it was written. I suggest that the historical understandings are also necessary to allow a modern reader to separate their own context from their reading of the text, so as then to be able to examine that context with insights gained from the text.

*Hard Times* provides a simple story through which the realities of a particular harsh context—the industrial mill-towns of Victorian England and education as the construction



of possibilities—are presented in a way that seems to call upon the reader to respond in some way that will complete the text. This thesis examines the idea that *Hard Times*, by its nature, contains the potential to bring about such a physical response. In addition, by constructing his text to present material in an ethically questioning, even morally ambiguous, way, Dickens calls upon the reader to examine emotional—and therefore beyond rational—interpretations of the actions and outcomes depicted. I will argue that Dickens attempts to illustrate a human sentiment for which empathy is too cold a word and charity is one that has lost its meaning. Hard facts, he seems to say, by their nature create boundaries of interpretation that do not allow for nuanced understandings of the extent to which human interactions with circumstance can create that which is labelled as fact—and then become the foundation of ideologies. Dickens’s text will also be examined for insights into the persistence of fact-based ideologies in today’s context and as an explanation for the ways in which various forms for education have repeated over time.

It is an important argument of my thesis that *Hard Times* has a distinctive contribution to make to educational discourse. However, *Hard Times* is largely fictional in its presentation of the material that it contains. It does not have the rational structure of an argument. In itself, this suggests—rather strongly—that there is something irrational in the way in which a literary work and the human mind interact. This seed was planted in my mind by *Hard Times* and the seed was called Fancy. I started with the assumption that, like all seeds, Fancy—and the significance of *Hard Times*—must have a background story. In Chapter Two, following Dickens’s lead, I examine some of the existing work on memory, narrative, animal cognition, imagination, and mental and optical processing for insights into what form this fanciful irrationality might take.

This second chapter suggests that narrative-type processing has some claim to being a form of understanding and knowledge acquisition that may be widely distributed across different species. It suggests that evidence of narrative-type thought processes seems too widespread—perhaps almost to the point of being universal—to resist the tentative conclusion that Dickens’s insight may have some validity. Dickens even went so far as to have a bird claim that “we Ravens are all good scholars, but that we keep our secret” (Dickens, 1850d, p. 38). Perhaps ravens still keep their secrets, but nevertheless Dickens’s implied link between human fancy and behaviours displayed by animals is worthy of some attention. Beginning with the claim that the conditioned responses of

Skinner's pigeons (1948) are not rational, but still represent the outcome of some mental process, the chapter looks at crows and jays—and Dickens's beloved ravens—and their behaviour. When Dickens has a raven master language it then chooses to write a Natural History of Humans because "You men have had it all your own way for a long time" (Dickens, 1850b, p. 158). So claimed the bird itself, and furthermore it said: "Now, you shall hear a sentiment or two about yourselves". Even in the words of his fictional ravens, Dickens predicts that the development of language will be accompanied by story. Some initial thoughts are introduced on the symbolic and narrative information contained in footprints; arguing that deductive abstract thought is distinct from, and additional to the narrative-type processing and superstitious thinking patterns that it overlays. In this form of analysis, then, language is suggested as a possible tool for the development of reasoning from narrative-type thought processes. The chapter is illustrated with examples of brain processing that are regularly and predictably at variance with fact to suggest that there is considerable evidence that lends support to Dickens's proposition that fact should be approached through fancy. This thesis is centred on a particular literary work, and on the contribution that *Hard Times* might make to discussions on society and education and so this chapter is something of a digression. However, I claim Dickens's own words as my inspiration and in my defence. The permanent nature of any literary work makes it available for—and subject to—constant re-reading and re-interpretation, but not for re-writing. Throughout my thesis, I take advantage of this stability to re-examine Dickens's *Hard Times* and by so doing seek to demonstrate that this text can indeed be understood as a special and important contribution to educational thought.

To engage with any text is to engage with more than just the words on the page because the author and the text also have a historical context. Some understanding of Dickens's life is necessary because while his experiences and environment directly influenced his thinking and writing, his writing has since transcended its historical context. In Chapter Three I give an outline of Dickens's biography, but with particular attention being paid to those circumstances and events of his life that seem to bear most directly on the production of the novel *Hard Times*. His own control over the available biographical information is considered.

Dickens's view of his world, and his place in it, is proposed as central to his understanding of education as an instrument of social change. His own educational

experiences—including those he perceived as denied to him—are discussed and argued as major influences on his understanding of the relationships between education, poverty, social justice and individual opportunity. Not only does the material presented in this chapter highlight aspects of Dickens's personality and interests that bear directly on the reading of *Hard Times*, but—in concert with the rest of the historical material—establishes him as a credible and informed historical source. The chapter also argues and seeks to demonstrate that the relationship between fiction, instruction, and journalism—and his own biography—was one which Dickens continued to explore throughout his life, and that his sensitivity to personal injustice informed his writing. It provides evidence to support the view that before *Hard Times* was written, Dickens had developed an understanding of educational possibilities that went beyond the acquisition of job skills. I suggest that he also saw it as a tool for breaking down the effects of class divisions; not for demolishing social class, but for creating a bond of shared humanity across social difference.

This examination of Dickens's biography provides significant insights into his response to what he perceived to be the role of education in Victorian England, and the problems brought about by reducing education to an instrument of control by capitalist ideologues or religious dogmatists. It is suggested that this underpinned his concern that economic justification had replaced a vision of moral justice as a guide for life and that the education required to live life well had become narrowly instrumental, to the disadvantage of all.

In Chapter Four, the location of *Hard Times* within the body of Dickens's work—the central of the three books of his 'dark period'—and the turmoil in the industrial north of England raises questions that cannot be answered without a historical investigation—why, for example, does Dickens seem to produce his most serious work at this time? Even the critical responses are products of their time and need to be examined against their historical context. In the process of so doing, it seemed apparent that much of *Hard Times* is located in discussions on the role of education in human development, and the power relationships between members of a society.

I look extensively at the fear of revolution brought about by the calls—by the workers, often weavers—for both improvement in working condition in the mills, and for a more

representative voice in the running of the country. I argue that what Dickens's calls a "terrible mistake of these days" is seen in the rising tensions between capitalism and workers' rights. In the chapter I respond to criticisms of inaccuracy of Dickens's understanding of his world, both theoretical and historical, in *Hard Times*. I use Stephen and Martineau extensively to illustrate this. In addition, the accuracy of the physical and geographical descriptions of Coketown and its environs are investigated by comparing them with Angus Reach's contemporary newspaper reports of the conditions prevailing in the industrial north. The Chartist petitioners are extensively discussed, and their call for Christian justice to be an earthly business ethic is noted to present the view that this is also a call within *Hard Times* that has not received sufficient attention.

The chapter also looks at the historicity of the educational setting Dickens displays, and the increasing use of education for both social control and industrial outcomes—showing functional education delivered to working class children in the form of a distorted object lesson with a subtext of political economy rather than the Golden Rule. I argue that these aspects of the text support a claim that Dickens saw education as an active process of enquiry, rather than a passive one of submission to authority; education as an involvement with, rather than a limitation on, the life opportunities of the participants. I suggest that *Hard Times* can be understood as a mid-Victorian thought experiment, predicting businessmen, no matter how charitable their intentions, when allowed to place efficiency/economic targets on education inevitably devalued personal development for the student but increased the economic utility of the outcome, because that which was measured became that which was valued. *Hard Times* was Dickens's response, and his thoughts on an alternative.

My examination of Josiah Bounderby, presented in Chapter Five, draws more heavily on Paulo Freire's work—particularly *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*—than any other. Bounderby is analysed as an allegorical representation of capitalism, and Freire's writing on authenticity and dialogue is helpful in presenting this claim. Where the previous chapter argued for recognition of Dickens's accuracy of portrayal—and perception—of the historical and political context of which he was writing, this chapter argues that the accuracy extends to the characters. I argue that Josiah Bounderby is not a product of Dickens's imagination but an observed type; he is a psychopath before the term had been

coined. As an allegorical figure, Dickens uses him to make the analogous claim for the psychopathy of industrial capitalism.

The chapter begins with an illustration of the acuity of Dickens's perceptions of psychological responses and outcomes, using the life of John Stuart Mill as an illustration. The implication is that Dickens, although unable to theorise in an academic way, was able to present a very real portrayal of the process of human emotional development, and the influence of upbringing. Dickens's proclivity for basing his fictitious characters upon real ones is shown, and used to argue that Dickens seldom invented his characters—he compiled them. The chapter then moves to a very detailed discussion of the significance of the third gentleman in Gradgrind's schoolroom. I extend Fielding's 1953 identification with Henry Cole to demonstrate the pervasive influence of a very rule based philosophy into education, even extending into art. Dickens's parody represented the historical position more accurately than modern scholarship has suggested.

My claim is that Dickens is similarly accurate with Bounderby, and that Dickens's psychopathic rendering of him lends credence to this claim, as I show with modern studies of business leaders. Throughout, I argue that Dickens highlights liberal education and capitalist interests as being fundamentally incommensurable, but superficially similar. The apparent similarities of economic interest and education are the result of the inauthentic representation of the capitalist case, and this is discussed using the friendship and dialogue between Bounderby and Gradgrind, and by a comparison of the Freirean myths and Coketown fictions. Freire aids a modern reading of Dickens's world through a more familiar lens, and this is also helpful to my reading of the infertile marriage between Louisa and Josiah Bounderby, and the circumstances of Stephen Blackpool's life and death.

The examination of Bounderby, and of Dickens's reliance on reportage in his fiction, supports my claim that *Hard Times* is a work of real substance. It also supports Dickens's belief that readers can be influenced through fancy, and a claim of this thesis that not all knowledge is accessed through reason. A modern reader—even without the analysis—will likely react against Bounderby more strongly than against Gradgrind. The two are different in more than degree and, in Chapter Six, I fancy that I show that to be a fact.

Throughout this thesis I suggest that Dickens's use of the word fancy is central to an understanding of the novel—that it is the theory of knowledge fundamental to the text. Here I argue in more detail for this relevance and its nature. I suggest that the nature of fancy—and the implications stemming from that—have not been comprehensively examined. While it might initially seem clear that Dickens has some objection to an education of fact, at no time does he argue against fact(s) themselves. He seems to be suggesting that such an education is overlooking something important—and he leaves the reader to decide what that might be. In this chapter I present an argument to suggest that fancy, to Dickens, is both complementary and oppositional to fact, which makes the reader's task more difficult.

I argue in this chapter that fancy is deliberately less rigid than fact. It is partly that which is not fact, the un-measurable and uncountable in life. I demonstrate this through a discussion of the contributions made to the question of fancy by Collins, Sonstroem, and Pollatschek. However I conclude that these readings of fancy—while valuable insights—do not quite capture Dickens's concept. I argue that Dickens recognised knowledge as being facts and stories, and I present the evidence: Bounderby has a story with no facts, Gradgrind has both facts and a story—an ideology in his case—Louisa has facts but insufficient narrative to construct a meaningful life. I demonstrate, through some of Dickens's early work, his understanding of satire as fanciful and purposeful narrative.

I also examine how Dickens uses the structure of a sermon to rail against both scientism and religionism. There are strong biblical links to faith hope and charity throughout *Hard Times* and I suggest that they bring fantasy into focus. Sissy Jupe is the key; through this unfanciful champion of fancy, Dickens makes his call for Christian charity as the final component of fancy. Education, Dickens seems to propose, is not a matter of accumulating facts, and filling pitchers, but a process more like the Freirean ideal of a constant transformation towards becoming more fully human—coming to reason through fancy.

This thesis is an examination of a literary work, and in this final chapter I summarise my investigation and present my conclusions. I begin by reminding the reader of the background to the work and the justification for my methodology, then demonstrate that I have addressed the questions that were my starting point. There is an element of irony in

drawing upon the scientific resources of evolution and psychology to argue for the limitations of the scientific approach—although the scientific method, being ‘not fact’, might be a form of fancy. Nonetheless, I demonstrate that these fields have contributed to a clearer understanding of how *Hard Times* may function in its ability to persuade without argument. In the process, I show that the study also has a contribution to make to the understanding of Dickens’s concept of fancy.

This final section also brings together the threads of the historical study, and develops the significance of re-examining the context from which a work is produced. Research does not stand still, and new access to information allows a re-reading of the world of the author as well as the text. Similarly, I show how the work of Paulo Freire can be combined with the other material to develop insights into the accuracy and authenticity of the characters and circumstances that Dickens was building to build his case against the excesses of his time.

Finally, I show that the two fields of action, the nineteenth century and the present, still have a relationship; the past is not past, it is only an earlier today. Dickens’s ‘these times’, I suggest, can still contribute ideas of educational significance to our times, and I demonstrate this through my thesis.

## 2. Footprints of the tiger

In my introduction, I mentioned that Trollope had commented that Dickens's fiction was more persuasive than reasoned argument. In a common-sense way we all know this is likely to be true. If it wasn't true there would be no advertising industry, for they make their living from constructing stories to influence decision making; neither truth nor reason are a requirement for a successful marketing campaign. Dickens too, indicates his awareness of the power of fiction to persuade—in *Hard Times*, he writes directly to his readers, exhorting them to consider his story carefully and to take action based on the results of this consideration. However, it seems to me—and this is a very personal conclusion—that Dickens goes further than simply showing awareness of the power of fiction and that he may even have had some intuitive recognition of a mechanism by which this might be possible.

Charles Dickens, perhaps more than we generally assume, was an astute observer and well informed about contemporary issues and events, a point that I deal with in more detail a little later. However, the importance here is that nineteenth century science—with its discoveries and the arguments that developed from them—was an area of intense public interest and debate. The age of the earth, the development of life, and the relationship between humanity and (other) animals were areas of active discussion. In this chapter I will provide evidence to suggest that not only was Dickens aware of these developments, he was also interested in them. With the opening words of *Hard Times*, Dickens links an education that is reduced to the transmission of facts with the production of “reasoning animals”. At the very least this seems to suggest that he might be advancing a view either that humans are animals with special qualities, or that they can be transformed into animals. The text of *Hard Times* specifically associates the development of some quality of ‘fancy’ as central to the distinction Dickens perceives between human and animal. Furthermore, this ‘fancy’ seems—in its contrast with fact—to lie somewhere in thinking processes themselves, rather than being exterior to the individual.

In this chapter I will examine Trollope's stated, and Dickens's implied, position, that fiction can be a valid form of knowledge acquisition and understanding for human beings.



I will also follow Dickens's hints that there is evidence to support the possibility that this form has an evolutionary origin. Interestingly, animals evolutionarily distant from humans demonstrate characteristics of narrative-type thought processes, which suggests that such processes may not even be unique to humans, so once again Dickens's observations seem to have led to perceptive conclusions. Whether similar thinking processes result from a common ancestor or from convergent evolution it seems that there might be some compelling advantage to some form of narrative-type processing that utilizes visual information gathering systems. Building on Dickens's comments, but using some modern studies, I consider the possibility that the development of human language may have its beginnings in a visual relationship between what can be seen and what can be inferred. As such, there is a tentative explanation in Dickens's ideas suggested for how fiction may persuade. I propose that narrative-type processing could have been the bedrock upon which Dickens's 'fancy' is constructed.

### **An early history of evolutionary narrative(s)**

In 1844, a small book entitled *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* appeared for sale in London. It was published anonymously—the author must have known that such a work carried an element of risk<sup>17</sup>—but this did not stop it from becoming an immediate success. Its anonymity may have even improved its popularity by focussing attention on the work rather than the author. In any event, it ran to 12 editions between 1844 and 1884 and was widely discussed in Victorian society; Prince Albert is known to have read it aloud to his wife (Secord, 2002). Although it was popular with general readers, its themes questioned the natural theology of the time and thus it drew heavy criticism from theologians and scientists alike. In all fairness, this was in part because of the text's poor science. However, it was also because the author specifically questioned the intervention of a deity in the daily processes of life, asking instead whether the observed facts of the natural world “best agree with the hypothesis of an origin of organisms by special Divine exertion, or that of their origination in Divine power working in the manner of natural law” (Chambers, 1851, p. 218). This rather direct suggestion—and the overall tenor of

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<sup>17</sup> The more things change, the more they stay the same. Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (1989) drew both critical acclaim and an Islamic *fatwa*—technically a religious opinion, in this case the opinion was that Rushdie should be killed on sight. The shameful international lack of resistance to this remains a stark reminder of both the power of literature to excite a response and the reluctance of the state to protect the individual against powerful interest groups.

the text— that the actions of a god may be indistinguishable from natural processes, was the reason for the controversy caused by the book’s publication. It was simply not a position that had ever been so publicly voiced and widely disseminated. However, one outcome of the furore was an increased general interest in science, and the consideration of ideas that would have been intolerable to an earlier generation. Charles Dickens, in his review of Robert Hunt’s book, *The Poetry of Science*, makes this very clear:

[W]e are perhaps indebted for the publication of such a work to the author of the *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, who, by rendering the general subject popular, and awakening an interest and spirit of inquiry in many minds, where these had previously lain dormant, has created a reading public not exclusively scientific or philosophical to whom such offerings can be hopefully addressed. This, however, we believe to be the case; and in this, as we conceive, the writer of that remarkable and well-abused book has not rendered his least important service to his own time. (Dickens, 1848, p. 787)

Perhaps this book awakened “an interest and spirit of inquiry” in Dickens’s mind too, because it was after this that the references to animals informing our understanding of ourselves seem to become part of his writing.

The previously anonymous author of the book at the centre of this discussion was eventually revealed to be Robert Chambers<sup>18</sup>. Ironically, although his name lives on, it is not for the controversial text that was *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation*, nor is it for any contribution to biology, or science; it is because in 1872 he and his brother produced and published *Chambers’s English Dictionary*<sup>19</sup>. So, from the earliest days of the discussion of evolution there has been a link with language—admittedly a tenuous one. The more serious connection—between words, science, ideas, and Charles Dickens—is what concerns me here. The entire drama and debate instigated by the publication of Chambers’s literary excursion took place during Dickens’s working life, and probably marks a turning point in scientific thought. It became less fashionable—and less expedient—to explain the natural world as the product of a supernatural one. Although it is unlikely that Dickens had any idea that his own work, as a journalist and a

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<sup>18</sup> The 12<sup>th</sup> edition of the book was published in 1884, more than a decade after the death of its author in 1871. This was the first edition that acknowledged its author.

<sup>19</sup> It was compiled by the Rev. Thomas Davidson and it expanded upon an earlier work by James Donald.

writer of narrative fiction, would also be examined under the same light that science was to bring to other areas of human endeavour, he was well aware of the public's interest.

The book review, a section of which is shown above, was not the only occasion on which Dickens showed an awareness of the general fascination—and at least suggested his own—with the new developments in natural history. The opening lines of *Bleak House*—the precursor to *Hard Times*<sup>20</sup>—contain the first dinosaur reference in popular fiction (Glendening, 2009), a fact that should remind the modern reader of just how up-to-date Dickens was in his work. Dickens displayed his almost uncanny writing skill as he combined a creature from the Jurassic<sup>21</sup> with a description of Victorian pollution to create a sense of primitive disquiet, placing in his readers' minds a comparison between prehistoric and industrialised ugliness:

As much mud in the streets as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus, forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snowflakes—gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun. (Dickens, 1853a, p. 1)

So, even without the soon-to-be-revealed theories that would make Charles Darwin famous, by the time Charles Dickens published *Hard Times*, in 1854, there had been ten years of spirited public discussion on the conflicts arising between science and previously unquestioned explanations of order in the natural world, and a growing realisation that Earth had once been a very different place.

The most significant evolutionary thinker of the age, Charles Darwin, made no claim to have introduced the idea of evolution to the world. In fact he credited the author of *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* with making acceptance of his own work possible, by preparing readers for the ideas, and the implications, that were to follow (Secord, 2002). Darwin even made mention of the earlier work in his introduction to *On the Origin of Species* (1859). Darwin's personal correspondence even shows that he

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<sup>20</sup> Welsh (2000) goes further, and claims that *Hard Times* is best understood as an epilogue to *Bleak House*.

<sup>21</sup> The Great Exhibition had featured a dinosaur display, organised by Richard Owen, an eminent naturalist and coiner of the word dinosaur. The dinosaurs—including Megalosaurus— from the exhibition were restored in 2002, and can still be seen in London's Crystal Palace Park.

himself had been suspected of the authorship of *Vestiges*, which implies that Darwin's own views were at best a poorly kept secret<sup>22</sup>. Darwin's great achievement was to identify a mechanism, that "*natural law*" to which Chambers had alluded, by which the observed evidence of change over time could be explained. So, in 1859, Charles Darwin presented to the scientific world a radical new framework for investigating, categorizing, and understanding the natural world. Darwin made no mention of "*Divine exertion*", rather his theory suggested that there was no grand plan, no goal towards which life was progressing; there was, however, a mechanism of selection for success. Success itself was rather pragmatically defined in terms of the transmission of genetic material rather than of moral supremacy. Implied by this is, of course, the possibility—at least—of ethical behaviour being a choice rather than a divine instruction.

The recognition of the evolutionary mechanism itself was inspired by the influential economic writings of the Anglican clergyman Thomas Malthus, whose major work *Essay on the Principle of Population* argued that population growth would increase more rapidly than society's ability to support it. There would inevitably be an increased death rate, to restore equilibrium, and those best able to survive would be more likely to do so. In his introduction to *On the Origin of Species*, Darwin wrote that his own work was

[T]he doctrine of Malthus, applied to the whole animal and vegetable kingdoms. As many more individuals of each species are born than can possibly survive; and as, consequently, there is a frequently recurring struggle for existence, it follows that any being, if it vary however slightly in any manner profitable to itself, under the complex and sometimes varying conditions of life, will have a better chance of surviving, and thus be *naturally selected*. From the strong principle of inheritance, any selected variety will tend to propagate its new and modified form. (Darwin, 1859, p. 5)

One of the specific challenges that arose from Darwin's work was that it proposed a completely natural solution for that which had previously been presumed to be

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<sup>22</sup> Darwin may have acknowledged *Vestiges* but he certainly didn't agree with it. In a letter to William Fox, his second cousin, Darwin (1845b) writes "[h]ave you read that strange unphilosophical, but capitally-written book, the *Vestiges*, it has made more talk than any work of late, and has been by some attributed to me.—at which I ought to be much flattered and unflattered." In a slightly earlier letter to J. D. Hooker, Darwin (1845a) commented that "the writing and arrangement are certainly admirable, but his geology strikes me as bad, and his zoology far worse."

supernatural; even *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* had only hinted at this possibility. Although Darwin did not exclude the concept of divine creation, neither did he find it necessary to include it as an explanation. A special act of creation was no longer needed to explain the diversity of life, or the existence of humanity itself. Human beings could be explained and understood as simply one of many species, each evolving alongside all other living beings. Nor was the natural world common-sense, complete and static, with humanity representing some pinnacle of perfection. Evolution was presented as an on-going process, and so the current forms of all life were revealed to be in a constant state of change; humanity itself was a work in progress.

The fundamental principles of our current understanding of the mechanisms through which life evolves are relatively simple. Darwin's original idea, initially derived from Malthus, was that in any competitive environment some heritable changes occurring within a given population would prove to have a reproductive and/or survival advantage in that particular environment and circumstance. Moreover, nature would ensure that no population could outgrow its source of support; famine or some other disaster would do what self-restraint did not<sup>23</sup>; those that survived to reproduce were those best fitted to the conditions. Where Darwin was to see a mechanism in Malthus's work, Dickens—in *Hard Times*—had already engaged with the ethical and educational implications. He even gave the name Malthus to one of Gradgrind's children; it seems that Dickens saw some dangers in justifying ethical decisions on a pragmatic basis.

Dickens, like his contemporaries Chambers and Darwin, seems to have had some awareness of an ancient earth and perhaps even a common past for all animals. Darwin proposed that any heritable changes that occurred within groups isolated from the original population would result in differing characteristics between the two groups and eventually into different species. Dickens, on the other hand, seemed to have a growing awareness that some of the difficulties between social classes—groups isolated within a population—might be the outcome of an uncritical acceptance of the ideas of Malthus and the political economists. In an article from 1850 he has a rather resentful raven suggest of humans that “you don't take half the care you ought; of your own young, and don't teach

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<sup>23</sup> This is important to Dickens's world as much as it is to evolution. Before Darwin, famine and poverty was understood as being a divine intervention. Hence, working to ameliorate the social effects of the industrial revolution was seen to be interfering with a divine plan.

'em half enough” and that some part of education should consist of developing students “into their proper nature” (Dickens, 1850d, p. 38, emphasis in the original). *Hard Times* may be a text based on the words of a raven.

### **Bird brains and crocodile tears**

An important part of the early scientific world was to make sense of the wealth of information that was available from geologists, biologists, archaeologists, palaeontologists and various other –ologists. In the words of Mrs Gradgrind, in *Hard Times*,—and doubtless in the thoughts of generations of Victorian scholars— “Ologies of all kinds from morning to night. If there is any Ology left, of any description ... all I can say is, I hope I shall never hear its name” (*HT*, p. 151). Similarly, through his description of the intellectual world inhabited by the Gradgrind children, Dickens both records and parodies this Victorian obsession with sorting and classifying the natural world into discrete parcels of fact:

The little Gradgrinds had cabinets in various departments of science too. They had a little conchological cabinet, and a little metallurgical cabinet, and a little mineralogical cabinet; and the specimens were all arranged and labelled, and the bits of stone and ore looked as though they might have been broken from the parent substances by those tremendously hard instruments their own names. (*HT*, p. 12)

Charles Darwin was to give those who like to categorise things some new tools for doing so—doubtless to the delight of scientists and the distress of small children—because evolution posits a single original ancestor to all life on Earth. If all life is more or less distantly related then it is possible to draw a family tree, and the process of biological classification becomes an attempt to chart these relationships between different life forms, past and present, over the time of life on Earth. The resulting chart indicates that birds are more closely related to reptiles than to mammals. Any characteristic shared by both Birds and Mammals must, therefore, have evolved twice or else it must be an inheritance from their common ancestor. That is, such a characteristic either occurs because of a common evolutionary past, or as the result of convergent evolution—the independent development of similar traits, such as flight in birds and insects. This may not seem terribly relevant to

a reading of *Hard Times*, but that which is true of structural similarities between different groups may be equally true of patterns of thought, and that is relevant. If many of the intellectual characteristics that we might think of as specifically human—or at least belonging specifically to primates—are more widespread than once thought, we must consider the possible explanations. They must either be from a common past, or so useful that they have evolved more than once. Dickens's writing seems to suggest a similarity between the little Gradgrindian collectors and his garrulous raven. The bird comments of itself: "I am, by nature, a sort of collector, or antiquarian. ... I have a passion for amassing things that are of no use to me" (Dickens, 1850d, p. 36). This suggests that it would have come as little surprise to Dickens that many behaviours that we might consider indicative of narrative-type mental processing are not only found outside the primates, but found within the group that we call birds. These include behaviours that might suggest ideas of cause and effect, a working knowledge of time, the knowledge that other individuals have independent motives for their behaviour (Theory of Mind), and some concept of agency. This would allow for the possibility that narrative-type mental processing may be a common way of interpreting the world, or even that it may approach being a default way of processing information about the world.

I mentioned in my introduction that Skinner's classic paper "Superstition" in the pigeon' (1948) had caught my attention. In this paper—which is the founding document of behavioural psychology—he detailed an experiment in which pigeons developed ritualized behaviours in response to the irregular presentation of food. Skinner described this as superstitious behaviour; a behaviour that arises when the delivery of a reinforcement occurs within a short time of a behaviour that is actually independent of it. Of particular note is that even though there was no actual connection between a pigeon's behaviour and the receipt of food, many of the pigeons behaved as though they believed that such a connection existed. The existence of the food was a Gradgrindian fact, but it seems that something fanciful in the pigeon may also have been present. It is at least possible that such superstitious behaviour involves the pigeon having processed its own experiences into a narrative-type cause-and-effect understanding of its relationship with the world. Nevertheless, here we have a genuine 'bird brain' behaving as though it assumed a cause and effect link between two events—perhaps there is even a hint that some notion of agency is involved—but doing so without that which we would usually consider to be reason or logic. The pigeons' behaviour at least allows for the possibility

that their ‘reading of the world’ was constructed by narrative-type processing of information. Behavioural psychology itself still has no theory of any mechanism that might explain the behaviour of the pigeons, but it does utilise the fact that—as Trollope and Dickens seem to have assumed—human behaviour can reliably be influenced in a similar way.

Pigeons exhibit some behaviours that could be interpreted as showing a form of narrative-type mental processing, but they don’t actually do much more than that. Even amongst birds, pigeons seem fairly ordinary intellectual performers. However, not all birds have evolved to be equal, and it seems that the second most intelligent species on the planet may not be a mammal—we might have guessed a dolphin or a chimpanzee—but a bird. Dickens’s ravens it seems, just might be more intelligent than most other life on earth. Perhaps we should not uncritically accept the claim by one such raven that his kind are universally good scholars (Dickens, 1850d). Nevertheless, the crow family—which includes crows, ravens, rooks, magpies, and jays—do seem to be good learners. Anecdotally, it is well known to New Zealand farmers that Magpies have a long memory. The character Pew, in Murray Ball’s famous Footrot Flats cartoons is a humorous illustration of a vengeful magpie, possessed of a long memory and single minded dedication to the harassment of the farmer that cut down the *Macrocarpa* tree that Pew called home. This thesis argues that Dickens’s fiction—and specifically *Hard Times*—is grounded in fact, it now seems that even Dickens’s high regard for ravens has justification. Indeed, even a vindictive cartoon magpie may have some basis in fact. Recently, a longitudinal study begun in 2006 provided evidence for similar behaviour in American crows (Marzluff, Walls, Cornell, Withey, & Craig, 2010).

Researchers had long suspected that crows could recognize people previously involved in positive activities, such as feeding, or negative activities such as trapping—and chopping down *Macrocarpa* trees, no doubt. To demonstrate this, the researchers exposed wild birds to a ‘dangerous face’, by wearing a unique facemask during trapping and banding activities at five different sites. Prior to the trapping very few crows reacted to the ‘dangerous face’, but subsequently they mobbed and scolded the ‘dangerous face’ more than the ‘neutral faces’ used as controls. Like Pew, they were in no hurry to forget, and continued to react to the ‘dangerous face’ for almost three years. They were rapidly able to learn to recognize a particular face, as the result of a single brief experience, and then



to remember it as a negative presence over an extended period of time. It was the particular individual that was remembered and responded to, not people in general. So, very clearly the crows were able to associate an agent with an activity, and they are capable of retaining long term memories of this association. Once again, animals a long way separate from man show behaviours that are commensurate with thinking and memory of a similar type to that of humans.

Relatives of the magpie and the raven, the scrub-jays, have been observed to behave in ways that suggest they may be capable of some understanding of time and place (Clayton & Dickinson, 1998), and of the possible motives of others based on their own behaviour (Emery & Clayton, 2001); these are capacities that have not been so clearly demonstrated by other animals (Emery, 2006). However, as we will see with crocodiles, it would be rash to discount the possibility. Scrub-jays cache food for future use, which is not an unusual behaviour in itself. However, Clayton and Dickinson showed that the birds may have some concept of a best-before date for the retrieval and consumption of the food items. This is important for two reasons, firstly because time is an essential element in narrative-type processing of information, and secondly because it raises the possibility that at least some animals may have some historical awareness—an idea that may conflict with some of our assumptions. At least one modern zoologist, (e.g De Waal, 2006, 2009), not only argues for an evolutionary pathway for both empathy and morality but insists that the reason we don't recognize empathy as a universal trait—at least among mammals—is because of the insistence of Abrahamic religions that humans are outside of nature. I shall return to the subject of empathy in another chapter; at the moment the point is that science finds no good reason to think of people as being an exception to the evolutionary process.

Some scrub-jays steal food from the caches of others—surprisingly, this then affects their subsequent reading of the world. Those that have previously stolen from others show an awareness that their own caches may be subject to predation. If another scrub-jay is in a position to observe their caching activities, they will often return in private and re-cache at a new site (Clayton, Griffiths, Emery, & Dickinson, 2001). Dickens's son reported similar antics by the family's pet raven.

It was delightful to watch him going through the most studied pretence of busily burying something in a particular spot, knowing well that we were watching him, covering up the hole with earth in order to deceive us, and then surreptitiously burying it in an entirely different place. (Dickens, 1928a, p. 15)

Perhaps Grip—the name given to the pet raven of both the Dickens family, and that of *Barnaby Rudge*—had been guilty of stealing from another. Of course, it is not possible to examine the thinking behind the behaviour of a scrub-jay or a raven, but the behaviour suggests that the birds may have some understanding that other individuals are independent agents, making independent decisions in historical time. They behave as though they have an awareness of a hypothetical scenario where, at a future time, another bird might choose to pirate their cache of food. This in turn raises the possibility of narrative-type mental processing, involving agency, cause and effect, and time. This behaviour has been repeatedly observed in studies looking at episodic like memory, that is the ability to retrieve information about what occurred in an episode, where the episode was located, and when it took place. This mental time travel has long been assumed to be a unique quality of the human mind (Clayton, Salwiczek, & Dickinson, 2007). Once again, irrespective of whatever may be the final explanation for such behaviours, not only was Charles Dickens in a position to observe some of them but there is evidence that he did so. I have no more access to the thoughts of Dickens than I do to those of ravens and scrub-jays, but it certainly seems possible that Dickens saw similarities between the ways that birds behaved and the ways that people do. Did he wonder about the facts of actions that seem based on the fancy of the actors?

The birds of today are descended from the theropod dinosaurs, and their closest living relatives are members of the crocodile family (Weishampel, Dodson, & Osmólska, 2004). As with many other families, the relationship remains a distant and somewhat strained one, but nevertheless the *Megalosaurus* of *Bleak House* and Dickens's pet raven were relatives. As I have shown, birds display some behaviours that are consistent both with the narrative-type processing of information about their world—cause and effect and agency, connected by time—and with more complex mental processes than had earlier been assumed. It is now becoming apparent that even crocodiles may have some surprising mental attributes; they certainly exhibit behaviours that might suggest so. A recent paper by Dinets, Breuggen, and Breuggen (2013) described tool using behaviour in

two separate crocodilian populations. Both the mugger crocodile—officially *Crocodylus palustris*, but its common name of ‘mugger’ seems fitting—in India and the American alligator have broad flat snouts and live in similar marshy environments. Both species have been observed lying motionless, partially submerged, with sticks balanced across their snouts. It seems a slightly unusual behaviour, and one that might generally go unremarked. However, this only occurred close to egret and heron colonies, and only in the nest building season when such sticks were in high demand by the birds. The conclusion reached was that the reptiles were using the sticks as bait for the nesting birds. Predictably, those birds that choose the sticks made available by the waiting predator seldom used the nest materials. It seems *apropos* in the context of *Hard Times* and this thesis that Dickens would later<sup>24</sup> use alligators as a metaphor for his condemnation of what Bown elegantly described as: “the reptilian world of mid nineteenth-century capitalism, fuelled by speculation and waste, greed and ruthlessness” (2010, p. 11). However, for this thesis,—if only for these times—it is notable that the behaviour of the crocodilians, as it was with several birds, is commensurate with time and agency being included in their mental processes. It seems that similar patterns of behaviour—which may suggest similar narrative-type mental processes—occur in species that are only distantly related.

### **Hearing the words of the Raven**

Notwithstanding the now proven evolutionary connections between all life on Earth, a century and a half after the publication of Darwin’s work, some writers outside of Biology still treat humanity as distinct from the animal kingdom rather than distinctive within the animal kingdom. Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educationist whose work forms part of this thesis, is one such, and perhaps for reasons such as those suggested by De Waal. Freire understood humans and animals to be fundamentally different in the nature of the relationship between their being and the world. In that most influential book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he assumes a fundamental divide between humans and animals and describes it thus:

of the uncompleted beings, man is the only one to treat not only his actions but his very self as the object of his reflection; this capacity distinguishes him from the

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<sup>24</sup> He does this in his last completed novel *Our Mutual Friend* (1865).

animals, which are unable to separate themselves from their activity and thus are unable to reflect upon it ... animals can neither set objectives nor infuse their transformation of nature with any significance beyond itself. Moreover, the ‘decision’ to perform this activity belongs not to them but to their species. ...Unable to decide for themselves, unable to objectify either themselves or their activity, lacking objectives which they themselves have set, living; submerged in a world to which they can give no meaning, lacking a ‘tomorrow’ and a ‘today’ because they exist in an overwhelming present, animals are ahistorical. (Freire, 1970/1996, pp. 78-79)

However, as we have seen from the behaviour of corvids and crocodiles, such an understanding reflects the science of the time it was written—or even earlier, as it appears to have strong parallels within Marx’s work—rather than the science of today. The difference between humans and other animals now seems more a matter of degree—as we would expect with evolution—than a contrast of absolutes. Perhaps human thought and behaviour—including the development of narrative-type processing of information about the world—may prove to be the extension of an inheritance from our earliest common ancestors.

As we go on, it is as well to remember that while Freire identifies the awareness of self as a characteristic of man that “distinguishes him from the animals”, who are also “ahistorical”, the evidence of biology no longer supports this position as strongly as it once did. Dickens’s pet ravens—and their relations the scrub-jays—display behaviours that at least allow for the possibility of some concept of self which allows them to assume prospective behaviours in others, to plan for tomorrow, and to be aware of today—and we can’t be sure that some crocodylians are excluded from this way of interacting with their world. Given what science now knows about the family to which ravens belong, it seems ironic that Charles Dickens has his raven<sup>25</sup> promise his readers that

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<sup>25</sup> Dickens had more than one pet raven, one of which makes an appearance in *Barnaby Rudge*. Both birds shared the name Grip. Edgar Allen Poe was an admirer of Dickens’s work, but he noted in a review that the raven could have had a more prophetic role. Of course, Poe himself was to give it one in his poem *The Raven*; it is a widely recognised inspiration. On the death of the original Grip, Dickens had a taxidermist—the model for the taxidermist in *Our Mutual Friend*?—mount the bird in a case. It can still be seen in the rare books room of the Philadelphia Free Library. Moskovitz (n.d.) has an article on the Dickens/Poe connection on David Perdue’s Charles Dickens Page website, with an interesting discussion on parallels in the two writers’ works. Smith (2013) suggests that Dickens uses ravens as symbols of knowingness, elements of which seem apparent in this passage.

[y]ou shall not have it all your own way. I am resolved that I won't have Ravens written about by men, without having men written about by Ravens. ... As leisure and opportunity serve, I shall collect a natural history of you. You are a good deal given to talk about *your* missions. That's my mission. (Dickens, 1850b, p. 157)

So far no ravens seemed to have shared his mission, for there seem to be no texts that can be attributed to them. However, they do seem to be more intelligent than we had once supposed, and possessed of some remarkable abilities. Perhaps it is only a matter of time before they write, but it seems—as Dickens predicted—that they already are telling us about ourselves. Therefore, rather than pursuing the philosophical differences claimed by Freire, let us take note of Dickens once again. In his review of *The Poetry of Science*—continuing from that mentioned earlier—Dickens observed that:

To show that Science, truly expounding nature, can, like nature herself, restore in some new form whatever she destroys; that, instead of binding us, as some would have it, in stern utilitarian chains, when she has freed us from a harmless superstition, she offers to our contemplation something better and more beautiful, something which, rightly considered, is more elevating to the soul, nobler and more stimulating to the soaring fancy<sup>26</sup>; is a sound, wise, wholesome object. (Dickens, 1848, p. 787)

Indeed, as science allows us freedom from Dickens's "harmless superstition"—although some might question the harmlessness of superstition—it equally allows us to develop a way of thinking that is, in Paulo Freire's words, "characterized by depth in the interpretation of problems; by the substitution of causal principles for magical explanations; by the testing of one's 'findings' and by openness to revision" (1976, p. 18). If we choose to ignore superstitious or magical explanations for the apparent mental commonalities between crows and crocodiles—and ourselves—then it is those established 'causal principles' that seem likely to one day provide a satisfying explanation.

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<sup>26</sup> Dickens's use of the word 'fancy', in this passage, is obviously in reference to a concept of some importance. It reads more like 'speculative imagination' than 'childish thoughts'. As fancy will reappear later, I bring this to your attention.

Jonathon Gottschall (2012) has pointed out that some evolutionary thinkers believe that the human tendency to enjoy stories is simply an accident. He presents their position as one where “The brain is not *designed for* story; there are glitches in its design that make it *vulnerable to* story” (p. 29). Whether our brain is designed for, or vulnerable to, story humans are undoubtedly a storytelling animal. Although this thesis is not dependent upon a resolution to any problem of brain design, as I simply raise the possibility of an evolutionary importance for narrative-type thought processes, a comment would not be out of place. I think it an interesting possibility that our current brain may be a result—and a very long term evolutionary development—of narrative-type information processing being an important element of thought itself. If this is so, then in a very real way, our brain might have been constructed *by* the development of narrative-type processes, in which case our vulnerability to story would not be unexpected. I will, however, take advantage of either vulnerability or design, and tell a story. This is a story about tigers and hunters, and footprints and symbols. Whereas the earlier part of this chapter has raised the possibility that similarities between us and other animals—particularly in the use of narrative-type mental processes—may be the outcome of a shared past, from here we are in tiger country.

### **In the forests of the night**

As a young reader—when grounded and unable to accompany Biggles—I was fascinated by the adventures of the famous hunter, and author of *Maneaters of the Kumaon*, Jim Corbett. The book was a childhood favourite of mine, and in my mind Jim and I together hunted man-eating tigers in northern India. I remain impressed by his reasoning behind carrying only three rounds of ammunition; after three shots either he or his quarry would be dead. Although impressive, it wasn’t entirely re-assuring as I walked beside him one darkening evening. We were attempting to make our way through the jungle to home and safety, however Corbett was convinced that we were being stalked by a particularly dangerous tiger—a known man-killer<sup>27</sup>. For those of you whose education has not included being stalked by a tiger while on foot in the jungle, Corbett offers this helpful observation:

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<sup>27</sup> Corbett was involved in pursuing man-eating tigers and leopards between 1907 and 1938, at the behest of the local regional government. The terms ‘man-eater’ and ‘man-killer’ are the descriptors Corbett used in his writings. He became a noted conservationist, and has both a national park and a tiger named in his honour.

[W]hen a tiger becomes a man-eater it treats human beings exactly as it treats wild animals, that is, it approaches its victims up-wind, or lies in wait for them down wind... In all case where killing is done by stalking or stealth, the victim is approached from behind. (Corbett, 1944/1991, p. 60)

Thus informed—but not greatly comforted by knowing the rules the tiger would follow in the attempt on my life—I ventured forth with the legendary hunter. Our rather tense evening walk was spent in tacking towards our goal, making sure that we gave the unseen and unevidenced tiger no chance to predict our path and get behind us and downwind of us. Clearly, it is not possible to really know what is in the mind of any animal. However, it is possible to observe, learn about, and subsequently predict some behaviour. So, when Corbett (and I) examined the tiger’s tracks in daylight, it was apparent that they were consistent with his prediction of both the intentions and the methods of the big cat. The information laid out on the ground could be read as a contest between man and cat, constrained by the rules that Corbett had suggested. He had assumed that the tiger would work to defeat what it expected to be the main information gathering systems of its prey, sight and scent, and it matters not whether Corbett was correct in the details of the tiger’s reasoning; the model was sufficiently valid to enable his survival. The hunter was able to deal with an abstract tiger, one he could not see. In fact it was more—or perhaps rather less—than an abstract tiger, it was a propositional “what if” tiger. Corbett based his actions on his understanding of a situation that may not have existed at all; he had no evidence other than his own mental construction of a likely scenario. This seems qualitatively different from the tiger’s behaviour; that it was able to be predicted suggests that it may have followed a particular pattern, independent of the events in which it was taking part. The tiger seems to have been following a script; without that which Dickens called ‘fancy’, the tiger was unable to re-imagine its own narrative.

There may even be a possible clue to the origins of language in the fact that only part of the story of the duel between Corbett and the tiger was written in his book. Another part was written on the ground and Jim Corbett was able to construct a narrative of past events from that visual record. This seems to be an important skill: the plausible re-construction of a historical sequence of events from visual indications of an animal no longer present seems a powerful tool. Several animal and bird species have been shown to behave as though they have some ability to remember what they’ve seen, to make some assumptions

about future events, and to understand that objects continue to exist even though out of sight (Emery, 2006). Although this seems different from Corbett's reconstruction of events, it does seem at least possible that the processes involved may be related. Similarly, some of the behaviours of Bonobo chimpanzees may be interpreted as suggesting some understanding of the footprints of their group as a sign of their passing. Bonobo groups often break branches as they travel in their foraging, this behaviour has been explained as—at least possibly—intended to provide markers to guide absent members back to the fold (Savage-Rumbaugh, Williams, Furuichi, & Kano, 1996). However, if the ground is muddy, and holds footprints—and I admit to imagining the footprints of Dickens's *Megalosaurus* in the London mud—the group doesn't bother with breaking the branches. This seems to indicate at least some awareness of the information value of the footprint; the narrative of the group's travel conveyed by a symbol. However, Bonobos have not been recorded as transferring this ability beyond their own group; only humans seem to have developed the ability to combine the skills of being able to 'read' sign to infer from a footprint the existence of an absent animal and to then construct a hypothetical model of possibilities for the future. However, many animals seem to exhibit behaviours that raise the possibility that the human abilities may be related to those observed elsewhere.

I don't know how many times I have watched a 'nature' documentary and seen an antelope, zebra or wildebeest living its last few moments under the watchful gaze of a predator—a predator that hunted by sight and scent, using anciently formed patterns of behaviour. This same predator had often left its footprints in the mud beside the waterhole from which its prey now drank; it had left a sign that the victim had been unable to interpret. I think that it is at least plausible that the ability to 'read' in this way pre-dates, and may have been instrumental in the development of, spoken language. Hunter-gatherers who could 'read' the world in this way would have an advantage over those who could not, whether those others were predator, prey, or partner. They could act in the present, on information laid down in the past, to make plans that would affect the future. However, without language there could be little exchange of information, because prior to language no listener would expect information to be conveyed by voice.

Gestures are important to communication because they are learned rather than innate, and because they are universally associated with understanding and influencing the actions of



others (Tomasello, 2008), and so they encourage comprehension. However, Burling (2005) argues that the audience's understanding of the information value of any action must precede the actor's use of it to convey information. Burling uses his classic example of the baring of teeth in a dog's snarl to make his point. He gives a long and amusing version of the argument, but a summary is enough here. At first, curling the lips away from the teeth may have been a simple action prior to biting, to ensure that the biter's lips were way from the main action. No matter how many years it took, once potential victims had learned to understand the curled back lip as the precursor to a bite—the narrative-type processing of information into cause and effect over time seems relevant here—and so to avoid it, that understanding bestowed an evolutionary advantage. The escaping animals had improved prospects for survival and reproduction. However, it also introduced another possibility. Now the retracted lip could be used to intimidate others. By indicating an intention to bite, the possibility arose of scaring away enemies and rivals without engaging in conflict, once again there was an adaptive advantage. Now the snarl is evolving into a communicative signal, a gesture, but the communicative value comes from an existing action.

Dickens was well aware of canine behaviour and dogs played a significant part in both his personal life and in his fiction. The snarling dog of Burling's example reminds me of the vicious—but ultimately intensely loyal—Bulls-Eye, companion to the equally vicious Bill Sykes of *Oliver Twist*. However, *Hard Times* also had its canine character: Merrylegs, the faithful companion to the circus clown Signor Jupe. Dickens seems, in this text, to use the dog's actions to communicate to the reader the love and loyalty that is imputed to Jupe. Merrylegs' actions—particularly his return signalling his owner's death—do this just as surely the actions of Burling's dog communicate a threat. Dickens—and not only in *Hard Times*—uses behaviours to suggest mental processes and to communicate ideas. For a dog's snarl to have any warning value—or a dog's return to convey a message—the recipient must have some understanding of time sequence—first this then that. Burling suggested, indirectly, that such behaviour has the potential to lead to the creation of a fiction. The response to any action also conveys information to the actor—as we have seen with behavioural psychology and reinforcement. Over time, the behaviour may no longer be communicating the reality of the dog's intentions, but rather the message it wishes the recipient to understand.

## Reading the world

Human beings have had a long time to develop complex interactions between members of individual societies and communities, more complex than a dog's snarl. However, the hurdle of interpreting thoughts and motives using the evidence of visible actions has never been cleared; it is still an obstacle to human communication. How clearly Dickens himself understood this can never finally be determined—although I will always find in favour of such an astute observer of others—however, he utilised it perceptively in *Hard Times*. It is a common enough literary technique to give readers access to the thoughts of the characters; *Jane Eyre* and *Robinson Crusoe*, for example, were both written in the first person. Indeed, Dickens himself used it, *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* are written completely in this manner, and both *Bleak House* and *The Old Curiosity Shop* have first person sections. Not so with *Hard Times*. A reader is in much the same position as they would be if they shared the world of this text with those who inhabit it. Knowledge of the mental and emotional life of the various individuals must be based on inference from observation, as in life.

There is some editorial comment from the author in *Hard Times*, but no access to the thoughts of the characters themselves. I have chosen to mention this here because of Josiah Bounderby, a character in *Hard Times* and one to whom I shall devote more attention in a later chapter. For the moment, however, it is enough that Bounderby combines both truth and fiction; he has fabricated the back story of his life, and his interactions with others are shaped by this. Yet, as Dickens demonstrates, the fictions of his life are not central to his being, because his actions accurately define him. When his lies were revealed, nothing changed; the truth was in the narrative he wrote with his behaviour not the stories he told with his words. This issue of the reliability of words is central to contemporary discussions on the evolution of language; words are easier to fake than a dog's snarl and therefore are less trustworthy. So it is that communication is bedevilled by the genie of interpretation; for whose benefit is the message sent, and who benefits from the understanding, and how reliable then is the—very cheaply produced but potentially influential—information? Dickens's illustration of this conflict—one that Darwin seems not to have considered—should be kept in mind; the link between fiction, perception, reliability, and communication seems central both to language and to narrative. What we hear is not always what we get.

Although the ultimate origins of human speech are unknown, and likely to remain so, it is almost universally accepted that gesture—the visual—was important in the evolution of human speech. Tomasello (2008) has argued that speech arose from gestural origins, and that sign language was the original prototype for speech. McNeill (2005) argues differently, proposing that gestures could not have led to speech, but that the two must have evolved together or speech would have supplanted gesture. Furthermore, he suggests that this required an awareness of self as a social being in relation to the other participant in the exchange. In either case, whether the possibility of deception in the dog's snarl—as self-serving as a businessman's claim to have known poverty—is understood as a fabrication or an unconscious action, I suggest that this raises the interesting possibility that some form of gestural fiction may even pre-date language; wherever there is a power relationship to consider, there is social advantage and the opportunity for manipulation.

The exact role of gesture and communicative behaviour may be the subject of debate, but it seems more likely than not that the beginnings of language have a strong visual element as well as the more obviously audible component. In fact, most primates have only a small range of coded cries. For example, those that will warn others of the presence of a predator; the cries may identify the type of predator (Arbib, Liebal, & Pika, 2008), but that predator must be present. There is no room for a “what-if” tiger here. The small range of calls used, their lack of flexibility, and that the cry reliably reflects the emotional state of the caller, seem very different from the generative process that is commonly understood as language. Even the transmission is general rather than specific; the information conveyed is received by an audience that is simply within earshot rather than selected by the caller. It is a proto-typical Freirean communique, a one way activity with any response occurring outside of the process rather than within, as a dialogue of interactions. So, perhaps the origins of language may turn out to be quite distant from the vocalizations common in the primate world—even though they obviously share some similar tools—because language has abstract, symbolic properties. Words represent an object rather than simply warning of its presence. Footprints—or similar indications of interaction between an object and the world—seem a plausible pathway for the development of the complex abstract understandings, and communicative abilities of human beings from those of their remote ancestors.

Once the first individual makes the mental link between the footprints and the tiger he or she is beginning on the journey to abstract thought. The deduction that the footprints contain symbolic and narrative information—they represent the presence of a feline predator in that place, at some point in historical time—seems to be beyond all or most animals. This is despite the behavioural evidence that suggests elements of narrative-type processing may be present in some groups. There is no indication of any animal having a warning cry that might be interpreted along the lines of “there are some tiger footprints here; look out for the tiger that made them.” Savage-Rumbaugh’s work with Bonobo chimpanzee does raise the possibility that at least one band of these apes in some way understands footprints from their own group as a trail-marker. This may be an early step along the same path that human ancestors walked towards. However, the evidence is not strong enough to be sure; all that has been observed is that the Bonobos did not blaze a trail when they walked in the mud. Nonetheless, it is a place to start from; it is something to consider. What we do know is that somewhere in the mists of the human past a sign—and the nature of a footprint makes it seem a likely sign—was read, and the information gathering systems of a species was changed forever.

I think footprints are a likely starting place because they are universal, unintended, reliable sources of information. Perhaps some hunter, as he knelt to drink, saw the pug marks of a tiger and remembered that he had seen similar marks beside a kill. In a moment of perception he was able to understand the link between the footprint and the tiger; he knew that at some point in time there had been a tiger in this place, and that there was a historical narrative of cause and effect, of agent and agency, written on the ground. It is just as likely that the revelation came in pursuit of game, the realisation that unseen, and perhaps fleeing, prey could be located by following the signs of their passing. Perhaps it was a mother seeking a missing child who first understood the story of the print, understood that in some way the sign represented the object. It may seem obvious that a tiger is needed to make a tiger’s footprint, but such a conclusion can only come from a particular understanding of the world. An antelope apparently sees only a mark on the ground; the deductive step represents a giant leap for mankind. With this single action, or at least one similar, the human world is changed forever and the brain becomes a tool that that can think about the unseen. It does not supplant the natural superstitious, inductive, thought processes—which live on in such things as the *post hoc ergo propter hoc* fallacy, that because *B* happened after *A* that it was caused by it—of the earlier time,

but instead it becomes an additional tool for understanding the environment. It may even represent the beginnings of abstract and symbolic thought because the kneeling hunter does not need to see the tiger that watches; knowledge of the presence of a tiger is sufficient cause for caution. Where the antelope or zebra must wait to see or smell a particular animal before they take alarm, the hunter can respond to a paw print that has become a symbol, standing in for the absent beast.

In my imaginative re-construction of events, the human hunter (or mother), long accustomed to deliberate physical gestures and visual markers as ways of communicating information, has realised that information can also come from signs that were not intended to be read. Each of these possibilities—albeit impossible to prove—are but small steps from Bonobos deliberately leaving a trail for their fellows. For each of these simple observations, however, there is an additional concept, implicit in the separation of agent and effect—a distinction between what is and what was. The narrative-type information processing indicated by so many behaviours across so many species now had some markers on a way of linking events and observations. The evidence has become a point on a historical time-line; the observer, the hunter, the mother, the storyteller, must connect such points in a way that explains the world. It seems a long way from Dickens, but it is not as far as it might first appear, for in *Hard Times* he suggested that there was something important beyond fact, something about the way in which the facts were included into our lives was significant. My storytelling, for all its fictional nature, seems a plausible representation of something close to the beginnings of much of what is human about the processing of information from the world around us.

I like to imagine that the first human attempting to communicate an abstract idea drew a footprint in the dirt and made the warning sound for tiger. Whatever the case may actually have been, the first stumbling steps along the pathway towards modernity would have been difficult ones, but they were taken. The brain would have struggled with the new tasks, but evolutionary advantage eventually selected those who gained the most advantage from this new way of acting within the world. It may be that previous species had come to this point but failed to make the transition to language. Language need not be verbal, sign languages are an obvious example, but they do need the ability to convey information and ideas. For the hunter who has read his world and seen a message in the footprints of the tiger—and his friends and family—there is a benefit from

communicating the relationship, however broadly, between the presence of the footprints and the presence of the cause. There is no reason to think that our ancestors were any less articulate than other animals, with their systems of coded sounds and gestures to represent the presence, and even the nature, of an intruder or a predator. However, as noted earlier, there seems to be no generative ability in this animal communication, no way of communicating a more subtle message nor of rapidly explaining a new situation (Tomasello, 2008). The transition from the coded gesturing and vocalisation (Armstrong & Wilcox, 2007) to generative communication was one of the necessary steps for the transition from animal to human.

The development of language would seem likely to have given some communicative benefit to its users, and give further advantage to those with the intellectual capacity to extend the logical possibilities. In this thesis, I do not attempt to address the evolution of spoken language in detail, I am only sketching a possible pathway for language and narrative thought to be a progression from ancient behaviours—some of which can still be seen in other species—which affect how we now understand our world. It is difficult—for me impossible—to visualise complex reasoning without language. However, language would be a powerful tool for the development of reasoning abilities from the narrative ideas of agency, and cause and effect. Language without syntax, without structure, seems oxymoronic, and so this structure must have also evolved. The same narrative thought processes that, as this chapter has argued, appear to be widespread, and perhaps universal, could have provided the foundation for grammar and syntax. One of the prevailing theories of language acquisition even claims that all humans are born with an innate ‘universal grammar’, which is then applied by the infant to his or her linguistic environment (Pinker, 1994). I recognise the speculative nature of my reasoning here; nevertheless, if language is founded upon a near universal thinking process, then a near universal language structure would be unsurprising. That this could result in children being born with a hard-wired predisposition to acquire a language seems almost a necessary evolutionary outcome.

### **Evolutionary baggage and cultural cargo**

In whatever way it evolved, the universal ability to communicate through language is a defining human characteristic. Importantly, humans retain and utilise thought processes

that make us particularly susceptible to explanatory narratives—Gottshall’s “vulnerability to story”—rather than being truly rational. Here I will call upon—and build upon—the words of Paulo Freire:

Animals do not consider the world; they are immersed in it. In contrast, human beings emerge from the world, objectify it, and in so doing can understand it and transform it with their labor. (1970/1996, p. 106)

This may no longer be an entirely accurate distinction, nevertheless human beings do seem to have a much greater ability to objectify their world than other animals do. It may be language, I suggest—with its ability to allow individuals to interact with the world as a coherent group—that has made this possible. However, the objectification of the world is only in relation to a subject position; it reveals nothing about the world itself. Evolution works on advantage, not accuracy; there is an instrumental advantage in being able to “understand [the world] and transform it”, but that says little about the how accurately such an understanding might compare with an alternative. The famous cargo cults of Melanesia provide a non-trivial example; adherents to this world-understanding expect—among other things—a forthcoming world change that will restore justice, help from and/or the return of ancestors, that strong leaders will arise who will have special knowledge and/or experiences, and the appearance of material wealth in the form of an abundance of goods or ‘cargo’ (Otto, 2009). Its origins can be connected to the arrival and departure of Japanese and American troops in the area during World War Two<sup>28</sup>, and the material wealth that they possessed.

The Melanesian Islanders understood the objects in spiritual terms; they were created for the use of the indigenous people and would one day be returned to them. Their efforts to bring about the return of ‘cargo’ have resulted in the well-known imitations of western products made from coconut and straw and intended to bring the return of the ‘cargo’. So, these people have acted upon, and transformed their world as a result of their understanding of that world. It seems vanishingly unlikely that many western readers would consider the ‘cargo’ interpretation of the world to be as accurate as their own. The human mind does not require a world of objective truth. In fact, just the opposite; a

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<sup>28</sup> Otto (2009) also points out that those groups involved were not dissimilar to Western cultures in important ways, particularly the high value placed on material wealth as a source of prestige. Cargo did not establish among local cultures without that cultural similarity.

constructed world view that fits the facts as understood is perfectly adequate. As Boyd (2009) so succinctly expresses it, “[t]he uncertainty that theory of mind arouses, that we do not know the complete situation, will often be appeased by the first ready-made agential explanation that comes to mind” (p. 203). Evolution has provided us with a mind that has baggage, and because of this it can produce ‘cargo’.

The same human mind that produced ‘cargo’ can and still does, construct faces out of clouds, and giants and animals out of rocks and trees silhouetted against the sky. It makes irrational connections, but nonetheless comprehensible connections. It is easy enough to dismiss such things as fanciful creations of no significance; they simply illustrate the well-known human tendency to create patterns in our minds and to impose our own order upon observations. This may seem like a trivial enough ability, and indeed on one level it is. Who has not spent some time lying in the sun, allowing their imagination free rein to play games with the softly changing shapes of the clouds? Of course, there is no giant, no face in the clouds, no sleeping tiger crafted from rocks and trees; human beings can see what isn’t there. In this case, there seems to be no case of mistaken identity; most of us would be aware that we were imposing an artificial order onto natural phenomena to create meaning from the meaningless. However, there comes a problem with this; human beings can create mental bridges, no more real than the faces in the clouds, to create order and meaning. And then treat the result as fact.

The hunter saw a pattern that linked a footprint with a tiger, but some Melanesians saw a pattern that linked the arrival of modern material goods with their own expectations. Pigeons linked the arrival of food with their own ritualised behaviours. There are many ways of reading the world, but—as Roberts (2000) pointed out in a discussion on reading the works of Paulo Freire—the existence of a range of possible interpretations “does not mean, however, that some readings, interpretive positions, and modes of understanding may not be better than others” (p. 71). Reading uses the eyes to access information, but then uses the brain to process, interpret, and give meaning to the information, within the limitations of the reader’s existing understanding of the world. Therein lies much of the power and pleasure of reading both a text and a world; it is an act of imagination, but it challenges the reader to examine their own reading for its understanding of the world—and their own understanding of the world for effects on the interpretation of the text.



## **In what distant deeps or skies, burnt the fire of thine eyes?**

Humans rely heavily on vision to gather information about their world, whether it is from observation or reading. However, just as reading is an activity that involves interpretation, so it is that observation can provide a poor representation of reality. Human beings do not just ‘see’ things, they create their vision of the objective world; our brains process all incoming data, not just text, in ways that we do not yet completely understand. On a visual level, this is shown simply enough by optical illusions—so popular with children—where what we see produces a distorted view of what is actually present. It seems that at least one part of human—and possibly other animals’—sensory perception, and understanding, of the world does not simply gather factual data; vision is an activity of assessing and processing data in accordance with these as yet not fully understood inner rules. These rules seem to have inherent limitations to the accuracy of the results they produce for us. Throughout the text of *Hard Times* Dickens seems to me to be suggesting that what we see is affected by our existing understandings of the world and our circumstances. *Hard Times*, although containing no direct reference to optical illusions—unlike *Martin Chuzzlewit*—does seem to hint at the possibility of an artificially controlled presentation of reality. Should the reader understand the ‘fairy palaces’ of Coketown—seen from a train at night—as simply an ironic description, or is there an uncertainty suggested? Is it the position of the observer—wealthy enough to travel past the facts of industrialism—that allows the illusion? This encourages us to consider the possibility that Dickens was aware that in some way, the world that we see and live in has a less certain relationship with an objective reality than we might readily expect.

Most of us will have had the experience of searching the room for something without success, only to eventually find it in plain sight. Almost as common is the experience of seeing someone we know quite well, but not recognizing them immediately, and being aware of an abrupt transition into awareness as they approach. The truth is that we don’t always see what is in front of us, or at least not all of what is in front of us. In one famous and entertaining study (Simons & Chabris, 1999) a group of observers were asked to watch a short video clip of two teams of three players passing an orange basketball to one another, in a regular order. However, there was a gorilla in the room, almost literally, and therein lies the whole point. That almost half of the observers didn’t notice a person in a gorilla suit walking through a group of six people who were passing a basketball to each

other seems remarkable, and indeed it is. It is called ‘inattentional blindness’ and it’s well known. It means that people often don’t see what they are not looking for. We make assumptions and we attempt to create patterns; these are economical behaviours which may reduce the mental processing required. This has a Darwinian appeal. Perhaps patterns are more economically processed, as they are produced by calculation rather than data. Dawkins has suggested that “what the eye lacks in optics the brain makes up for with its sophisticated image-simulating software” (2009, p. 353), however, the metaphor of ‘image-simulating software’ implies an accuracy that does not seem to be present. It seems at least as possible that the relationship between the world of ‘reality’ and our perception of it is mediated in multiple ways. Our interpretation of reality is—to some extent at least—our own creation rather than objective fact; we see what is not there and we don’t see what is. Uncertainty is part of the human condition, and so when *Hard Times* begins with Thomas Gradgrind making his famous call for an education based entirely on facts, I suggest that Dickens was deliberately making him ask for the impossible. Dickens—without the science of today—seems to have had some sense that imaginative, fanciful, creative input was needed to process facts into meaning, and that creativity brings with it the possibility of error.

The creativity of the human mind—closer to Dickens’s ‘fancy’ than Gradgrind’s ‘fact’—raises serious problems regarding the accuracy with which an individual can understand the world. There is considerable evidence that the human brain not only modifies input to agree with existing beliefs about the world, but it will also reject facts that conflict with those beliefs. From an educational perspective this is of interest. In addition, once beliefs are formed they can be very resistant to change even in the face of compelling evidence of error (Ross, Lepper, & Hubbard, 1975). Reluctance to consider alternative ideas—including alternative explanatory narratives and myths—once one has been decided upon is part of the human condition. It is called “belief perseverance—the tendency to make use of invalidated information—[and it] is one of social psychology’s most reliable phenomena” (Guenther & Alicke, 2008, p. 706). Actually the beliefs can be more than just resistant to change; the presentation of verifiable, factual, information that conflicts with someone’s belief can have a backfire effect<sup>29</sup> and actually strengthen the belief (Nyhan & Reifler, 2010). In the case of *Hard Times*, the critical response may provide

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<sup>29</sup> The “Backfire Effect” is the term coined by Nyhan and Reifler to describe the responses in their study.

and unexpected example. As a later chapter will show in more detail, the responses of Martineau (1855) and Sinnett (1854) to both *Hard Times* and its author read as the defence of a pre-determined ideological position—that the behaviour of the market is an appropriate standard for social decision-making—rather than as a contribution to a debate. This reluctance to reconsider a position in the face of new evidence puts Gradgrind in an even more difficult position than he was before; not only are facts more elusive than he might have expected, but it seems that they will not always be sufficient to bring about change, in any educational sense.

It seems that the human approach to the gathering and assessing of evidence to test beliefs is not simply a Gradgrindian process of collecting and sorting facts. In addition to the backfire effect and belief perseverance, another well attested mechanism works to make it difficult to change any belief that might be held. Positive confirmation bias is the tendency to seek evidence that supports already held beliefs and conclusions, rather than evidence that might raise questions or conflict with them (Jones & Sugden, 2001). Given that serious study did not begin in this area until the 1960s, it is remarkable that Dickens is able to illustrate so clearly the process of “unwitting selectivity in the acquisition and use of evidence” (Nickerson, 1998, p. 175). Here Gradgrind is verbalising—Dickens gives his readers access only to the actions, not the thoughts—a position that he has obviously already decided upon; there is no deliberate partiality only a blindness to other possibilities. He assesses the evidence that the thirty year age gap between his daughter and her suitor need not be an obstacle.

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. ... Is this one disparity sufficient to operate as a bar to such a marriage? In considering this question, it is not unimportant to take into account the statistics of marriage, so far as they have yet been obtained, in England and Wales. I find, on reference to the figures, that a large proportion of these marriages are contracted between parties of very unequal ages, and that the elder of these contracting parties is, in rather more than three-fourths of these instances, the bridegroom. It is remarkable ... that among the natives of the British possessions in India, also in a considerable part of China, and among the Calmucks of Tartary, the best means of computation yet furnished us by travellers, yield similar results. The disparity I

have mentioned, therefore, almost ceases to be disparity, and (virtually) all but disappears. (*HT*, p. 77)

Indeed the tragic gap between father and daughter is also well illustrated by his careful selection of facts. Gradgrind's argument is not in the best traditions of the scientific method—which itself Dickens may even have labelled as 'fancy'—where falsifiability has long been held as an important criterion of objective scientific study, nor even rational decision making. However, it is representative of human thought processes. Jones and Sugden (2001) examined decision making and found that people were very discriminatory in the information upon which they based decision-making, and they interpreted otherwise valueless information—such as that among the Calmucks of Tartary the groom is often older than the bride—as strongly supportive. It was found that confirmation bias has a “considerable degree of robustness to experience” (p. 92); people who should know better, don't behave as if they do. Facts do not seem to have primary importance in human thinking processes—processes that seem not to be optimised for the pursuit of truth, but rather better suited to the confirmation of ideas already held.

### **Muddy footprints in the Fairy Palace**

Fact and fancy are even more difficult to separate than Gradgrind could ever have imagined. Indeed, even Dickens could hardly have imagined the degree to which the understanding of fact can be influenced by experience, could he? Yet, perhaps he did have some notion of this; he does seem to have had at least some awareness that an educator could influence the way in which the students read their world. M'Choakumchild himself—even with his directive to “Bring to me ... yonder baby just able to walk, and I will engage that it shall never wonder (*HT*, p. 41)—shows us this. However, he would never have been so bold as to claim what serious researchers can now suggest:

Give us a dozen healthy memories, well-formed, and our own specified world to handle them in. And we'll guarantee to take any one at random and train it to become any type of memory that we might select. (Loftus & Hoffman, 1989, p. 103)

It seems that the line between a real memory and a product of the imagination is but faintly drawn. It is probably commonly accepted that memory represents a record of past events experienced by an individual, albeit sometimes a less than perfect record<sup>30</sup>. Within this understanding is the assumption that for an event to be remembered it must first have occurred. That, it seems, is supposition rather than fact. Modern research has confirmed that memories can be altered not only by events that occur later than those being recalled, but, in some cases, by fictitious accounts from a convincing source (Loftus, 1997; Loftus & Hoffman, 1989; Loftus & Pickrell, 1995)—even in pigeons (Harper & Garry, 2000). In such a situation, a remembered situation or event could have the educational value of personal experience—but without having occurred. In my introduction I mentioned that Forster, in a review of *Hard Times*, had claimed that “no thesis can be argued in a novel” (1854, p. 568). Presumably this was because fiction, being a story, cannot present a logical argument; however, studies have shown that a fiction can rewrite an individual’s understanding of the world. It seems reasonable to wonder if, under some circumstances, a literary work may be able to blend with the personal experience of the reader, and become a part of memory.

The evidence for the influence of prior learning on the understanding of texts is overwhelming (e.g. McNamara & Kintsch, 1996; Ozuru, Dempsey, & McNamara, 2009; Taboada & Guthrie, 2006), and will come as no surprise to any educator. The evidence for the influence of post event activity on memory is similarly compelling, although perhaps less expected. On reflection, it is difficult to see how it could be otherwise; existing understandings of the world form the foundation to which additional information is added, whether through text or experience. However, existing knowledge and ways of reading the world rely on memory, on past reading or experience. The known advantage of building on existing knowledge can be understood as elaborating and adding detail to that understanding of the world that is accepted by the reader/learner. Knowledge that contradicts is much less easily assimilated—as belief perseverance demonstrates. New knowledge that cannot be integrated requires the construction of a new understanding—unless it triggers the backfire effect—to explain the reader’s world.

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<sup>30</sup> A lot of the work was occasioned by the rise in reports of recovered memories of child abuse. In such cases the reliability of the child’s testimony was a crucial and contentious issue. An excellent discussion of the research in the area is in Lynley Hood’s book *A City Possessed* (2001), about New Zealand’s own most famous case of recovered memories

Reading, simply understood, is no more than a technical skill. Whether it be a work of fact or fancy, the reader converts the text to language—or at least something that seems to be processed as language. Of course, the reading of fact or fancy will be motivated by different forces; the quest for knowledge is not the same as reading for pleasure. Reading a popular novel for pleasure probably places less emphasis on the reader's rational processing powers than does engaging with a more academic work. Yet, it may still be an absorbing, and even emotional experience. Perhaps part of us is more firmly connected to the irrational, primordial crocodile at such a time. Half submerged in the shallows of an evolutionary stream, does the superstitious mind bring its old fears and emotions to the surface, to help engage with the text? I cannot help thinking that Trollope may have been correct for reasons that he could never have anticipated when he claimed an efficacy for sentiment that reason could not duplicate. Just as Freire called for action in response to a reading of the world, so Trollope admitted that action had resulted from the reading of Dickens.

[T]he radical reform which has now swept over such establishments [as Almshouses]<sup>31</sup> has owed more to the twenty numbers<sup>32</sup> of Mr. Sentiment's novel, than to all the true complaints which have escaped from the public for the last half century. (Trollope, 1855/1900, p. 189)

Literature, as text, takes its forms of understanding, and influencing, beyond any spoken narrative; it breaks the chains of time and space that once linked the storyteller with the audience. Nonetheless, it seems to build upon some innate human tendency to see and interpret objects and events in terms of other objects and events, whether it is 'cargo' or seeing faces in the clouds. Reading is, of course, visual and language has been argued to have roots in the visual act of gesture. Perhaps this helps us to understand the ability of a reader to convert the black marks of the typeface into an image or a narrative. In literature, the image becomes simile and metaphor. In *Hard Times*, Dickens writes—as mentioned earlier—of a night-time journey, where “[t]he lights in the great factories, which looked, when they were illuminated, like Fairy palaces – or the travelers by

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<sup>31</sup> Church funded housing and hospital care for the very poor. The care for the poor in Dickens's time was charitable by name but rather less in its ideology and performance. The intention was often to provide care at a level sufficient to discourage anyone from availing themselves of it. Poverty was understood as justified and self-inflicted; charity was moral rescue. The parallels with the modern discussions around welfare are not coincidental.

<sup>32</sup> This is a reference to the weekly or monthly serialisation of Dickens's novels, all of which appeared in this format prior to their collection and publication in any single volume.

express-train said so – were all extinguished” (*HT*, p. 52), and a few pages later “and the Express whirled in full sight of the Fairy Palace over the arches near: little felt amid the jarring of the machinery, and scarcely heard above its crash and rattle” (*HT*, p. 64), we can see cloud-watching brought to the page. Not only does the reader contend with the uncertain interpretation of optical illusion, but factories are compared with imaginary Fairy structures and then become them; they are used to convey information in the form of mental images and sense impressions. But no-one has ever seen a ‘Fairy Palace’, so, how is it that the image can be meaningful. The answer is those shared childhood stories also shared their images. Perhaps no adult imagines exactly the same Fairy Palace, but most adults who have grown up with English fairy-tales will have little difficulty with the image. The imagery refers back to an earlier, childish, reading of the world; fairies and ogres existed, as did cows with crumpled horns, and giant beanstalks. That world is as much a memory as a fiction.

Thomas Gradgrind opens *Hard Times* with his famous pronouncement—it seems so much more than a statement— about the importance and value of facts in education.

Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir! (*HT*, p. 5)

I will revisit this statement in a later chapter; here it is simply the primacy of ‘facts’ that is at issue. The setting for Gradgrind’s rather imperious oratory is a schoolroom and he is outlining his educational principles to his new schoolmaster. Certainly, few would argue that facts are not an important constituent of an education, but is the accumulation of facts sufficient to constitute an education, and does that differ from learning? Even if learning is understood as being defined in terms such as “a persisting change in performance or performance potential that results from experience and interaction with the world” (Driscoll, 2005, p. 1), then the answer must be that more than facts are needed. This requirement for change within the individual learner as the result of interaction with a physical environment—the beginnings of Freire’s *praxis*—implies that fact accumulation

is not sufficient for learning; education without learning is impossible to envisage. Understanding is not necessary for the retention of facts—but meaningful information is retained better than simple lists of data—however understanding at some level is needed for learning. Simple training—including the conditioned response of Skinner’s pigeons—such as encouraging household pets to learn which behaviours are not acceptable, would seem to fit the definition. In a limited way, this doubtless constitutes learning; however it falls short of providing any vision of education beyond the behavioural. The following description of education seems useful:

education in its broadest sense is any act or experience that has a formative effect on the mind, character or physical ability of an individual. In its technical sense education is the process by which society deliberately transmits its accumulated knowledge, skills and values from one generation to another.<sup>33</sup> (Rai & Kumar, 2010, p. 69)

The human capacity for learning seems quantitatively different from that of the rest of the animal world; the “knowledge skills and values” that cultures transmit seem more flexible, creative and varied than those of any other species. The human mind, I propose, is more complex and less rational than one that could construe education as a collection of facts. Humans use stories—beliefs and narratives with facts included—and transmit those from one generation to another.

Modern western societies use texts in their education systems; often scientific, fact based texts. However literature still holds a special place in western education. There are whole university courses devoted to its study, and it occupies a prominent position in secondary school English classes and their examinations. Nonetheless, as Dickens noted in *Hard Times* and knew from his own newspaper endeavours, these texts for study were not reading for pleasure. In any case, those that did not reach the person in the street could have no effect on the everyday lives of people. Any form of reading, literary or otherwise, is a transactional process between the reader and the text. The word ‘reader’, however, blends the species with the individual; an individual is a construction of cultural and biological influences, but a species is biological. There is a mass of evidence that

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<sup>33</sup> This quotation is unattributed in the paper cited. However, several internet sources, pre-dating Rai & Kumar, use the same quotation but attribute it to Wikipedia. It is no longer on Wikipedia, but that may be the original source.



indicates a biological basis for narrative-type processing as a fundamental way of interacting with the world. A literary work, such as *Hard Times*, may be an extension of those processes but fixed onto the page to be available for others.

The individual reader, I propose, responds to a literary text with perceptions that are evolutionarily directed towards the narrative-type processing of information in seeking an understanding of the text and its relation with the world. Narrative is not a cultural construct; it seems to be an evolutionary trait more highly developed in humans than in other animals, but its roots may spread beyond the exclusively human. The individual narratives of a culture will differ, but the fact of their existence is universal, and the processes from which they may have developed seem ancient. If narrative-type mental processes can occur without complex communication—and pigeons, crows, and crocodiles suggest just this—then there is no reason to assume that the development of language would replace this mode of thought. Language could have allowed the narrative-type processing of information to develop into more complex forms of thought. We might expect the development of the intergenerational transmission of evolving beliefs and superstitions, and even that the more powerful members of a group could be expected to impose their superstitions on other members of the group. Perhaps, over time, those beliefs may become a requirement for group membership and we would be able to observe cultural divisions delineated by shared narratives of myth and genealogy, and often by language itself. As the Raven so wisely observed:

You are mighty proud about your language; but it seems to me that you don't deserve to have words, if you can't make a better use of 'em. You know you are always fighting about 'em. Do you never mean to leave that off? (Dickens, 1850b, p. 158)

The stories we were told do seem to help make us who we are, so it may be that it is the stories we tell that will help shape the next generation. Dickens told great stories, but hinted that knowledge of a store of facts was inadequate for an education—or for understanding and transforming the world—and stories were somehow involved. With the understanding that *Hard Times* may present ideas in unexpected ways, let us travel back to the times and to the man who wrote of them.

### 3. Not a literary Bounderby

Samuel Pickwick, founder of the famous Pickwick Club—and founder of Charles Dickens’s career—travelled into the country beyond London by horse-drawn coach. Twenty five years later, Thomas Gradgrind made his journeys back into London by train. The change from the world of the coach to the world of the railway was the transition between two different worlds, and Charles Dickens lived across them both. When the mill-owner Josiah Bounderby admonished the circus workers with the claim that he and Gradgrind “are the kind of people who know the value of time, and you are the kind of people who don’t know the value of time” (*HT*, p. 27) he too was making reference to a world change. It was only with the introduction of railways connecting the towns of England that time became synchronised across the country, and it was with the development of factories—the original rise of the machines—that time became an industrialised unit of measurement. The circus, with its horses and its irregular attitudes, belonged to a fading past. Dickens saw this happen, and responded to it in his work. To engage with any text is to engage with more than just the words on the page because the author and the text have a historical location. Paulo Freire maintained that:

[I]t is impossible to read texts without reading the context of the text, without establishing the relationships between the discourse and the reality which shapes the discourse. ... We must try to read the context of a text and also relate it to the context in which we are reading the text. (Freire, 1985, pp. 18-19)

The context of *Hard Times* and its author’s life are far removed from today. However, an understanding of both will show that literature in general, and *Hard Times* specifically, can contribute to an understanding of both those times and these times.

A biography is, of course, a narrative. It is a series of events—more or less factual—threaded together on a time-line. It is also, at least in part, a fiction; memories, as noted in the previous chapter, are not impartial or perfect recordings. Similarly, the events on the biographical time-line can be selected, and arranged, to cover gaps and to conceal that which might conflict with the tone of the image being presented. The biography of Charles Dickens is no exception; except, that in many ways Charles Dickens was himself

an exception. He was no member of the leisured, educated classes; Charles Dickens rose from an obscure background to become the foremost novelist of his age. This is more important than it seems at first glance, because in many ways he was not even a novelist; he was a newspaper man who wrote serials. In addition, he was a newspaper man at a time when editorial comment, and even reporting, was often blended with fictional material in its presentation—Dickens’s own article ‘On Strike’ (1854) is a salient example. He wrote both his fiction and his articles against a background of the reality of social problems that figured in the newspapers—and society—of those times. Such generalisations, for all their truth, do not tell a modern reader exactly how Charles Dickens was constructed by his times, experiences, and his character to write *Hard Times*. This biographical note finishes with the publication of the first issue of *Hard Times*, but uses some material subsequent to that for the insights into Dickens’s character that can be so obtained. I illustrate the point that his personality,—including some quirks—intentions, interests, and activities combine to form the portrait of a man who was passionate about injustice and outspoken against it. Above all, he was a keen observer—if not critical of his own view—and an accurate reporter, at the centre of Victorian life; as such he stands as a well-informed, important, historical voice.

There have almost certainly been more words written about Charles Dickens than he ever wrote himself, which given his prodigious output is a monument to enduring fame. The first of the many biographies of Dickens was produced soon after his death in 1870, and the continued interest in his life has meant a continuous stream of publications. Some very thorough modern biographies have been produced quite recently (e.g. Ackroyd, 1990; Slater, 2009), and more will continue to be produced as new material becomes available. In this chapter I have used this available material to give an outline of the facts of his life, but paid particular attention to those circumstances and events of his life that seem to bear most directly on the production of the novel *Hard Times*. In the process of so doing, I will highlight some evidence of characteristics of his personality that also contributed to the novel. Included are his conflicting views that while education was both an opportunity for personal growth and for economic advancement, it was largely wasted unless directed at economic or social ends. In addition, his own sense of entitlement to a special place in the world seems to have limited his understanding of the workings of social class. He could see that society contained injustices, but not that it created and recreated them. His responses to these perceived injustices were constrained by his

inability to question the basic social structure; for Dickens, social class was the natural order of things. That he was a product of his times did not inhibit his powers of observation, even if his analysis may now be interpreted as being historically located. His extraordinary ability to notice the anomalies and absurdities of everyday life and then to share that vision with his readers enabled him to create a plausible world for his fictional characters to inhabit. In fact, I will argue in this, and subsequent, chapters that he did not so much create the world his characters moved in, but reported on it. This facility of observation was reproduced in his descriptions of his own experiences, but in an externalised way. There is a suggestion that his own understanding of himself was at least partly a fiction. His life and *Hard Times* show signs of inner conflict and unresolved ideals; what is and what Dickens believes ought to be, do not align.

I will suggest that Charles Dickens had one major attribute of character—and to call it a flaw would not seem unreasonable—that seems to have influenced his writing. Although he was able to observe and understand his social world, in terms of the interactions of power, and the individual behaviours of people, he seems detached from the emotional understandings that would be expected. Evidence often suggests a totally self-centred world view from Dickens; to the extent that on occasion he treated others as objects in his world rather than subjects in their own. Exactly a month after the birth of his third son, a time when some emotional response might be expected, Dickens wrote to a friend, “Kate is all right again; and so, they tell me, is the Baby. But I decline (on principle) to look at the latter object” (Dickens in Tillotson, 1977, p. 47). This might be little more than a sample of Dickens’s sometimes grim humour, and perhaps that was how it was intended. Nevertheless, it displays an emotional distance from the objects of his attention that is not uncommon in Dickens’s writings. It also seems to hint at echoes of Josiah Bounderby’s emotional isolation from those that surrounded him, as well as his self-appointed role as a controlling figure in the lives of others.

Any effort to understand an individual is incomplete without some understanding of the social and historical context in which that individual lived. This is particularly important in the case of Charles Dickens because while his environment directly influenced his thinking and writing, his writing has since transcended its historical context. As a result, for example, few modern readers would understand, without an explanation such as Giddings (2004) provides, that in the London of *Nicholas Nickleby* the term ‘milliner’ had

as much to do with prostitution as with the production of hats<sup>34</sup>. It seems that Ralph Nickleby's assistance in finding employment for his niece Kate was more sinister than it appears to today's audience. The behaviour of other characters—such as the lecherous Sir Mulberry Hawk—can also be seen in a different light, and Kate's predicament lies revealed as truly desperate. So it is with their creator that some understanding of his time is needed to understand his responses.

Charles Dickens was the most prolific and influential novelist and journalist in Victorian England, but he was also the product of an earlier age. He was in his mid-twenties, in 1838, when the first of his novels, *The Pickwick Papers*, was published in a single volume. His latest work, *Oliver Twist*, was part-way through its monthly serialisation. Dickens arrived as a novelist in the same year that England crowned a new queen, the young Victoria<sup>35</sup>. So, although he grew to become part of the Victorian world, Dickens's roots are firmly in the soil of Hanoverian England. His early reading was of the writers of the eighteenth century and before—Defoe, Goldsmith, Shakespeare, and the King James Bible are all alluded to in *Hard Times*—and his own attitudes reflect those of the pre-industrial era. Even to claim that his career as a novelist began with the triumphant success of *The Pickwick Papers*, and continued with a succession of popular novels, is to oversimplify the story. In practice, each of his novels was first published in a newspaper, in weekly or more often monthly, instalments. Charles Dickens didn't write books. He was never a novelist in the modern sense; he was always a newspaper man, writing to meet his publishing deadline for the next issue.

It is worth reflecting on the ability and the output of this man Dickens; in a single lifetime he contributed enough to English literature to be considered the greatest writer of his era, and he did so with a sharpened feather and an inkwell. He may well have also been one of the most prolific. From the mind of Charles Dickens and through the nib of his pen flowed fourteen major novels, all of which are still readily available, and highly regarded, today. He also wrote two children's books, although one of them, *The Life of Our Lord*, was written for the private use of his own children and was read aloud within the family

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<sup>34</sup> Note, for example, the comment under the header *Ignorance and Crime* in *The Examiner* of April 22 1848; "Ill-paid milliners and dressmakers would seem to lapse the most into such offences as may be supposed to arise from, or to lead to, prostitution" (*Ignorance and Crime*, 1848).

<sup>35</sup> Victoria was crowned in June 1838. In that same month *Oliver Twist* was into its fifteenth issue (of twenty four), and *Nicolas Nickleby* had its third instalment published.

every Christmas<sup>36</sup>. Charles Dickens has even been described as the man who invented Christmas (Kitton, 1890), and, with *A Christmas Carol* he certainly popularised a secular view that focussed on good works and family dinners. Notice, however, that the idea of ‘works’—transformative action as an ethical activity—also represents the implied call for action is central to much of Dickens’s writing, but explicit in *Hard Times*. Dickens wrote several other Christmas stories, and contributed many articles to newspapers—including *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* both of which he founded and edited. In addition to that, he wrote enough letters to have a two volume edited set of them published shortly after his death, and a twelve volume set was subsequently produced, being completed in 2002. He gave many speeches, wrote several unmemorable plays and was an enthusiastic amateur actor; he travelled widely both locally and internationally, and gave an acclaimed series of public readings of his works in the United States and in Britain. Not only was he a product of his time, he was a contributor to it, and to our own modern understandings of those times. However, he was also a product of his own imagination, a kind of Boudier with a pen.

Several of Dickens’s novels have the form of a *bildungsroman*, where an innocent young man sets out through life without goals, or with misguided ones and after a series of adventures, and with the help of his friends, the hero finally finds his true vocation. This form became very popular in England after Carlyle had translated *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* from its original German, in 1824 (Drabble, 1995). However, Fielding’s *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling* had all the characteristics of the *bildungsroman*, even though it pre-dated the term—and it was a favourite of Dickens<sup>37</sup>. In Dickens’s own work, *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby* and *David Copperfield* all exhibit the form of the *bildungsroman*, the novel of ‘education’. These, particularly *David Copperfield*, are well known to have autobiographical elements in them. But, interestingly, Dickens himself also made the connection between himself and another of his characters, another self-

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<sup>36</sup> Dickens considered this to be an especially personal work, and prohibited its publication. His sister-in-law, Georgina Hogarth, and his children honoured Charles’s wishes and also withheld it from a wider audience. It was not until the death of the last of Dickens’s sons, Sir Henry Fielding Dickens, that the family agreed to its release. In early 1934, the publication rights were sold to the London Daily Mail for \$210,000, far more than Dickens was ever paid for any of his works sold during his lifetime.

<sup>37</sup> Henry Fielding Dickens, KC—named after the author—was the eighth child of Charles and Catherine and the most successful of them. He published his recollections of his father in the Times in 1928; he noted of Dickens senior:

He was intensely human, and I do not suppose it could be said of him that he was freer from the faults and defects appertaining to humanity than most of us are; but he was ‘thorough’ to the core, absolutely and entirely sincere and earnest in all he did (Dickens, H., 1928b, p. 16)

made man: Josiah Bounderby from *Hard Times*. In a letter to his close friend William Wills<sup>38</sup>—also sub-editor of *Household Words*—he discussed some collaborative work with another writer and then penned the words “I write this in the confidence of your knowing that I am not a Literary Bounderby, and not misunderstanding me (Dickens in House, Storey, & Tillotson, 2002, p. 160). With his act of denial he raises the question of why he chose to link himself with Bounderby at all.

It is particularly difficult to separate fact from fiction when writing of the life of Charles John Huffham Dickens. This is partly because his own life has many of the elements that feature in his novels, the lowly birth, an unexpected legacy, hopeless love affairs, legal battles, success and tragedy. It is also the effects of time and the myth that has grown around him. However, Dickens’s active involvement in telling his own story—and editing it—has also polished the narrative to reflect a chosen image of himself, and as with the journalism of his day we would be unwise to assume the author’s impartiality. Perhaps he understood his own life as being not unlike the fictional biography created by Josiah Bounderby. The rags-to-riches story of the disadvantaged child escaping his uncaring family to achieve success as a self-made-man—through hard work aided by personal superiority—could be drawn from the ‘hard times’ of Dickens’s life or from his fiction. We have no way to be sure where the line lies between truth and fiction in Dickens’s own story, because until very recently, most of the biographical information available had come from the first major biography published after Dickens’s death. *The Life of Charles Dickens* was written by John Forster, a man who although he was a professional biographer was also a lifelong friend. The intimacy between the two men and their shared Victorian context made Forster a part of the life about which he wrote, surely a position of both privilege and obligation for a biographer. Or course, that closeness may have been an influence on Forster, in his efforts to protect his friend’s family and reputation. Not only that, but there was some distance between Dickens and Forster in the latter part of his life, and some of the biographical details have been modified to disguise this. We know, for example, that there are sins of omission in the work because Dickens’s controversial relationship with a young actress, Ellen Ternan, is not mentioned, nor is there mention of Dickens’s badly treated and deserted wife Catherine. Ellen was at

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<sup>38</sup> W.H.Wills married Janet Chambers in 1846. She was the sister of Robert Chambers who had anonymously published his *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* two years earlier. Wills had worked for the Chambers brothers 1842-1845.

Dickens's bedside, as was his sister-in-law Georgina, when he died. Ellen Ternan was the first named beneficiary in Dickens's will, and she received a thousand pounds<sup>39</sup>. Whatever the truth of the relationship between Dickens and Ellen, it seems likely to have been significant enough for a reader to assume that her absence from the biography was more than a careless oversight.

It seems certain that there were other areas that were avoided or distorted to reflect a perspective that Forster was more comfortable presenting publicly. Charles Dickens was a self-made man, but he controlled the publicity for the product. He made himself, and re-made himself, through his work and his life; he presented himself as the 'learned and distinguished man'<sup>40</sup> that he had wished to be. He was his own hero and his own nemesis; for all of Dickens's adult life he concealed secrets from his past and led a double life. Publicly he was the greatest writer of his age, the Inimitable Boz; intelligent, witty, and in control. Privately, he remained secretive, insecure and ashamed of his background (Ackroyd, 1990). It has been pointed out (Smith, 2001) that there must be a fundamental reservation about Forster's biography because of the level of influence that Dickens himself had exercised. Forster's main sources were letters that Dickens had written, and conversations that they had had together. So pervasive was Forster's presence that one reviewer wondered whether Dickens had ever written to anyone else<sup>41</sup>, and even suggested that the book would have been more appropriately titled the *History of Dickens's Relations to Mr Forster* (FitzGerald cited in Hamilton, 1992, p. 153). Dickens was more than simply the object of study, in fact Dickens had wished, and perhaps even arranged, for Forster to be his biographer. His decision was justified, and Dickens retained sufficient influence with his friend to have posthumous editorial control.

### **Consulting the chimneys of the Coketown works**

We are on uncontested ground with the claim that on Friday the 7<sup>th</sup> of February 1812, a fairly ordinary lower-middle class couple in Landport, Portsea, welcomed into the world the child who would become the greatest novelist of his age. He was the second child in

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<sup>39</sup> It is difficult to accurately assess the 2013 value of this figure, because there are different ways of making the calculation. A simple purchasing power calculation puts it in the region of 80,000 pounds. It was certainly a significant sum of money.

<sup>40</sup> Dickens's words in his Autobiographical Fragment reproduced in Forster's biography.

<sup>41</sup> Dickens had written to others, so much so that Forster distorted his own writing to give the impression of a rather closer correspondence than had actually taken place.



the family; his sister Frances, known as Fanny, had been born eighteen months earlier. After Dickens's death, it was revealed that his paternal grandparents had been servants, but this does not seem to have been common knowledge during his lifetime, at least not outside the family. It may not have been known even within the family—Dickens had reasons to keep secrets. His grandfather, William, had been a footman working for a Lady Blandford, and in 1781 he had married the housemaid of his employer (Mondadori, 1977). There was a quarter of a century age difference between the two—similar to that “among the Calmucks of Tartary” (*HT*, p. 77), and between Louisa and Josiah Bounderby. William Dickens went on to become the Butler of Lord Crewe, who had homes in both London and the country, while his wife eventually became the housekeeper to the Crewe family. Such servants fitted awkwardly into the class structure of the day because they were “part of the aristocracy but not belonging to it, part of the lower-middle class and yet not attached to it” (Ackroyd, 1990, p. 4). (In Dickens's fiction his characters are often under the watchful eye of the butler, in *Hard Times* the role is filled by Mrs Sparsit). William Dickens died before his second son, John, was born, but it seems likely that he passed on some of his qualities, for he must have been a hard-working and conscientious employee with skills in administration and a reputation for honesty (Ackroyd, 1990). These same qualities also show in his grandson. The young Charles certainly knew his grandmother, for she did not die until he was twelve years old—in fact she seems to have been the model for the Dedlock's housekeeper<sup>42</sup> in *Bleak House*. In her position as housekeeper for the Crewe family she gained a reputation as an imaginative and fluent storyteller. One of the Crewe children is reported to have observed that “not since that time had she met anyone who possessed so surprising a gift for extemporising fiction for the amusement of others”, and another report claimed that “Mrs Dickens was an inimitable story teller, and she loved to have the children around her, and to beguile them, not only with fairy tales, but with the reminiscences of her own, and stories from the pages of history” (Ackroyd, 1990, p. 5). It seems that the inimitable Boz owed something to his grandmother.

John Dickens stayed in the Crewe household until his early twenties, by which time he was affable and handsome, although his mother thought him inclined to laziness and

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<sup>42</sup> This claim is made by Stevenson (1943) and supported in (Storey, 1939). Stevenson comments on the importance of this, Dickens's first implied admission of his working class roots. *Bleak House* was begun the year following the death of Dickens's own father's death, a time when many would examine their own place in family history.

careless with money (Ackroyd, 1990). It is to be expected that his manners, speech, and general behaviour would have reflected the households in which he was raised, rather than the social class to which his birth assigned him, and he may have even felt somewhat disadvantaged by life. Ackroyd expresses his attitude well “whether out of insecurity or resentment or plain imitation, he carried himself as a gentleman, dressed fashionably as a gentleman, and always insisted upon being treated as a gentleman” (p. 9). Such a lifestyle needs the income to support it, more than working as a servant was likely to provide. One writer has even suggested that this behaviour, and his reticence about his early life, indicate that he was, or believed that he was, the son of someone other than an aging butler (Tomalin, 2011). This remains no more than a suggestion, but it is true that while his older brother remained in service, John—probably with the assistance of his mother’s employer—began his working life as an extra clerk for the Treasurer of His Majesty’s Navy. He later became assistant clerk in the Pay Office, and in 1808 was transferred to Portsmouth. His income was more than adequate to support a family—and his gentlemanly lifestyle—and the following year he married Elizabeth Barrow, the sister of a work colleague.

The late Georgian world was so different from our own, and biographies that illuminate lower-middle class life so scarce, that it is difficult to put Dickens’s early life into perspective. Charles Dickens probably had a largely unremarkable childhood, and better rather than worse by the standards of the time. The Dickens family were not poor and they were not working class; they were firmly in the lower-middle class. However, John Dickens may have believed himself to have been deserving of better things, if he was—or had convinced himself he was—not the son of a butler. Charles, as the eldest son, may have shared a sense of social entitlement with his father. Certainly, Charles Dickens showed evidence of thinking that he was better than the social class he had been born into. The Dickenses had a comfortable home and John and Elizabeth eventually had eight children, of whom six survived. This was a time when a quarter of all children died before their tenth birthday (Woods, 2006).

The Dickens’s had ambitions for their children, and their children had ambitions for themselves. In 1818, Frances, usually known as Fanny, was sent with her brother Charles to a dame-school. These schools were based on little more than the premise that an old lady with some reading and writing skills might be able to pass these on to children. In

many cases this may have been true, but it seems certain that the quality of such schools was highly variable. Nonetheless, this was Charles's first experience of formal education, and it was a subject that would concern him throughout his life. Whatever he felt about this school, he learnt to read, and like most children he read fairy tales; among his favourites were *Jack the Giant Killer* and *Little Red Riding Hood*. He would later write of the young lady that "She was my first love. I felt that if I could have married Little Red Riding-Hood, I should have known perfect bliss" (Dickens, 1850a, p. 291), but it was not to be. Unlike most children, Dickens retained the roots of these childhood stories and they may be seen peeping through the pages of his writing; Jack too is mentioned in *A Christmas Tree* but he also reappears in *Hard Times* as one of the acts in Sleary's Circus<sup>43</sup>. These are small shared links across time, between the writer and the reader, and serve to remind us that Dickens's used the facts of experience as material for his fiction.

There were starting to be signs of a decline in the family fortunes by early 1821. Although the young Dickens left the dame school for a larger and better school in the Chatham area, the family had moved to a smaller home. This move was social as well as physical; the new home was a step down for the family into a less desirable area. By this time, Charles had developed into an avid reader, reading many of the popular books of the day, perhaps losing himself in their imaginary worlds. Dickens seems to have enjoyed the time that he spent at the school in Chatham, and when, in June of 1822, the family moved to London, Charles was allowed to remain in the schoolmaster's home. By this time John Dickens was in financial trouble, he had borrowed heavily from friends and family, and he was having difficulty servicing his debts. When Charles was forced to leave Clapham and come to London, in the autumn of 1822, his formal education was suspended. He was ten years old.

Dickens was the reporter for many of the stories and events of his childhood, and so reservations exist about their accuracy, and indeed their purpose in the larger narrative. However, most biographers agree that the events around the year 1824, when Charles was twelve years old, had a traumatic and lasting influence on him (eg. Ackroyd, 1990; Forster, 1872; Hawes, 2007; G. Smith, 2001). In April of 1823, the family enrolled Fanny

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<sup>43</sup> The fugitive Tom Gradgrind is disguised as a "one o' them black thervanth" (*HT*, p. 210) in *Jack the Giant Killer*. The blackface makeup worn for such roles was often bootblacking—which also has special meaning for Dickens, as a later paragraph will show.

at the Royal Academy of Music. They couldn't really afford the thirty eight guineas a year that the tuition and board cost, but presumably they felt that it was an investment rather than an expense. Charles later told his biographer "what a stab to his heart it was, thinking of his own disregarded condition" when his sister was sent to receive an education, but that he was denied one (Forster, 1874b, p. 39). Here, once again, is the suggestion of an almost melodramatic self-indulgence and a distance from the needs of others; the quoted lines are not those of the twelve year old, but of the adult recounting his past. The family finances did not improve, and it was decided that Charles should go to work in a factory which manufactured boot blacking. Dickens summarises his childhood qualities, as he recalls the event, but his words reveal much more: "It is wonderful to me how I could have been so easily cast away at such an age (Forster, 1874b, p. 51). Sometime around the 9<sup>th</sup> of February 1824, the young Dickens first walked the three miles from his home to his new employment. Whether his later recollections are accurate representations of events—and memory is a malleable recording media—this descent into the working class society, with no indication of any other future, was a shattering experience:

No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship; compared these everyday associates with those of my happier childhood; and felt my early hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man crushed in my breast. The deep remembrance of the sense I had of being utterly neglected and hopeless; of the shame I felt in my misery, cannot be written. (Forster, 1874b, p. 53)

It should be remembered that the family was in financial difficulty in a time with little social support. There is no suggestion in Dickens's words of any sense of pride at helping his family and being treated as a man, no indication of any identification of himself as a family member, only as an isolated individual. There is only, the adult Dickens recalls "the deep remembrance ... of being utterly neglected and hopeless".

Dickens kept his memories of his time as a factory worker secret even from his wife and children, and yet he couldn't keep them from his writing. It was only after his death that John Forster, his lifelong friend and biographer was able to reveal the story of the months the young Charles had spent in Warren's Blacking Factory. However, throughout

Dickens's novels there are small references to boot blacking—making a secret link between the man and his fiction. For example, in that most autobiographical of Dickens's works, *David Copperfield*, when David visits an old school-friend he notices that “his blacking brushes and blacking were among his books – on the top shelf, behind a dictionary” (Dickens, 1867, p. 266). Blacking, brushes and books, even the alliteration makes a powerful connection to a reference the readers must miss. In *Hard Times*, Josiah Bounderby is a man with a secret in his past. His secret is revealed to be that he had a normal childhood rather than the poverty and neglect that figured in his self-claimed narrative. Bounderby—the man whose past is a self-created fiction—and Dickens are linked by the authorial control they had over their own biographies, and by the appearance of blacking bottles in their story. Bounderby stated that for many years the only pictures in his possession were “engravings of a man shaving himself in a boot on the blacking bottles that I was overjoyed to use in cleaning boots with” (*HT* p. 128).

Allen (1954) identifies this period of Dickens's life, working in Warren's Blacking Factory, as the basis for the frequent appearance of orphans and abandoned children as characters in Dickens's work, the fairy tale imagery, and the vein of self-pity that he perceives running throughout Dickens's writing. The vein of self-pity seems to pre-date this time, and merely flourishes—as did the Hyacinths last spring in *Nicholas Nickleby*, “blossoming in old blacking bottles” (Dickens, 1839, p. 255). The orphans and abandoned children, however, were a real part of London, and Dickens would have been well aware of them. Between 1828 and 1831, Charles Dickens lived only nine doors from the Covent Garden Workhouse, where he could observe real poverty, and real abandonment (Richardson, 2012). Once again, personal observation and real social facts—including experience—seem to underpin Dickens's fiction. Perhaps such experiences were maturing ones for the young writer, and from them he came to understand a little of how others felt, and how their circumstances too were not always of their own making. In any case, it seems likely that he never forgot them.

Charles Dickens is almost the only source of information about his mother, Elizabeth, and so her portrait is coloured by Charles's own attitudes, and the effect they have on our interpretation. These attitudes show most strongly in the period following his sojourn in the blacking factory, and Dickens blamed his mother for that. Charles's father may have been the son of a servant, but his mother's family had servants. Elizabeth's father,

Charles Barrow, had once had a job in the Navy Pay Office, and in a superior position to that held by John Dickens. However, two years before Charles Dickens was born, his grandfather was found to have systematically embezzled £5,689 from his employer over several years<sup>44</sup> (Slater, 2009). He chose to flee the country rather than face the law, and died on the Isle of Man in 1826. This meant that Elizabeth Dickens had a father who was both thief and a fugitive from justice, and it was his name that she passed to her son. It is uncertain how much of this the young Charles Dickens knew as a child but it is hard to imagine that it created no tension in the household. Certainly he seems not to have forgiven her for her part in placing him in manual work at Warren's Blacking Factory, when he was twelve, and encouraging him to stay on when he at least thought that the financial necessity had passed. They were not reconciled for many years, and it is this that makes any assessment of her difficult. However, Dickens himself sees any fault as being with her; he is without blemish in thought and deed. Whatever the exact nature of the relationship between mother and son, other people seemed to find Elizabeth attractive, charming and extremely observant. A contemporary report of her, notes that

[she] possessed an extraordinary sense of the ludicrous, and her power of imitation was something quite astonishing. On entering a room she almost unconsciously took an inventory of its contents and if anything happened to strike her as out of place or ridiculous, she would afterwards describe it in the quaintest possible manner. ... In like manner she noticed the personal peculiarities of her friends and acquaintances. She had also a fine vein of pathos, and could bring tears to the eyes of her listeners when narrating some sad event ... Mrs Dickens has often sent my sisters and myself into uncontrollable fits of laughter by her funny sayings and her inimitable mimicry. (quoted in Ackroyd, 1990, p. 7)

So the inimitable Boz seems to have had a storyteller on one side of the family, and a highly observant comic, mimic, and raconteuse on the other. Dickens himself would later parody his friends and others, and in his writings, at least part of his success was based on the acuity of his observations. As a storyteller, and the focus of attention, he too could elicit emotional reaction from an audience, as a review of one of his public readings states; "his hearers had scarcely time to dry their eyes after weeping before they were enjoying the fun of Scrooge's discovery of Christmas Day" (Dolby, 1885, p. 26). Of

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<sup>44</sup> Using the same calculation as for Ellen Ternan's inheritance, this would be about 385,000 pounds today.

course, this illustrates the response, the reaction, the emotion in the reader that Dickens—Mr Popular Sentiment—aroused, and used to influence his own times.

Less than a fortnight after Charles had started his demeaning and unhappy employment, his father was imprisoned for debt. This must have been very disturbing for a sensitive—and perhaps even over-sensitive—twelve year old; even more so if he was aware of his grandfather's history of embezzlement. This was an age when many people believed that criminal tendencies could be passed down through the generations; if the young Dickens was at all introspective he must have considered the nature of his heritage. It has been estimated that around this time, between thirty and forty thousand debtors were arrested annually (Ackroyd, 1990, p. 69), so John Dickens was only one of many. However, as Dickens points out through his character Sissy Jupe in *Hard Times*, the use of statistics can serve to conceal rather than reveal the personal tragedy behind such events. By April, most of the family had moved to Marshalsea prison, but Charles was left in lodgings and continued his work at Warren's Blacking Factory. He felt abandoned again:

That I suffered in secret, and that I suffered exquisitely, no one ever knew but I. How much I suffered. ... [n]o man's imagination can overstep the reality. (Forster, 1874b, pp. 57-58)

It is difficult to escape the thought that perhaps at least one man's imagination was up to the task of transforming the everyday into a narrative of personal tragedy.

### **From reader to writer**

It seems to have been around this time that Charles Dickens discovered newspapers, in particular an illustrated periodical called *The Portfolio*. A weekly newspaper of 1824 was far more directed at entertainment and instruction than its modern equivalent, as the title-page indicates: "The Portfolio of Entertaining and Instructive Varieties in History, Science, Literature, the Fine Arts etc. Price Twopence" (Langton, 1912, p. 77). The relationship between fiction, instruction, and journalism—and his own biography—was one which Dickens would continue to explore throughout his life. Dickens's literary success was not simply paralleled by the growth in power and influence of popular newspapers; they were the vehicle by which he achieved it. He started his writing career

as a journalist, reporting and commenting on events of concern and his novels should be considered as an extension of this. There was always a social commentary in his work, and I claim throughout this thesis that he was always a journalist rather than a novelist.

Shortly after John Dickens was released from Marshalsea, in May 1824—having received a legacy from his mother—he had a disagreement with young Charles’s employer. As a result, the boy was dismissed. His mother, Elizabeth, visited the factory and, Dickens recalls, “brought home a request for me to return [to work] the next morning, and a high character [reference] of me, which I am very sure I deserved” (Forster, 1874b, p. 68). No matter how deserving he may have been, whatever bond of trust that had existed between mother and son was destroyed. He never forgave her for wanting him to return to the blacking factory. In truth, Charles does seem to have been both easily hurt and unforgiving in nature. The ‘*Autobiographical Fragment*’ that he wrote for Forster, in 1847, is the basis for most of our information about this time in his life, and perhaps it is an impartial account of his experiences. However, it could as easily be read as a piece of carefully crafted, self-dramatizing propaganda where he portrays himself as “a child of singular abilities, quick, eager, delicate, and soon hurt, bodily or mentally” (Forster, 1874b, p. 51), forced by others into an existence of endless suffering. For example, near the end of 1824 his sister Fanny received a prize from the Royal Academy of Music; Dickens’s recorded reaction seems remarkable:

I could not bear to think of myself – beyond the reach of all such honourable emulation and success. The tears ran down my face. I felt as if my heart were rent. I prayed when I went to bed that night to be lifted out of the humiliation and neglect in which I was. I had never suffered so much before. There was no envy in this. (Forster, 1874b, p. 66)

Perhaps there was no envy, but it is difficult not to read this as an addition to the mounting evidence of a self-centred, self-pitying individual. It is equally difficult to believe that he would not have made his feelings known at the time. Dickens seems to have positioned himself passively in his universe, part observer and part victim; there is little suggestion in his comments that he viewed himself as a participant either in situations or in his own responses to them. Also evident is the desire to succeed within a particular world, and in a way that Freire not only understood but predicted;



[A]t a certain point ... the oppressed feel an irresistible attraction towards the oppressors and their way of life. ... the oppressed want ... to resemble the oppressors, to imitate them, to follow them. This phenomenon is especially prevalent in the middle-class oppressed, who yearn to be equal to the ‘eminent’ men and women of the upper class. (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 44)

Dickens certainly wanted social advancement and recognition; his own words convey that. However, his prayer “to be lifted out” was soon answered, and shortly afterward, his father’s disagreement with young Dickens’s employer saw him removed from the blacking factory and sent to a new school.

Dickens spent the next two years as a day-scholar at Wellington House Academy, where Ackroyd (1990) reports that his contemporaries regarded him as “lively, agreeable, high-spirited, healthy, and very clearly the ‘son of a gentleman’” (p. 106). His own, perhaps partisan, memories of his time in the blacking factory record that “my conduct and manners were quite different enough from [the other workers] to place a space between us” and “they ... always spoke of me as ‘the young gentleman’” (Forster, 1874b, p. 58). By the standards of the day his claim to be a young gentleman, or the son of a gentleman would have been a tenuous one. Nevertheless, he seems to have always been a very private person who concealed many of his feelings behind a façade of gentility and good humour. Unsurprisingly, self-effacing modesty was never a handicap for him, and in his newspaper articles we can detect this. However, there is evidence of him rewriting rather than recording his experiences. In “Our School” Dickens describes his school experiences at the Wellington Academy,

We were old enough to be put into Virgil when we went there, and to get Prizes for a variety of polishing on which the rust has long accumulated. ... we had the honour to attain and hold the eminent position of first boy. (Dickens, 1851, p. 49)

This recollection of the author’s achievements adds little or nothing to the overall description of the school—whether it is true or not—and many a student has misremembered their results, and invariably to their own advantage. Nonetheless, the passage is at variance with the memory of his schoolmate, who told Forster that:

Dickens has given a very lively account of this place in his paper entitled *Our School*, but it is very mythical in many respects, and more especially in the compliment he pays in it to himself. I do not remember that Dickens distinguished himself in any way, or carried off any prizes. My belief is that he did not learn Greek or Latin there; and you will remember there is no allusion to the classics in any of his writings. (Forster, 1874b, p. 82)

It is certainly true that there is an absence of classical allusion in Dickens's work, and his extensive use of the metaphor of fairy tales hardly extended even to Greek and Roman mythology. His use of the 'mythical', it seems—perhaps reminiscent of Josiah Bounderby—was that he presented his personal narrative as his public persona needed it to have been, rather than as the facts would have supported. That is not uncommon, but it was a remarkable act of hubris, that he thought that he could publish the myth without the facts being questioned.

Whether or not he read Virgil at the Academy, he did find time to continue with his fascination for the lurid pages of the weekly newspaper. This time it was one named the *Terrific Register*. The rather exciting nature of this illustrated sixteen page production can be inferred from some of the headlines, reproduced in Ackroyd: "Horrible Murder of a Child", "Miserable Fate of a Female Slave", "A Most Extraordinary and Diabolical Murder" (1990, p. 109). The young Charles was around thirteen years of age, and these seem similar to kinds of stories that even today would attract the attention of a young teen-ager. Later critics have sometimes suggested that Dickens was fascinated by the macabre (eg. Carey, 1991), and perhaps this is so, but human beings have long been drawn to the evidence of their mortality and the uncertainty of their existence. Dickens lived at a time when life was shorter and more abrupt than it is today, and his fame gave him the opportunity to indulge his curiosity. The average lower class citizen of the time could expect to live only until the age of around thirty-five, and that only after surviving a childhood with a staggering mortality rate (Purchase, 2006). Dickens lived in a time and place so far different from most modern readers' experience that it would constitute the Third World.

Dickens wrote in *Hard Times*, not of the 'Miserable Fate of a Female Slave', but of the miserable fate of male and female 'hands' in the industrial cities of England. Freire would

remind the modern—and probably comfortably First World—reader to consider the world that the text represents, rather than simply decoding the words. Dickens introduces a power-loom weaver:

[In Coketown] lived a certain Stephen Blackpool, forty years of age. Stephen looked older, but he had had a hard life. ... He had known, to use his words, a peck of trouble. He was usually called Old Stephen, in a kind of rough homage to the fact. (*HT*, p. 52)

Forty years old—we also learn he is stooped and grey—and called ‘Old Stephen’; a miserable fate with a short middle age, it seems. After the day’s work in the factory, Old Stephen walks his friend Rachael to her home in the industrial heart of Coketown.

It was in one of the many small streets for which the favourite undertaker (who turned a handsome sum out of the one poor ghastly pomp of the neighbourhood) kept a black ladder, in order that those who had done their daily groping up and down the narrow stairs might slide out of this working world by the windows. (*HT*, p. 54)

Death and misery, actual and vicarious, were the everyday experience of many city dwellers. It was a time when public executions were public entertainment, and the Thames flowed thickly with sewage<sup>45</sup>. No special fascination with the macabre was needed, only opportunity and powers of observation. As an imaginative schoolboy—and later an astute reporter—the contrast between observed reality and the happy endings of childhood stories must have been obvious.

Dickens’s first employment, after leaving school for the last time, was as clerk to a Mr Molloy, a solicitor. He cannot have spent very long with Mr Molloy, because he is reported to have started work with the solicitors Blackmore and Ellis when he was fifteen years and three months old (Langton, 1912). His father was now working as a parliamentary journalist, and is credited with finding Charles this new position (Mondadori, 1977). It seems that his father’s new occupation may have influenced

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<sup>45</sup> In fact the sewage, and other rubbish, flowed so thickly that the Thames was little more than an open toilet. Matters came to a head in 1858. The combination of centuries of accumulated filth and a heat wave in the summer caused the river contents to ferment. The resultant stench brought London to a standstill. Soon after, a new project to provide an adequate sewer and waste water system was commissioned (Briscoe, 2011).

Dickens, because he began to teach himself shorthand; presumably with the intention of entering journalism. By the time he was eighteen he was working for a newspaper called *The Mirror of Parliament*, which had been founded by his uncle, John Barrow. His position as parliamentary reporter gave him the opportunity of observing the machinery of power from the inside, and he quickly became disillusioned with the petty rivalries, the endless self-serving speeches, and the lack of interest in important issues that he witnessed (Mondadori, 1977). Dickens advanced in his career, and by the time he was twenty-three he was working for *The Morning Chronicle*, the major rival to *The Times*. Forster assures his readers that “[t]here never *was* such a shorthand writer” (1874b, p. 92) as the young Dickens, and that “he occupied the very highest rank, not merely for accuracy in reporting but for marvelous (sic) quickness in transcribing” (1874b, p. 101). Indeed, it is Dickens’s ‘accuracy in reporting’ and acuity of observation which makes his novels as much fact as fiction.

This was a time when the Reform Bill was being passed into law as the 1832 Reform Act, and riots and demonstrations were erupting throughout the country—which will be elaborated on in the following chapters. Dickens was given the opportunity to travel around the provincial towns, reporting on the speeches and meetings. His experiences during this time, of politics and public officials, were to have a lasting influence on his later writings; he treated politicians with little respect, as either self-serving or incompetent. In *Hard Times*, the Members of Parliament are referred to as “the national dustmen” (*HT*, p. 162), which is even less flattering than it first sounds. Henry Mayhew, in his 1851<sup>46</sup> series *London Labour and the London Poor*, described them as “collectors or removers of the dirt and filth of our streets and houses” (1861, p. 97), so Gradgrind’s parliamentary career, and his ‘blue books’, are the result of a metaphorical sorting through the discarded by-products of the lives of others. In addition, Mayhew made the following observation:

The dustmen are of the plodding class of labourer, mere labourers, who require only bodily power, and possess little or no mental development. (1861, p. 137)

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<sup>46</sup> These three volumes were based on his newspaper articles for *The Morning Chronicle* in which he examined the living conditions in London. They were reprinted in 1861, unchanged other than the addition of a 4<sup>th</sup> volume, and my references are to that work. Other reporters were investigating other parts of England—the first real investigative journalism. Angus Reach looked at the manufacturing districts and I use his work in later chapters to show the accuracy of Dickens’s understanding of industry.

Little wonder, then, that the two characters represented in *Hard Times* as MPs, Thomas Gradgrind and the un-named older brother of James Harthouse, are both portrayed as unempathetic and largely ineffectual individuals. The older Harthouse, after a train crash which killed five people, noticed that:

Among the slain was a cow, and among the scattered articles unowned, a widow's cap. And the honourable member had so tickled the House (which has a delicate sense of humour) by putting the cap on the cow, that it became impatient of any serious reference to the Coroner's Inquest, and brought the railway off with Cheers and Laughter. (*HT*, p. 96)

Much of Dickens's subsequent writing was to highlight the effects of poor legislation, whether caused by social class insensitivity of a Harthouse, or the well intentioned inhumanity of Gradgrind, on the lives of ordinary people. However, much of the drama in everyday life has causes more mundane than the machinations of the state.

In May 1833, Dickens's first romance ended. At least the actuality of the relationship ended; in his mind it seems to have continued as some tragic fairy-tale of perfect happiness denied to him. It is clear that he had thrown himself wholeheartedly into his pursuit of a banker's daughter, Maria Beadnell, but it is less clear to what extent his affection was reciprocated. For many people such a relationship might be considered part of the transition from childhood into emotional maturity. However, emotional maturity does not seem to have come to Dickens. Perhaps it was an asset in his writing; his hurt was always fresh and so he could understand the hurt of others. Whatever the case, a passionate, obsessive, and sometimes reckless side of Dickens's character seems evident throughout his life. He was impatient of hesitation or delay, and would throw himself into a situation with no apparent thought for the consequences. This was a curious trait in a man who, by his own admission, was so easily hurt. Perhaps it doesn't really matter what Maria felt for him, because his expressions of affection to her have the same self-centred focus that characterize so much of his personal writing. Maria was obviously cooling in her affection for Dickens when he wrote to her: "I have borne more from you than I do believe any living creature breathing ever bore from a woman before" (Dickens in House & Storey, 1965, p. 25). Indeed, as Ackroyd observes of Dickens, "his real nostalgia about this aspect of his past is reserved for himself and for his own feelings. ... Dickens was a

man of infinite nostalgia about himself” (1990, p. 132), and it is difficult to read Dickens’s letters from this time without agreeing.

Although Ackroyd claims that when Maria’s parents discovered that Dickens’s father had been in debtors’ prison, they ended the relationship between their daughter and the young reporter, Slater’s (2009) suggestion that it was Dickens that ended it because of Maria’s coldness towards him seems more likely, especially reading from a rather petulant letter from the young writer: “Our meetings of late have been little more than so many displays of heartless indifference on the one hand while on the other they have never failed to prove a fertile source of wretchedness and misery” (Dickens in House & Storey, 1965, p. 17). Once again his writing has a degree of self-absorption that is uncomfortable to read. It was around this time that he wrote: “I have been so long used to inward wretchedness and real, real misery that it matters little, very little to me what others may think or what becomes of me.” (Dickens in House & Storey, 1965, p. 23)

It is likely that Charles actually believed that public opinion had no power over him; whereas, in fact, he spent most of his life deliberately maintaining his public image and seeking fame. Self-consciousness without self-awareness seems to have been a part of his character. However, although the affair—if that is the correct word—seems to have made a deep impression on him, it is difficult to escape the lingering suspicion that it was his imaginative recreation of the past that caused the real injury. Any risk of rejection and hurt was too great, and from this point on Dickens seemed to seek control over not only his own life, but the lives of those around him. It may have been as a way of directing his energies elsewhere, but Dickens now threw himself into his writing. His first published works beyond reporting were in the form of *Sketches*; the first one published in December 1833, in the *Monthly Magazine*. He published his second sketch in January 1834, followed by six more that same year.

His August publication was the second half of the story “*The Boarding House*”, and was signed “Boz”. It was under this name that he continued his *Sketches* in the *Evening Chronicle*, and achieved wide popularity. There were two remarkable characteristics of his writing, the subjects written about and the way they were written about was new to the reading public. This, combined with the now ready availability of printed material, attracted a much wider readership than any writer before him had ever achieved. He wrote

about the England of ordinary people, and he wrote about it with charm, a sometimes sardonic wit, and an observant eye for detail, without denying the cruel injustices that existed. He was portraying an identifiable reality for a new audience, which now included the working class.

There was quite a high degree of literacy in English working class society, even before the introduction of state schooling. An analysis of various surveys done in the late 1830s and early 1840s (Webb, 1958) indicates that illiteracy seldom exceeded 50% of the working class population of an area, and was usually much lower, at around 25%. In addition, there was a fairly consistent ratio of about three to two between the ability to read and the ability to both read and write. Twenty years after these first publications by “Boz”, Dickens wrote an article entitled ‘On Strike’, about a major industrial dispute in Preston. In this he was able to illustrate working class literacy without comment; the workers carried, and could read, placards, they were shown carefully reading the bills posted by each of the sides to the dispute. Their financial contributions to the Preston cause were accompanied by little verses such as “Love to all and peace to the dead, May the poor now in need never want bread” (Dickens, 1854c, p. 554). Dickens, in his never-ending role as journalist, investigated the strike, and recorded that the people of Preston freely give him assistance, explaining the background to some of what he was reading (Dickens, 1854c). His comments were directed at the politeness and seriousness of those involved, but there is no hint that such levels of literacy were exceptional, even if they were not universal. This was a market that previous writers had seldom attempted to capture. In February 1836, many of Dickens’s stories were collated and published as a book *Sketches by Boz*, which was immediately successful. Three days after it was published Dickens was approached about writing a new work, which would be another series of sketches but linked by a narrative, *The Pickwick Papers*. Three months after *Pickwick* made his first appearance, Dickens contracted to produce another novel, which became *Barnaby Rudge*. His career was launched, and with it a new idea, the best-seller.

In the spring of 1836, Dickens married Catherine Hogarth, who seems to have been a pleasant natured and quiet young lady. Like Dickens’s mother, she suffers from the retrospective attention of a self-serving Dickens as the source of our information. We know little about her. It is known that her seventeen year old sister Mary came to live with the couple in February 1837. The large families of the time encouraged a shared

responsibility for other family members, and a daughter with a home of her own would be expected to share it with an unmarried sister. On an evening in early May, Charles, Catherine and Mary went to the theatre together; on their return home Mary went upstairs and collapsed. She was obviously in a serious condition, and died in Dickens's arms the following morning. This was undoubtedly a sad occasion for all of the family members, but Charles's reaction was extraordinary. He removed a ring from Mary's finger, and wore it for the rest of his life; he stored her clothes and for several years afterward would take them out and look at them; he expressed his wish to be buried in the same grave as Mary, and she occupied an important place in his dreams, at least until 1844 (Smith, 2001). For the only time in his life he missed a publishing deadline, and no edition of *Pickwick Papers* was released that month. In a letter written ten days after her death he wrote: "Thank God she died in my arms, and the very last words she whispered were of me" (Dickens in House & Storey, 1965, p. 260), which seems a remarkably but consistently self-centred comment. In the same letter, he writes of his wife of less than a year, a woman who has just lost her sister:

Kate, I am glad to say, made such strong efforts to console her [mother], that she unconsciously summoned up all her fortitude at the same time, and brought it to her own assistance. She knows that if ever a mortal went to Heaven, her sister is there; she has nothing to remember but a long course of affection and attachment, perhaps never exceeded. Not one cross word or angry look on either side, even as children, rises in judgment against her; and she is now so calm and cheerful that I wonder to see her.

It is as though Dickens's grief must be the only grief; no one could suffer more than he. In fact Kate was so distraught at the death of her young sister that she miscarried. However, as Dickens calmly noted of his wife, almost as a postscript, in a letter a bare fortnight after Mary's death "I should have said that the affliction we have suffered brought on a miscarriage but that she has perfectly recovered from it" (Dickens in House & Storey, 1965, p. 265). How can such almost brutally insensitive behaviour best be understood? There is no easy answer, other than to note Dickens often had emotional responses to situations that concerned him directly, but his responses to situations where he is less central seem more difficult to interpret. Charles Dickens lived his life with a melodramatic passion. He cast himself into the centre of every scene, and interpreted



everything through its effect on him. Intellectual analysis and systematic criticism were not the source of his literary genius; rather it seems that when he felt anything at all he felt it very intensely, and could portray this in words that struck a sympathetic chord in his readers. His emotion carried over into his writing, and has influenced readers for over a century—a triumph of fancy over fact.

### **A learned and distinguished man**

During his own lifetime, Charles Dickens was without doubt one of the most popular and influential writers in the world. As such, the despair about his early life that he reported to Forster, his anguish at being sent to work and his pain at having his education cut short were all recollected from the privileged position of fame. As mentioned earlier, his writing was not aimed at an academic audience, nor at the leisured upper classes, but at the growing market of the working class and lower middle class reader. Dickens was a popular writer, not simply in terms of prestige, but also in the sense that he appealed to the emotions rather than the intellect of the reader, and by so doing his work influenced a broad range of people. Much of his success as a novelist lay in his ability to present his satire in an entertaining form, and still to elicit an emotional response from his audience. It was an indignant rather than an intellectual response that he aimed for. Certainly, his writing aroused strong feelings in his readers, and just as certainly this was exactly what Dickens intended. He was aware that he was able to do more than simply entertain an audience; he could influence their ideas and instigate action. However, in a disarming contradiction, he did not believe that he had the right to inflict his own beliefs upon this audience. He sought, rather, to give them the opportunity to interpret their world through his words, and his words through their world. As he explained in a letter to a friend:

To interest and affect the general mind in behalf of anything that is clearly wrong – to stimulate and rouse the public soul to a compassionate or indignant feeling that it must not be – without obtruding any pet theory of cause or cure, and so throwing off allies as they spring up – I believe to be one of Fiction’s highest uses. And this is the use to which I try to turn it. (Dickens in Storey, Tillotson, & Easson, 1993, p. 405)

Here, Dickens makes explicit his decision not to suggest solutions to the problems that he highlights, in a way that seems to be a precursor of the ‘problem posing’ educational approach of Paulo Freire. Dickens did however, reveal his own opinions through his writing, and there is abundant evidence throughout Dickens’s work that he felt education to be important. Perhaps it began when his own schooling was cut short, however it is certain that, at more than one level, Dickens maintained almost lifelong interest in education—for girls as well as boys.

It has been suggested by a number of writers that Dickens’s interest in—and attitude towards—young women was, if not an unnatural one, at least a little odd (e.g. Hartley, 2009; Storey, 1939; Tomalin, 2011). His response to Mary’s death, his infatuation with Maria Beadnell, and his yet to come controversial friendship with the teenaged actress Ellen Ternan do indeed make easy targets for criticism. Yet that is also symptomatic of being human. Just as no treatise can be argued in a novel, no moral lesson can be learned from most lives. It is Dickens’s awareness of imperfection that makes his early novels so amusing. It may be that is also why his later ones are less light-hearted—perhaps age brought the knowledge that although he could see so much he could change so little. However, he did try. He did give his time to others. He did champion the poor, and he did show signs of caring about, and an understanding of, the circumstances of others.

In the discussions leading up to the establishment of Urania Cottage, a ‘Home for Homeless Women’<sup>47</sup>, he outlined his thoughts to his sponsor, Miss Burdett-Coutts:

In the generality of cases, it is almost impossible to produce a penitence which shall stand the wear and tear of this rough world, without Hope—worldly hope—the hope of at one time or other recovering something like the lost station. I would make this Hope, however faint and afar off it might be, exactly the one that out of the Asylum and without its aid, seemed (and was) impossible of attainment. (Dickens in Tillotson, 1977, p. 589)

To make Hope a real possibility there was two hours of schooling every morning. Dickens insisted that all the girls should learn to read and write. However, Dickens did

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<sup>47</sup> This was the phrase used by Dickens in his correspondence with Miss Burdett-Coutts on the topic. She seemed rather more enthusiastic about the girls’ Christian, rather than physical, salvation compared with Dickens.

not limit education to literacy, he also encouraged some more fanciful pursuits. They worked in the flower gardens that surrounded the cottage, and learnt to play music (Hartley, 2009). For Dickens, the education of these women could rightfully be called a Pedagogy of Hope. Although it would be 150 years before Paulo Freire used this title when he revisited his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Nonetheless, it seems that the two men shared a belief in the importance of education as a means “to unveil opportunities for hope, no matter what the obstacles may be” (Freire, 1994, p. 3). They both certainly envisaged education as something far more than the transmission of facts through communiques. Education, although still subject to rigour, was opportunity rather than constraint.

A letter from Dickens to Miss Burdett-Coutts on the subject of the girls of Urania Cottage—but five years later than that previously mentioned—is consistent with the commendably human aims of the Home. This time, however, he was writing of outcomes. There had been a letter received regarding the success<sup>48</sup> of one of the girls from Urania Cottage, and Dickens made the comment that “It is most encouraging and delightful! Imagining backward to what these women were and might have been, and forward to what their children may be, it is impossible to estimate the amount of the good you are doing” (Dickens in Storey & Tillotson, 1977, p. 324) And he was right. Although not all of the stories from Urania cottage were of success<sup>49</sup>, the stories were of real people, with real lives, who were really affected by Dickens’s work.

Throughout this busy period, Dickens was writing—and often about education and schooling. Dickens mentions a charitable school in his 1846 novel *Dombey and Son*. The proud and rigid Mr Dombey professes himself to being “far from friendly to what is called by persons of levelling sentiments, general education”, but he concedes that it is necessary “that the inferior classes should be taught to know their position and to conduct themselves properly” (Dickens, 1852a, p. 67). As such he is prepared to nominate the son of a family in his service to a position in a school called the Charitable Grinders. The sentiment expressed is so different from that demonstrated by Dickens that we can be sure

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<sup>48</sup> In Australia. Emigration was always part of the overall plan to remove the girls from familiar problems.

<sup>49</sup> Jenny Hartley, in *Charles Dickens and the House of Fallen Women*, successfully traced the lives—and sometimes descendants—of a few of those who had passed through Urania Cottage. History refuses to stay neatly in the past.

it represents a view that is not his. Even the name Charitable Grinders<sup>50</sup> surely presages that of Thomas Gradgrind, the owner of the school in *Hard Times*, and in neither case was the education liberal. To grind is, after all, to shape by removal. The first thing removed from each student was that important marker of identity, their own name. The student nominated by Mr Dombey, young ‘Biler’, is given the number 147, and Sissy Jupe became girl number 20 at Gradgrind’s school. The closest that Dickens ever came to this was in the case-book at Urania House. Dickens recorded the girls’ stories in detail, but they were numbered so the girls themselves could not be identified (Hartley, 2009). Dickens used the numbers to protect, not dehumanise, his charges.

Dickens had long had a special interest in charitable schools for the poor, the Ragged Schools and the Reformatory Schools and he promoted them in his newspaper. Such schools were associated with charity, were usually both evangelical, and denominational. By 1851 there were around 17000 schools run by the National Society for the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church, with almost a million pupils (Manning, 1959, p. 50). Ten years later, in Newcastle, a commission found that 84% of the 44608 pauper children receiving instruction, were doing so in workhouse schools (Manning, 1959, p. 47). However, by the 1850s Dickens was becoming disheartened, both by the lack of government funding and by the endless rivalry between various religious groups. He suggested that the Church(es) were spending so much time squabbling that they were neglecting their true mission and that, as a consequence “a certain large class of minds in the community is gradually being driven out of all religion” (Dickens, 1852b, p. 580). This appears to have been an ongoing concern, because two years later, in *Hard Times*, as he described the fictitious Coketown, he noted that eighteen religious persuasions had built chapels there and he asked “Who belonged to the eighteen denominations? Because whoever did, the labouring people did not” (*HT*, pp. 22-23). Dickens seems to have recognised that there was a growing division between the activities of church groups and the needs of the poor, and that organised religion was becoming—or had become—external to the everyday lives of many people.

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<sup>50</sup> A grinder, in the English of the day, was a person who prepared students to sit examinations. Thackeray uses the term in this way in *Pendennis* (1850), “She sent me down here with a grinder. She wants me to cultivate my neglected genius”

As Dickens questioned the role of religious organisations in education, he began to consider the possibility of state involvement. After all, the problems that created the poverty of the working class created problems that affected society as a whole. So, for the March 13 1852 edition of *Household Words* he wrote a leading article entitled *A Sleep to Startle Us*; this was a tour around the Field Lane Ragged School. In his closing paragraphs, Dickens made it clear that his concept of education encompassed a wider social good, and that any vocational benefits sprang from this rather than being its own end. Ten years earlier, he had visited the Field Lane Ragged School and been appalled by what he saw, commenting in a letter to *The Daily News* that the boys he saw had “nothing natural to youth about them: with nothing frank, ingenuous, or pleasant in their faces; low-browed, vicious, cunning, wicked; abandoned of all help but this; speeding downward to destruction; and UNUTTERABLY IGNORANT” (Dickens, 1846). Dickens had been in no doubt then that society itself had contributed to their situation. He did not, and probably could not, see—as Freire would, for example—that such social problems were inherent outcomes of the social structure itself. For Dickens it was social practices, internal to the structure, that needed changing. So, as a reformer rather than a radical, Dickens argued that it was society—through the state—that should contribute towards the solution. To Dickens, the ragged school was evidence of:

the frightful neglect by the State of those whom it punishes so constantly, and whom it might, as easily and less expensively, instruct and save; ...[and which] finally impelled me to an endeavour to bring these Institutions under the notice of the Government. (Dickens, 1846, p. 4)

When he revisited the school he found that it had changed, and grown, but that the underlying social issues still persisted. As well as his on-going criticism of churches for their constant bickering over points of doctrinal difference, which took their focus off what he saw as their pastoral role, Dickens had become increasingly critical of the inactivity of the state. He was now much firmer in his conviction that the obligation for provision of schools lay at least in part, with the state; the benefit accrued to society as much as to the individual. He therefore argued that if only the Government were to give:

an annual sum of money, contemptible in amount ... [it] would relieve the prisons, diminish county rates, clear loads of shame and guilt out of the streets, recruit the army and navy, waft to new countries Fleets full of useful labour, for which their

inhabitants would be thankful and beholden to us. ... [W]ith such assistance as a trained knowledge of ... instruction, and a sound system adjusted to the peculiar difficulties and conditions of this sphere of action, their usefulness could be increased fifty-fold in a few months. (Dickens, 1852b, p. 580)

To Dickens, and to many others, it seemed clear that not only was poverty linked with a lack of education, but that both of these already had clear associations with crime. In fact, the correlation was there. In *The Examiner* of April 22 1848, there was an anonymous review of a government report on those persons taken into custody by the Metropolitan Police force during 1847; the report had an appendix attached for the preceding years between 1831 and 1847. Of the 25000 women and 41000 men apprehended, only 14 of the women and 150 of the men could read and write well. Although literacy, as noted earlier, was not unusual in the working class, it seemed that it was a lot less common among those who fell foul of the law. As the reviewer noted, “[s]ide by side with crime, disease, and misery, in England, ignorance is always brooding, and is always certain to be found” (p. 258). If the social importance of education was apparent to the police, it was equally apparent to the courts as well.

Thomas Noon Talfourd was an old friend of Charles Dickens, in fact he was the inspiration for Tommy Traddles in *David Copperfield*<sup>51</sup>. By 1854 he was well known in literary circles, but was also Judge at the Court of Common Pleas<sup>52</sup>. Mr Justice Talfourd believed that rising crime rates, if not actually caused by, were exacerbated by “that separation between class and class which is the great curse of British society” (cited in Carnall, 1964, p. 31), and he said so in his address to the Grand Jury at the opening of the Stafford assizes. He went on to suggest that class divisions were so entrenched that the working class may as well have been living in another world, for all that the middle classes knew of their lives; a sentiment we see reflected in *Hard Times*, when Gradgrind’s daughter Louisa finds herself in the room of Stephen Blackpool, a weaver. Dickens notes that “for the first time in her life, she was face to face with anything like individuality in connexion with [the working class]” (*HT*, p. 120). With this one line Dickens confronts

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<sup>51</sup> Tommy Traddles was the school-friend, referred to earlier, who had the blacking brushes and blacking among his books when David Copperfield visited. Charles Dickens dedicated the single volume edition of *The Pickwick Papers* to his friend Talfourd.

<sup>52</sup> Originally the court in which cases not involving the Crown were heard—subject v subject, and property disputes—and which consequently formed the basis of most of English common law. It became part of the High Court of Justice in 1873 (Baker, 1990).

his readers, both then and now, with the reality of individuals' lives being concealed by blue book tables and social class labels.

Unlike Louisa, Mr Justice Talfourd collapsed and died before he had finished speaking (Carnall, 1964), which may have made his speech more memorable than it would otherwise have been. This was the 13<sup>th</sup> March 1854, after Dickens had visited the industrial dispute in Preston but before the publication of the first instalment of *Hard Times*. Dickens knew Talfourd—and his family—well enough to write familiarly and fondly of him on the front page of the March 25<sup>th</sup> edition of his newspaper, *Household Words*. In this eulogy, Dickens reveals his own thoughts on the changes taking place around him:

Who, knowing England at this time, would wish to utter with his last breath a more righteous warning than that its curse is ignorance, or a miscalled education which is as bad or worse, and a want of the exchange of innumerable graces and sympathies among the various orders of society, each hardened unto each and holding itself aloof? (Dickens, 1854b, p. 209)

Dickens here makes the point that the working classes are as rigidly exclusive as the upper classes, and suggests that education has a role in encouraging social understanding. He returns to this point about the intolerance of the classes in *Hard Times*, where Stephen Blackpool becomes a social outcast because of his refusal to align himself with either side of an industrial dispute and thus “by the prejudices of his own class, and by the prejudices of the other, he is sacrificed alike” (*HT*, p. 110). The commonalities of human existence have been sacrificed to group identities. So, before *Hard Times* is written, Dickens's starting point is clear. Education is necessary for human and social development, not simply for job skills. Additionally, he sees it as a tool for breaking down the effects of class divisions; not for demolishing social class, but for creating a bond of shared humanity across social difference.

## **Harder Times**

By 1850 Dickens was the established writer that most people are now familiar with. Over the preceding fifteen years he had written the novels *Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist*,

*Nicholas Nickleby*, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *Dombey and Son*, and *David Copperfield*. However, Dickens was middle aged, and newer sometimes younger writers were making their mark on the reading public, with more polished styles and more developed characters. *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Mary Barton* and *Vanity Fair* were all taking their place on the bookshelves of Britain, and in the hearts of the reading public. Stevenson (1943) long ago suggested that *Bleak House*, with its female first-person presentation of a complex psychological drama, was a response to the writing of the Bronte sisters and that Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock owe their origins to the mannered intrigues of Thackeray's *Vanity Fair*. The industrial novel *Mary Barton*, along with the 1853 unrest in Preston, may also have contributed towards Dickens's attempts at something new and different with *Hard Times*, in 1854. These two books—*Bleak House* and *Hard Times*—along with *Little Dorrit* comprise what is known as the 'dark period' of Dickens's work. It was certainly a dark period in his life.

On the 31<sup>st</sup> of March 1851, Charles Dickens's father, John, died after surgery. A fortnight later, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of April 1851, Charles Dickens's daughter, Dora<sup>53</sup>, died after 'convulsions'. His wife Catherine was in Malvern at the time, she seems to have been suffering from depression after the birth of Dora. Dickens had his friend Forster take a letter to Catherine, to tell her of Dora's death. The letter itself is a touching one; Dickens's concern for his wife is evident as he tries to soften the pain of the news. He tells of the child's illness, rather than death, but warns his wife to expect the worst. I've reproduced it here, because it is so much in contrast to the self-concern evident in much of Dickens's writing and behaviour.

My dearest Kate.

Now observe. You must read this letter, very slowly and carefully. If you have hurried on thus far without quite understanding (apprehending some bad news), I rely on your turning back, and reading again.

Little Dora, without being in the least pain, is suddenly stricken ill. She awoke out of a sleep, and was seen, in one moment, to be very ill. Mind! I will not deceive you. I think her *very* ill.

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<sup>53</sup> Named after the character Dora Spenlow in *David Copperfield*, a character herself modelled on Maria Beadnell. Dickens noted in a letter the day after her death "We had called her Dora, in remembrance of my last story—it was an ill omened name" (Dickens in Storey & Tillotson, 1977, p. 355)



There is nothing in her appearance but perfect rest. You would suppose her quietly asleep. But I am sure she is very ill, and I cannot encourage myself with much hope of her recovery. I do not—why should I say I do, to you my dear!—I do not think her recovery at all likely.

I do not like to leave home, I can do nothing here, but I think it right to stay here. You will not like to be away, I know, and I cannot reconcile it to myself to keep you away. Forster with his usual affection for us comes down to bring you this letter and to bring you home. But I cannot close it without putting the strongest entreaty and injunction upon you to come home with perfect composure—to remember what I have often told you, that we never can expect to be exempt, as to our many children, from the afflictions of other parents—and that if—*if*—when you come, I should even have to say to you "our little baby is dead", you are to do your duty to the rest, and to shew yourself worthy of the great trust you hold in them.

If you will only read this, steadily, I have a perfect confidence in your doing what is right.

Ever affectionately

CHARLES DICKENS (Dickens in Storey & Tillotson, 1977, pp. 354-355)

The letter is in such sharp contrast with his later, very public, criticisms of his wife that it is difficult to reconcile the differing views. Whatever the nature of the feelings Dickens had towards Catherine, the empathy displayed in the letter—at a time when Dickens himself must have been suffering—seems self-evident. There is, however, in the deception itself, something patronising and controlling. Sadly, it also appears to have been the beginning of the end for the marriage, and for the youthful writer of satire. The family moved to a new home, Tavistock House, at the end of 1851, and here Dickens wrote the three novels of his dark period. Dickens seems to have become steadily more isolated by his work, and discontented with his home life. After *Hard Times* he published new novels less frequently than before, and they were more serious than in the past; critique had replaced caricature.

Dickens was a strange contradiction of a man. He seems to have been deeply sensitive to his own self-interest, but seemingly incapable of recognising the part that his actions played in creating his own problems. His understanding of others sometimes seems to have been superficial, only recognising how they impacted on his life, but denying any reciprocity of cause and effect. Self-analysis or self-perception were not highly developed in Dickens, instead he seems to have become a perfect observer of things external to himself. He stood in the shadows and watched the events of his time. He matched this to an extraordinary ability not just to record events, but to understand and re-present them to his readers. His writing shows an empathy with others that is lacking in the work of his contemporaries, and somewhat surprising even in his own. Nussbaum wrote in *Poetic Justice* (1995) that she considered empathy most likely to be associated with compassion in someone who has had an education that taught concern for others from an early age. Dickens, writing for his own children, was probably passing on what he had been taught:

Never be proud or unkind, my dears, to any poor man, woman, or child. If they are bad, think that they would have been better, if they had had kind friends, and good homes, and had been better taught (Dickens, 1934, p. 28).

It is the people that are important in Dickens's novels, they are almost always novels about people rather than ideas—*Hard Times* less than most. The people interact with each other, and display the foibles that we all display, the very characteristics of being human. And to Dickens, being human was important. His son recalled a phrase from one of Dickens's speeches, made towards the end of his life.

My faith in the *people* governing is, on the whole, infinitesimal; my faith in the People governed is, on the whole, illimitable. (cited in Dickens, 1928b, p. 15, emphasis in the original)

If there seems to be a hint there, in the stress on *people* governing, that Dickens believed that following the path laid out in the Bible was the surest road to true humanity, then that is probably how it should be understood. Dickens certainly had a Christian belief, and it underpinned his thinking. I made mention, in the introduction, of the pervasive nature and structural importance of the biblical references in *Hard Times*, and will develop this link further in a later chapter. He did think that the single-minded pursuit of profit was a social evil, and in his novel *Hard Times*, he suggested some insights into the relationship

between education, work, and social justice. In particular, Dickens was concerned that economic justification had replaced a vision of moral justice as guide for life. By so doing, the education required to live life well had become narrowly instrumental, to the disadvantage of all. In the last few lines of his will, Dickens addressed his children—and by default, all those who drew something from his work:

I exhort my dear children humbly to try to guide themselves by the teaching of the New Testament in its broad spirit, and to put no faith in any man's narrow construction of its letter here or there. (Forster, 1874a, p. 564)

People, always people, he was always a writer about the people, of the people, for the people.

#### 4. The times behind *Hard Times*

“*Hard Times* is not a difficult work; its intention and nature are pretty obvious” (Leavis, 1962, p. 249). Thus, in *The Great Tradition*, F. R. Leavis begins his influential claim for *Hard Times* as a masterpiece; a claim that undoubtedly increased the readership of both books. He notes, three sentences later that “[i]f there exists anywhere an appreciation, or even an acclaiming reference, I have missed it”. In fact, both George Bernard Shaw’s positive review (reprinted in Gray, 1969), and John Ruskin’s favourable assessment—reproduced in full in Forster’s (1876) biography of Dickens are inexplicably overlooked—but his point remains generally true. So, although Charles Dickens may be the novelist most readily associated with the Victorian era, at least until recently *Hard Times* was probably the novel least associated with him. This may be because both Dickens and *Hard Times* are each distinctive against their backgrounds, for although belonging to a time and place, neither are typical. Leavis also observed that *Hard Times* had largely been treated as “a minor thing; too slight and insignificant to distract us for more than a sentence or two from the works worth critical attention” (p. 249).

Certainly, more than one critic has expressed doubt whether *Hard Times* should even be included in any list of Dickens’s major works. In his 1897 compilation *The Novels of Charles Dickens*, F.G Kitton did not include *Hard Times*; instead he relegated it to a subsequent volume, *The Minor Writings*, produced in 1900. Similarly, in Stephen Leacock’s biography of Dickens, he dismisses the work by saying that “[t]he story in *Hard Times* has no other interest in the history of letters than that of its failure” (Leacock, 1934/2004, p. 149). *Hard Times* is a contentious novel, and needs to be examined against its historical context, which includes the critical response, for its place in Dickens’s oeuvre to be realised. In the process of so doing, it becomes clear that much of *Hard Times* is located in discussions on the role of education in human development, and the power relationships between members of a society. It is inevitable that different critics will notice different things; those from differing social, historical, and philosophical, locations will value different aspects of a text.

Given that fiction is by definition fictitious, it is interesting to note how much of the early criticism of Dickens's work was based around accusations that inadequate realism in his depiction of contemporary situations, events, and characters precluded him from being a social commentator, and that insufficient understanding disqualified him from being a political one. Thus, the argument went, his work was of insufficient gravitas to serve any useful purpose. James Fitzjames Stephen, later to become Judge of the High Court, was a particularly persistent and articulate critic; he penned a series of assaults on Dickens's abilities, of which the following, from his review of *Little Dorrit*,—the book immediately after *Hard Times*—is representative.

The simple fact is, that Mr. Dickens has been spoiled by success—or rather, like many other very clever men, he has mistaken his powers. ... He is a great master of humour—not of wit, for of this faculty he is quite innocent—but he thinks that his vocation is that of the social reformer, perhaps of the prophet. ... Mr. Dickens thinks that he is a satirist. ... We admit that Mr. Dickens has a mission, but it is to make the world grin, not to recreate and rehabilitate society. Sam Weller, Dick Swiveller, and Sairy Gamp are his successes, and we thank him most heartily for them. But when nothing less will content him than to reform the British constitution, to sit in judgment upon the whole law of England—to pronounce the bar, the Church, and all the Courts and institutions of England, its mercantile community, its legal community, its public servants, her Majesty's Ministers, all our charities, and all our politicians, our men of the Exchange, and men of the pulpit, to be downright shams and selfish hypocrites—we are forced to inquire whether this is not one sham among the universal crowd of shams—whether the preacher is not as his flock? (Stephen, 1858, p. 15)

Harriet Martineau, a well-known and outspoken supporter of 'Political Economics', had been—somewhat surprisingly, in retrospect—a contributor to *Household Words* from 1850 to 1854. However—rather less surprisingly—she seems to have had a falling out with Dickens around the time of the publication of *Hard Times*. There seems to be no recorded evidence of a connection between the two events<sup>54</sup>, and so it may be that it was nothing more than an accumulation of differences that brought about the final parting.

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<sup>54</sup> For a more detailed discussion, see Fielding, K. J., & Smith, A. (1970). *Hard Times and the factory controversy: Dickens vs Harriet Martineau*.

However, as I will show later, aspects of *Hard Times* can be read as a direct attack on Martineau's published position on *laissez-faire* economics and on women's educational aspirations. In addition, Harriet Martineau remained adamant that a genuine understanding of subject material was the necessary foundation for genuine criticism, and that Dickens fell short of this. This is clearly illustrated in her autobiography—written twenty years before her death in 1877—in which she protested that:

Another vexation is his vigorous erroneousness about matters of science, as shown in...“Hard Times,” about the controversies of employers. Nobody wants to make Mr. Dickens a Political Economist; but there are many who wish that he would abstain from a set of difficult subjects, on which all true sentiment must be underlain by a sort of knowledge which he has not. (cited in Chapman, 1877, p. 62)

This does seem a little like defining the parameters of the discussion in order to exclude a dissenting voice, but nevertheless it makes clear that not all of Dickens's readers were uncritical admirers. Additionally, if the response of his critics can be used as evidence, there is a suggestion that Dickens had defended himself, or been defended, against accusations of misunderstanding his material by the claim that he was only writing fiction for the general amusement of others. Both James Stephen and Harriet Martineau make specific claims that Dickens has denied himself this defence by stepping beyond the pages of entertainment and into those of politics. In a review entitled *Novels and Novelists* Stephen levelled the general charge against Dickens that:

[t]he fundamental vice of novels, considered as works of instruction, lies in the circumstance that the novelist makes his facts, and that, if he is charged with inaccuracy, he can always plead that he is writing a novel, and not a political treatise. (Stephen, 1858, p. 285)

Martineau was even more explicit. She wrote a prefatory letter to her work, *The Factory Controversy*; in it she explains that she had written the article to be published in *The Westminster Review* but that the editor had disapproved of the manner in which she had treated Mr Horner<sup>55</sup> and Mr Dickens. Her response was that:

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<sup>55</sup> Leonard Horner was the most impressive and influential of the first English factory inspectors. For 26 years from 1833 to 1859 he administered the Factory Act mainly in the textile district of Lancashire. His work and that of his colleagues in the Factory Department made a success of this major experiment in legislative intervention in industry and despite the gloomy predictions of their early opponents they did

Mr.Horner and Mr.Dickens, as Inspector and Editor, have taken up a ground which they do not pretend to establish on any principle; and they hold it in an objectionable temper, and by indefensible means. It seems to me, therefore, necessary to meet them unflinchingly, and expose, with all possible plainness, the mischief they are doing. They cannot complain, with any appearance of reason, of any plainness of speech. (Martineau, 1855, p. v)

In the main body of the text, Martineau made it clear that “plainness of speech” was not only part of her intention, but was well within her ability. She pilloried both any defence that *Hard Times* was intended to be ‘only’ fiction and any suggestion that Dickens had sufficient ability to raise it beyond that in any case.

It is not within our scope now to show how conspicuous has been Mr Dickens’s proved failure in the department of instruction upon which he spontaneously entered<sup>56</sup>. We need refer to only a single instance out of many,—as his Tale of “Hard Times”. On this occasion, again, the plea of those who would plead for Charles Dickens to the last possible moment is that “Hard Times” is fiction. A more effectual security against its doing mischief is that the Tale, in its characters, conversations, and incidents, is so unlike life,—so unlike Lancashire or English life,—that it is deprived of its influence. (Martineau, 1855, p. 36)

Nevertheless, Martineau’s autobiography also records that in their relations “[n]othing could exceed the frank kindness *and* consideration shown by him in the correspondence *and* personal intercourse we have had; *and* my cordial regard has grown with my knowledge of him” (Chapman, 1877, p. 63, original emphasis). Clearly, no matter how popular Dickens’s literary endeavours, or even himself personally, may have been, he was understood in some quarters to be writing more than just amusing stories. Additionally, critics were accusing him of “mak[ing] his facts” and of representing circumstances and behaviours that were “unlike ... English life”. Dickens had obviously alienated a powerful section of society and they were a vociferous opposition to the

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not ruin the British economy in the process. The first generation of Inspectors laid the foundation for successive extensions of the Factory Act so that by the end of the 19th century working conditions and hours of labour for women and children were under legal regulation in all the major branches of the manufacturing industry. Horner was acknowledged by his contemporaries to be the major figure among the early Inspectors; he even had the singular honour of being praised by Marx in *Capital* (Martin, 1969, p. 412).

<sup>56</sup> This is a reference to the founding of *Household Words*, in which *Hard Times* originally appeared, as did a number of articles critical of existing factory legislation and conditions.

political implications of his commentaries. However, people read his books and recognised some truths in his fiction.

Since Leavis's *Analytic Note*, in *The Great Tradition* (1962), there has been renewed interest and discussion on *Hard Times*. However, much of this later analysis, when it has not been focussed on a particular literary technique (e.g. Kearns, 1992), has followed the lead of Stephen and Martineau and been strongly historical, or sociological, in flavour. It has tended to examine historical situations such as the Preston strike of 1853-54 and compare the real personalities and events with Dickens's portrayal of industrial action in Coketown (e.g. Fielding, 1954). The subsequent discussions have then revolved around the accuracy and depth of understanding, or otherwise, displayed in Dickens's writing. Similarly, there have been scholarly articles discussing Dickens's understanding of political economics (e.g. Gilmour, 1967), the nature of the statistical representation of English society that he was satirising (Bayley, 2007), his relationship with other writers on industrial subjects (e.g. Carnall, 1964; Fielding & Smith, 1970), and the depiction of matrimonial law in *Hard Times* (e.g. Baird, 1977; Hammerton, 1990). Although no analysis of *Hard Times* should ignore these and other discussions, *Hard Times* is a single text, not simply a collection of assorted social comments. Certainly, it was produced in weekly instalments, however it remains the written expression of an idea so strong that Dickens later claimed that it had "laid hold of me by the throat in a very violent manner" (Dickens & Hogarth, 1893, p. 345). No matter how worthy it may be in other ways, any analysis of individual fragmented sections of the novel is unlikely to reveal the whole nature of this unifying idea. In amongst the satire and the social criticism there remains the central concept; Dickens had felt a compulsion to direct his readers' attention to an issue that he considered to be of over-riding importance to the well-being of society. This chapter particularly examines *Hard Times*, in its historical situation, for what it can contribute to our understanding of the debates surrounding the relationships between citizenship, education, and industry.

*Hard Times* is possibly the most criticised of Charles Dickens's novels—as suggested previously—but paradoxically, it is now almost certainly one of the most read. It has become a core text for a number of advanced English papers in schools and universities around the world; perhaps its comparative brevity, clear structure, and its potential for contemporary analysis makes it more approachable for some modern readers than



Dickens's longer novels. His other novels belong more explicitly to the nineteenth century, as do the issues that he raises within them. However, although *Hard Times* has been examined from a range of different perspectives, we have seen that the question of its position within the canon of Dickens's work remains contentious. Consequently, even more than a hundred years after the original publication, Ford and Monod (1966) were able to observe, in their introduction to a new edition, that there was still a difference between the critical treatment of *Hard Times* and that accorded to Dickens's other novels. They noted that "[m]any of the most helpful critical discussions of Dickens's other novels have been interpretative, whereas most discussions of *Hard Times* have been primarily evaluative. About none of his novels has there been less agreement" (p. 12). It seems that the discussions have been about the merit of the work, rather than truth or meaning within the text.

The lack of agreement noted by Ford and Monod is still with us, although there is now a wider range of criticism addressing interpretative issues. Nonetheless, the existence of continued debate indicates that *Hard Times* is widely understood to be a significant text and worthy of further study, and that it is somehow qualitatively different from Dickens's other works. However, the parameters of such study are not yet well defined. Some critics have tended towards a discussion of its literary merits or its historical accuracy, and others have looked at the underlying social critique. Humpherys (2011) rightly observed that *Hard Times* has "generated the most varied response" (p. 390) of all Dickens's novels. There is an unsettled quality to all this; *Hard Times* cannot readily be made to fit into any pigeon-hole. In an almost Freirean way the text itself seems perpetually uncompleted; it draws so much from each reader that it exists in a condition of inconstant reinterpretation, rather than static historicity. It was only with the publication of the single volume edition—that which has become fixed compared to the newspaper serial in progress—that the title was extended to include *for these times*, which raised and left unanswered the question of historical location. Which times is it for? Yet this is a discussion not at odds with the standards that Dickens had set; he himself did not view literary skill as the most significant attribute of a novelist, although he was a painstaking writer. Rather, he understood the value of the written word to lie in its ability to communicate and clarify important social ideas—the reporter in him could have it no other way.

Dickens was a prolific letter writer, and although I have referred to this particular letter in the previous chapter, his words are important enough to include again. Writing to Henry Cole—Superintendent of the Department of Practical Art, and inspiration for the ‘third man’ in Gradgrind’s classroom—a month after he had completed writing *Hard Times*, Dickens outlined his beliefs regarding the value of fiction:

To interest and affect the general mind in behalf of anything that is clearly wrong—to stimulate and rouse the public soul to a compassionate or indignant feeling that it must not be—without obtruding any pet theory of cause or cure, and so throwing off allies as they spring up—I believe to be one of Fiction’s highest uses. And this is the use to which I try to turn it. (Dickens in Storey et al., 1993, p. 405)

Even more, in the writing of *Hard Times*, Dickens himself noted that “It contains what I devoutly hope will shake some people in a terrible mistake of these days” (Dickens, 1854/2001, p. 283). The language is a little archaic, but the sentiment is modern, almost Freirean. In fact, Paulo Freire expressed a similar concept when he wrote:

I do not have *the truth*; this book contains truths, and my dream is that as those truths challenge or question the positions taken by the book's readers, they may engage those readers in a critical dialogue in which their practice, their understanding of the theory that informs that practice, and my analysis will serve as a frame of reference. (Freire, 1998, p. 47)

Selecting an appropriate frame of reference is a problem that seems to have bedevilled interpretations of *Hard Times*. The novel may be argued as a mid-Victorian precursor to present day debates about the nature of education and the curriculum, and the relationship between personal development and industrial expedience, or simply as an industrial novel. The strictly, and unimaginatively, fact based education as championed by Thomas Gradgrind, seems to be positioned in opposition to ‘fancy’. It could be argued that this is a weakness in the text and that ‘fancy’, in the form of fairy tales, novels, circuses and suchlike is an unworthy opponent to the power of fact. Of course, if instead of ‘fact’ and ‘fancy’ being seen as oppositional they are understood as naturally complementary, the whole novel takes on a more unified aspect. As noted earlier, the word ‘fancy’ in Dickens’s 1848 review of *The Poetry of Science*, meant more than idle amusement; it encompassed wonder and imagination, soaring abstract ideas and is of freedom and not

binding chains. If this is his position—and I maintain that it is, and will devote a later chapter to a discussion of fancy—then it seems that Dickens makes a claim to include the unquantifiable nature of human experience as genuine, valuable knowledge. Whereas scientific knowledge, fact, has a requirement of repeatability, human experience cannot be repeatable but this does not invalidate the understandings thus acquired. The same conditions can, and do, result in differing, unpredictable, and individual responses.

There is a reality in the lives of human beings, but it is not only the fixed reality of fact, it is also the more imaginative, constructed, Freirean “reality in process” (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 64). Freire himself was convinced of the value of imagination, and of including it into the educational experience, explaining that “we cannot teach content as if that was all there is. Teachers ... must demonstrate to students the importance of imagination for life. Imagination helps curiosity and inventiveness, just as it enhances adventure, without which we cannot create” (Freire, 1998, p. 51). Once again, this echoes the words of Dickens, who had suggested that Mr. M’Choakumchild, the schoolmaster in *Hard Times*, was “rather overdone” in content knowledge, but that “[i]f he had only learnt a little less, how infinitely better he might have taught much more” (*HT*, p. 10). Education, as envisioned by both Freire and Dickens, involved more than filling empty vessels.

It seems that it may be within the purview of both educator and writer—whether two persons or one—to reconstruct the familiar to reveal the unfamiliar. Both attempt to guide the learner/reader from the position that they occupy, to an idea that is new to them, a place that is new to them, thoughts, ideas and understandings that are new to them. Not everything so revealed need be a universal truth, because most people live in a world of individual truths, subjective and not very philosophical, but real enough to them. Throughout *Hard Times*, Dickens contrasts the objective with the subjective, and shows this played out through human lives. *Hard Times* is a novel written with a purpose—Dickens himself has said this—and is also, I suggest, an attempt by its author to move onto new ground in his writing—it was the middle of his three ‘dark period’ novels. Perhaps the attempt was only partially successful; not everything Dickens wrote was equally well received by his public. At least one admirer credited him with the useful ability of leaving “failures behind him with so light a pace that no one heard him moving off, and never once turning back his head,—which might have attracted the public

attention to his ill-luck—[and starting] forward on his way, as if nothing had happened” (Horne, 1844, pp. 34-35). Certainly Dickens never again attempted a project similar to *Hard Times*, so perhaps he did move on. If so, it was in a new a darker direction than the lighter more comedic works that had made him famous. Therefore, to examine it with the sole intention of determining its literary value in comparison with his other works is to ignore the author’s stated intent, to prejudge the text, and to limit the possibilities of understanding.

*Hard Times* is different from the works that preceded it, both those of Dickens and of previous writers. There can be little doubt that Dickens owes a debt to the novelists of the eighteenth century, but just as certainly later writers have been influenced by his work. In her discussion of Dickens and his relationship with earlier writing styles, Monika Fludernik (2011) identifies Dickens as one of the first writers to move from social satire to social criticism. Furthermore she names *Hard Times* as a turning point in Dickens’s work; she claims that it is the first of his novels in which metaphoric reasoning underpinned the entire structure of the work. It is also apparent that there are several other distinctive features to the work, and they may be related to the seriousness of the task that Dickens had set himself. It is the only novel that Dickens ever wrote that is neither set in nor even mentions London; a city that he knew so very well. It is the first of only two of his novels in which the title is an abstract concept rather than a person or place. The second, *Great Expectations*, was far more Dickensian in its structure, centring as it does around the life of the character Pip.

*Hard Times* has no central character, but instead deals with an elaborate network of social interactions between several people. It is the shortest of his novels, in fact it is barely a quarter the length of *Bleak House* which preceded it, or of *Little Dorrit* which followed it<sup>57</sup>. However, its brevity should not be overemphasised; although it is shorter than Dickens’s other books, it is almost 70 pages longer than Paulo Freire’s major work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and over three times the length of Marx and Engels’s *The Communist Manifesto*. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is certainly the most influential of Freire’s works, and *The Communist Manifesto* is in all likelihood the most widely read of Karl Marx’s. In both cases, their brevity makes them accessible, and their ideas make

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<sup>57</sup> The three of them, as discussed in an earlier chapter, are the novels written at Tavistock House identified as Dickens’s ‘dark period’.

them important. *Hard Times* is similarly short and accessible, and its ideas may make it one of Dickens's most important novels; but it is not typical of his work. This is the book in which Dickens sets out, as clearly and directly as he can, not a story simply for the amusement of his readers, but an allegorical representation of what, as mentioned earlier, he had identified as "a terrible mistake of these days" (Dickens in House, Storey, & Tillotson, 2001, p. 368). As a novelist, Dickens is constrained in the presentation of his ideas; he must set them within the narrative structure of the text, rather than explicitly as a theory. However, as the vigorous responses of both Stephen and Martineau recognise, he steps beyond the bounds of simply telling a tale. He may not have a theory, but he does have the empirical observations upon which others might build one, and he presents those observations in the form of a Victorian thought experiment. A thought experiment seeks new knowledge in the absence of new information; in the case of *Hard Times* it is an investigation in narrative form that predicts the failure of capitalist utilitarian and Malthusian ideologies—reproduced through education—to produce the socially just outcomes claimed for them. Although *Hard Times* does not fit the rigid definition of a thought experiment, the metaphor provides a useful model for thinking about the work. As with Marx and Freire, Dickens too found it possible to express important social ideas in a brief text.

### **Revolutionary times**

Dickens began his working life in a blacking factory, but made his fame as a journalist. He remained a journalist for the rest of his life, but the factory had given him a glimpse of the lives of others. It is easy to overlook the fact that not only were his novels an extension of his journalism, but that both were a response to his early experience. He began by writing articles on contemporary issues, published in newspapers owned by others. By the time of his death, he was still writing articles on contemporary issues, but the newspaper belonged to him and the articles were more serious. It should come as no surprise that, using a medium with which he was familiar, all of Dickens's novels began life as newspaper serials. More demanding on the author was that publication started before the writing had finished. His early books, I think particularly *Pickwick Papers*, maintain the episodic feel of a series of short pieces now connected; all his novels were first published in a series of weekly, or monthly, instalments. This early work exhibited his powers of observation, but not yet his social conscience. Dickens's life as a writer was

spent observing and commenting on the society, issues and events of his time. However, as Fludernik (2011) suggested, the nature of his commentary changed over time, moving from the merely satirical to the strongly critical. Nonetheless, whether his writing was articles or novels, it was always in newspapers. This was a time when the line between newspaper reporting and fiction writing was not as clear as we now assume it to be. Newspapers made little attempt at impartiality, and were often vehicles for the expression of opinion from a partisan perspective. The Chartist produced *Northern Star* is one example; *The Black Dwarf*, a radical newspaper that supported working class interests, is another. Many articles in the newspapers of this time were therefore strongly editorial, arguing a point of view on a topical issue, or creating a topical issue with their argument or their satire.

Many publications that, in the nineteenth century, were called newspapers would likely be categorised as magazines by a modern reader, because of their format, content and writing style. They often employed a degree of dramatic license in their reporting, changing names and re-ordering of events to satisfy the requirements of the story (Butwin, 1977). We can see examples of this in Dickens's *On Strike*, a story published in his own newspaper *Household Words*, about the 1853 strike—or lockout—in the northern mill town of Preston. There is the apocryphal character Mr Snapper who seems to represent contemporary conservative opinion, rather than being a genuine fellow passenger on the train with Dickens. Similarly, a real leader among the Preston workers named Grimshaw appears in thin disguise as “Gruffshaw” (Carnall, 1964). He is later reincarnated as Slackbridge, in *Hard Times*. The network of connections that was woven between fact and fiction was such that one of Dickens's avowed intentions in founding the newspaper *Household Words* was to provide a context for the serialisation of social novels (Butwin, 1977). Readers were then expected to respond to the text in a physical way, to join a society or to make donations to a cause, and to read more widely on related subjects. The Freirean notion of *praxis* has echoes of this concept, of taking action against oppression in response to a greater awareness.

*Hard Times*, in its original weekly serialisation in *Household Words*, was presented as a type of journalism, extending and amplifying both the assumed knowledge of the reader, and other articles presented from time to time within the newspaper (Butwin, 1977). *Hard Times* announced its importance in, and to, the newspaper by occupying the first four and

a half pages of the issue. This was something between news and fiction, between fact and fancy. Neither the intention of the writer, nor the text itself, is the most important feature of writing such as this, rather it is the developing relationship between the writer, the text, the world, and the reader; the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The reader was expected to interpret the novel through their own personal experience, and through action to complete the text in the world beyond the pages. It has been convincingly argued that this expectation of interaction was explicitly understood by Dickens's audience (Butwin, 1977). So, *Hard Times* can best be understood not as a text intended to provoke just an emotional response from its readers, but as a text connected to the world beyond words, requiring a physical response and on-going engagement from readers as participants in a dialogue.

It was in a newspaper, a very partisan newspaper, *The Red Republican* of November 9 1850, that the *Manifesto of the German Communist Party* began its first publication in English (MacFarlane, 1850). The authors, 'Charles Marx and Frederic Engels', focused on the conflict between the *bourgeoisie* and the *proletariat*, and the effects on family, education and class relations. In this brief polemic Marx and Engels introduce the ideas that were to become the core of socialist political thought for the next century and a half. It begins with the almost fairy-tale opening sentence, "[a] frightful hobgoblin stalks through Europe" (p. 4), and ends with the call "[I]et the Proletarians of all countries unite to achieve the goal of the 'overthrow of all hitherto existing social arrangements'" (p. 190).

It was also in a newspaper, *Household Words* of April 1 1854, that the first instalment of Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* appeared. As with the *Communist Manifesto* it is a short text, and it also deals with themes of family, education and class relations. Charles Dickens was no 'Charles Marx', and he was neither predicting nor encouraging the destruction of society, but rather was suggesting a more gentle social change. Nor, in fact, was Dickens completely opposed to the existence of factories or industrialisation. In an 1853 speech, Dickens exclaimed "I have seen in the factories and workshops of Birmingham such beautiful order and regularity, and such great consideration for the work people provided, that they might justly be entitled to be considered educational" (Shepherd, 1937, pp. 150-151). He accepted the possibility of a positive social and

individual connection between factory employment and education, but his position required employers to recognise the humanity of their employees. However, there is no optimism in *Hard Times* and it is not clear whether Dickens believes that such a change can happen, or is afraid of the demons that could be released if it does not. The fairy-tale metaphors of Dickens develop a text that calls for the recognition of a common humanity and for society to encourage empathy rather than conflict as the unifying bond. He suggests this be done, not as part of some “fantastic vow or bond or brotherhood ... but, simply as a duty to be done”, and notes to the reader that it rests with each and all of us to decide whether “similar things shall be or not” (*HT*, p. 222).

Both *The Communist Manifesto* and *Hard Times* were written at a time when the changes wrought in society by the industrialisation of Britain had become the subject of increasingly critical examination. England’s shift from an agricultural village based society to an industrialised urban society had not been without a social cost. The village structure that existed until the second half of the Eighteenth century, with its agricultural and trade/craft economic base, had been an independent economic and social unit. The introduction of mechanisation had brought with it changes in the population and wealth distribution of England; towns sprang up around industry as workers were attracted by the prospect of employment. The independent unit of the village still existed within the macro-structure of the nation as a whole, but the power base was shifting to the cities. From this shift grew a pressure for the reform of parliament; traditional representation had been based on land ownership rather than capital. The increasing domination of industrial power attracted attention from social commentators, both those in support and those in opposition to the changes. On one side, the ‘political economists’, with whom Harriet Martineau identified, argued that industrialisation increased the wealth of society and was a general good, and that those who did not benefit were those who did not take advantage of the opportunities offered, or who were selected by the Malthusian whim of natural law. They based their arguments on the works of Thomas Malthus, Adam Smith, Ricardo and Bentham. Perhaps not surprisingly, in view of the events and discussions over the first half of the century, and criticisms of *Hard Times*, Adam Smith’s 1776 observations on wages were overlooked:

What are the common wages of labour, depends every where upon the contract usually made between those two parties, whose interests are by no means the



same. The workmen desire to get as much, the masters to give as little as possible. The former are disposed to combine in order to raise, the latter in order to lower the wages of labour. (Smith, 1776, p. 81)

But Smith was more astute than to merely state the obvious, he also identified a problem which is hardly confined to his own eighteenth century; one might be forgiven for thinking it has some application even today.

We rarely hear ... of the combinations of masters, though frequently of those of workmen. But whoever imagines, upon this account, that masters rarely combine, is as ignorant of the world as of the subject. Masters are always and every where in a sort of tacit, but constant and uniform combination, not to raise the wages of labour above their actual rate. ... We seldom, indeed, hear of this combination, because it is the usual, and one may say, the natural state of things which nobody ever hears of. Masters too sometimes enter into particular combinations to sink the wages of labour even below this rate. These are always conducted with the utmost silence and secrecy, till the moment of execution, and when the workmen yield, as they sometimes do, without resistance, though severely felt by them, they are never heard of by other people. (Smith, 1776, pp. 81-82)

What he is saying, of course, is nothing less than there is no such thing as a free market for labour. It can never be anything other than a negotiation between those who wish to maximise the accumulation of capital by treating labour as a cost to be kept down, and those who need to provide food, shelter, and hope for their families. Seventy three years later, Dickens sought to warn the masters that driving too hard a bargain with their workers brought the risk that “in the day 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” (*HT*, p. 125). Smith (1776) too, warned that by the time things got bad enough for the workers to combine against their employers, their limited resources meant that time was a pressure and that “[i]n order to bring the point to a speedy decision, they have always recourse to the loudest clamour, and sometimes to the most shocking violence and outrage” (p. 82).

It is perhaps difficult, in our world of graphic action movies and instant news, to give meaning to the phrase “most shocking violence and outrage”, but it had real meaning in

Dickens's day. In the same year in which Smith published those words, 1776, Britain saw her American colonies adopt the Declaration of Independence, a move that formally created the United States of America but which was not accepted by Britain until her final military defeat in 1783. The importance of this extended well beyond the resolution of the colonists' initial complaints of taxation without parliamentary representation, well founded though they may have been. It heralded the arrival of the modern republican nation. The famous words from the Declaration of Independence, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal" are an explicit rejection of the British feudal-based class system. Not only had a king been defeated, but monarchy itself had suffered a defeat. Nor was this an end to conflict; the ideological conflagration that had been both fuel and flame to the revolution in America, had scattered sparks across Europe. France smouldered. A full discussion of the causes of the French Revolution lies outside the scope of this work, however there was certainly discontent among the populace for what was about to become the *Ancien Regime*. Included in this discontent was growing support for ideas around equal rights for all citizens; ideas similar to—and often from identical sources—those expressed in the 1776 Declaration of Independence.

Although the most famous revolutionary statement of position must almost certainly be *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité*, the articles of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen are more specific. The first words are "[m]en are born and remain free and equal in rights" (France Diplomatie, 2012), and in Article Six we read that "[a]ll citizens, being equal in its eyes, shall be equally eligible to all high offices, public positions and employments, according to their ability, and without other distinction than that of their virtues and talents". Clearly, this was a repudiation of the existing French system of government based on monarchy, similar to that which the American Declaration of Independence had been of the English Crown. If France had smouldered since 1783, the winds of change would set the embers aflame in 1789:

A slight sputter,—which has *kindled* the too combustible chaos; made it a roaring fire-chaos! Bursts forth Insurrection, at sight of its own blood (for there were deaths by that sputter of fire), into endless rolling explosion of musketry, distraction, execration;—and over head, from the Fortress, let one great gun, with its grape shot, go booming, to shew what we *could* do. The Bastille is besieged! (Carlyle, 1837/1911, p. 131)

Thus Carlyle, in a work that was a favourite of Dickens's and a source for *Tale of Two Cities*, describes the events at the start of the French Revolution. He mixed fact and fancy into a first person narrative of events at which he was not present; works of history were no more immune to creative writing than were newspaper articles. Nevertheless, the revolution was the end of a monarchy, and the beginning of a new republic; this time closer to home for Britain than the distant Americas. The War of Independence in America had involved several European nations, including France, and so too would the French Revolution. This time, however, the established monarchies of Europe felt they were directly threatened by the rise of a new republic, and they responded. By 1792, France was under attack and on the verge of collapse. However, by 1793, the revolutionary army was resurgent. This was also the first taste of battle for a young Napoleon Bonaparte. War reached outward across land and sea, and embroiled Europe in conflict that would not finally end until the defeat of Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815. For the three decades from 1776 to 1815, then, real bloody revolution was the background of the British industrial revolution.

### **A striking change: the key-note and coming to blows**

In Britain, the call for social reform, although muted in comparison with France, was far from absent. Social structures and circumstances were different in the two nations, for the industrialisation of British industry had already changed the shape of one society. The shift of power from hereditary landowners to industrialists—an outcome of the rising influence of capitalism—resulted in the push for parliamentary reform coming from a much wealthier and more influential power base than had been the case in France. However, the toppling of a monarchy across the channel and the resulting thirty years of unrest could hardly go unnoticed, nor than that it had begun with a popular uprising. An additional problem was that the Napoleonic wars had disrupted international trade and this had resulted in difficult economic conditions in Britain, particularly for its textile industry. This exacerbated the existing tensions between the handloom weavers and the mill owners of the north, where the power looms were beginning to take over. The handloom weavers had traditionally been self-employed artisans who sold the product of their labour to the textile merchants.

Power looms replaced skilled workers with less skilled, and thus cheaper, machine operatives<sup>58</sup>. This threatened—and eventually destroyed—the value of the weavers’ skills, and with it their source of income. The development and rise of the factory system saw a sharp drop in the wages of textile workers (Poole, 2009). In Bolton, for example, a weaver who could have expected to earn six shillings a day in 1792 would have found this reduced to less than six shillings a week for a sixteen-hour day over the following thirty years. This at a time when the price of staple foods such as bread, cheese and meat had almost doubled (Aspin, 1995). So it was that in 1811, the year before Charles Dickens was born, the Luddite unrest began in Nottinghamshire and spread across the North over the next five years. The workers protested the introduction of machinery and the reduction of wages. They sent threatening letters to their employers, smashed the looms, and assaulted mill owners and magistrates (National Archives, n.d.). There were violent clashes with the army and new laws were introduced making ‘machine breaking’ a capital offence. The names of the Acts, in themselves—Destruction of Stocking Frames, Etc. Act 1812; Malicious Damage Act, 1812—give insight into the concerns felt by parliament; the unrest was perceived as a major threat. The disturbances were eventually quelled by trials in York in January 1813, the outcome of which was that seventeen people were hanged and several others transported or imprisoned (Trial Report, 1862). The anonymous author of the report noted that “this tremendous example, made to the offended laws of the country, served to confirm and render permanent the public tranquility” (p. 15), as well it might. However, the claim of permanence for this tranquility was optimistic.

The year 1816 saw a winter of discontent, but it was not made glorious summer, for there was no summer that year and winter’s discontent grew deeper. This was the summer in which Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* with its dark and brooding skies and its Creature, which like the hungry poor of Europe, suffered first “from the inclemency of the season”, but “still more from the barbarity of man” (Shelley, 1831, p. 90) This was the summer in which Byron wrote *Darkness*, beginning it:

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<sup>58</sup> They were called ‘operatives’ ostensibly because they operated the machinery of the power looms. However, the word also distinguished the skilled weaver from the mechanical process worker who had replaced him. With the skill removed from the task, the individual had become part of the machinery of industry, until in *Hard Times* they have finally been reduced to ‘hands’.

I had a dream, which was not all a dream.  
The bright sun was extinguish'd, and the stars  
Did wander darkling in the eternal space,  
Rayless, and pathless, and the icy earth  
Swung blind and blackening in the moonless air;  
Morn came and went--and came, and brought no day,  
And men forgot their passions in the dread  
Of this their desolation; and all hearts  
Were chill'd into a selfish prayer for light: (Byron, 1826, p. 581)

This was the summer that didn't come. This was the summer in which Byron recorded "a celebrated dark day, on which the fowls went to roost at noon, and the candles lighted as at midnight" (West, 1826, pp. 246-247). The drifting ash from the April 1815 eruption of Mt Tambora, in the Indian Ocean, darkened the skies of Europe and caused unsettled weather; there were colder temperatures, increased rainfall, and shorter days. Coming so soon after the economic stress of the Napoleonic wars, the difficult growing season was a disaster. Crops failed in many countries, and famine and disease scythed through the poor (Wood, 2012).

In Britain, the demand for exports dropped while the price of corn, the staple grain for the working man's bread, was kept artificially high by the Importation Act 1815. The British government had introduced the 'Corn Laws' to prevent imported corn from lowering the price that local producers could demand. Increasingly, however, declining manufacturing profits put pressure on wages. Falling wages and artificially high prices for a staple food—the fuel for the factory hands—brought the land owning class, with their long standing domination of parliament, into direct political conflict with the recently emergent powerbase of the industrialized manufacturers. The former wanted to protect their income, while the latter wanted to lower the cost of employment and increase their profits—but the wages needed to be high enough for the workers and their families to be able to subsist, even if not to prosper. Factory operatives were finding it increasingly hard to keep food on the family table; the landowners, with their intransigence towards lowering the cost of bread, were identified as a major obstacle by both employer and employee. If the law could not be circumvented, then the power of the landowners to

control legislation must be circumscribed, and for that to happen there needed to be change to the system of parliamentary representation.

On 15 November and 2 December 1816, at Spa Fields, two of the largest public meetings and demonstrations seen in London for decades took place. The initial meeting surprised the organisers by attracting a crowd of about 10,000 people. Its official object had been to get support for a petition to be delivered directly to the Prince Regent, thus bypassing parliament. The petition was requesting both electoral reform—universal (male) suffrage, annual general elections, and a secret ballot (Bloy, 2003)—and some relief from the economic hardship of the times. The second meeting was called after the petitioners' representative was twice denied access to the Regent. This is the meeting known to history as the Spa Fields Riots (Sutton, 2009), and although it only lasted the day, the revolutionary Tricolour was paraded through the streets and a gunsmith's shop was robbed of weapons. The concentration of workers into the manufacturing cities had created more than just a labour pool; it had created the potential for united action by members of the working classes. To the parliament of the day, revolution seemed a real possibility, and the 'gagging acts'—what might ironically be called the 'popular name' for the Treason Act 1817 and the Seditious Meetings Act 1817—were quickly passed into law. This was the pattern for the first half of the nineteenth century, industrial, agricultural, and political unrest followed by legislative reaction.

Sporadic riots, and more frequently, petitions to the monarch or parliament were a fact of life, and increasingly the political pressure was coming from the provinces (Poole, 2009). In March 1817, 25,000 people, mainly Lancashire weavers, gathered in Manchester, with the intention of petitioning the Prince Regent about the economic woes of the textile industry, and to protest the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act (Poole, 2009)—an Act that had provided some assurance of the lawfulness of any prisoner's detention. The government still had a general fear of revolution, and in the debate surrounding the suspension of the Habeas Corpus Act, Lord Sidmouth claimed to have evidence that "a traitorous conspiracy had been formed in the metropolis for the purpose of over-throwing, by means of a general insurrection, the established government, and of effecting a general plunder and division of property". Sidmouth further noted that not only had "such designs ... not been confined to the capital, but [they] were extending widely throughout Great

Britain, particularly in the manufacturing districts”, as an expression of a “spirit [that] had long prevailed in the country, but especially since the commencement of the French Revolution” (Pellew, 1847, pp. 169-170). While those in power interpreted the situation as a groundswell of sedition, Poole (2009) argues, that the petitioners actually saw themselves as participating in constitutionalist strategies, rather than those of revolution<sup>59</sup>.

This particular petition achieved little, but would become known as the march of the Blanketeers, thus named because of the blanket each carried to keep warm at night and to identify themselves as weavers. Three months later, in June 1817, there was another protest also more noted for its existence than its efficacy. Nonetheless the Pentrich Rising, which resulted in three people being hanged and twenty being transported, is symptomatic of the increasing unrest of the time. The most spectacular, and significant, of these popular attempts to achieve change without revolution has become famous for its tragic results, but few remember its original purpose, the reform of parliamentary representation. The Peterloo Massacre of August 1819 has become, according to one modern historian, “a shorthand term for the political dark side of the industrial revolution” (Poole, 2006, p. 255) and yet is commonly represented as merely an unfortunate response by overly nervous local officials to a perceived threat to order. The event itself, the use of cavalry charging with drawn sabres to disperse a gathering of unarmed citizenry, resulted in 17 deaths and hundreds of injuries<sup>60</sup> (Poole, 2006). Poole argues, convincingly, that the real cause lay with the Home Office, who misinterpreted the gathering of 50,000 – 60,000 in the light of their own fears of revolution, based on the 1817 insurrections. Ten of the organizers were charged with seditious offences, but—to the discomfit of a government attempting to justify the killings as the preservation of order—only five were convicted, and they only of “intending to excite disaffection and hatred of king and constitution” rather than actually doing anything (Poole, 2006, p. 255). More telling is that even the crown’s solicitor felt that the guilty verdict was against the

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<sup>59</sup> In the absence of universal suffrage, petitions were the only way that the working class could attempt to influence the government, without too great a risk of accusations of seditious treason. As political pressure grew, so did the number of petitions. In the period 1838-1843, 94,000 petitions were presented to the House of Commons (Pickering, 2001).

<sup>60</sup> A quarter of those killed or injured were women, which suggests the authorities may have had a particular dislike of female reformers, but which certainly shows that women were heavily involved.

run of evidence. Later that year still further legislation was passed to restrict the ability of the citizens of Britain to participate in political activity, the “Six Acts”<sup>61</sup>.

The Chartism movement began as that very English idea which had become so popular with the citizens of England, an attempt to effect social justice through democratic participation rather than revolution. The state had, as we have seen, a fear of revolution stretching back into the previous century. In the state’s efforts to protect itself from the citizens it should have been representing, laws had been passed that restricted political meetings and publications. In 1830 the election of a Whig government in England—supporters of parliamentary reform—suggests that a major power shift had taken place within the British establishment. The timing may have been no more than coincidence, but in this same year, the French rose again, albeit briefly, and replaced their king—the monarchy had been reinstated by European powers after the abdication of Napoleon—with a constitutional monarch, and a similar uprising established the new constitutional monarchy of Belgium. Nevertheless, while Europe insisted upon change, England voted for it. The new government introduced a series of important legislative, and hence social, reforms. These included the 1832 Reform Act—that which the 23 year old Charles Dickens had reported on for *The Morning Chronicle*—which redistributed voting rights on the basis of population rather than hereditary power; the Factory Act 1833 which attempted to regulate the hours of work within the textile industry and made it mandatory for the employers to provide two hours of education a day for children; the Slavery Abolition Act 1833, which made slavery illegal, but not the near slavery of some factory workers; and the Poor Law Amendment Act 1834 which attempted to both centralise and discourage public relief payments to the poor. Although the Reform Act had made some important changes to the parliamentary system, by today’s standards they seem trivial, and it is difficult to see that these changes were of any benefit to the majority of the population, for the right to vote was still linked to property ownership. Nevertheless, some changes had been made, and the Chartists sought to continue this process and extend the franchise to include the working class.

The charter, from which the Chartists drew their name, is a logical progression from the Magna Carta (The Great Charter) of six hundred years earlier. Where the latter had

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<sup>61</sup> Training Prevention Act; Seizure of Arms Act; Misdemeanours Act; Seditious Meetings Prevention Act; Blasphemous and Seditious Libels Act; Newspaper and Stamp Duties Act



sought to limit the powers of the sovereign and protect those of the feudal lords, the Chartists wanted to limit the still almost feudal authority of the lords of the realm, and the newly arisen captains of industry. The 1832 Reform Act had extended the right to vote from about 400,000 to 650,000 individuals, and had restructured the electoral system to eliminate much of the corruption that had existed previously. Indeed, it laid the foundation of the modern party system of democratic representation (Phillips & Wetherell, 1995). However, in a country with a population of around 14 million, this meant that most of the population had no voice in the running of the country in which they lived. The members of the working class were politically voiceless, but they were not silent.

The Chartist movement was active from shortly after the Reform Act, until the middle of the century, drawing most of their support from the lower middle class and working class in the industrialised north. The Chartist newspaper, *The Northern Star*, became one of the leading newspapers of its day with a weekly circulation of 80,000 in 1839. The publishers took advantage of the Stamp Duty imposed on newspapers to distribute it widely by using the postal system (Mussell, 2012). Millions participated in this movement, signing several petitions to parliament asking for wider political representation. The six points of the People's Charter of 1838 show how far removed Britain was from any form of democracy that most modern readers would recognise:

1. A vote for every man twenty one years of age, of sound mind, and not undergoing punishment for crime.
2. The ballot - to protect the elector in the exercise of his vote.
3. No property qualification for members of Parliament - thus enabling the constituencies to return the man of their choice, be he rich or poor.
4. Payment of members, thus enabling an honest tradesman, working man, or other person, to serve a constituency, when taken from his business to attend to the interests of the country.
5. Equal constituencies securing the same amount of representation for the same number of electors,—instead of allowing small constituencies to swamp the votes of larger ones.

6. Annual Parliaments, thus presenting the most effectual check to bribery and intimidation, since though a constituency might be bought once in seven years (even with the ballot), no purse could buy a constituency (under a system of universal suffrage) in each ensuing twelvemonth; and since members, when elected for a year only, would not be able to defy and betray their constituents as now. (Crail, 2003)

Much of this was directly related to the failure of the Reform Act to bring any benefit or representation to the worker. By the early 1840s there were widespread strikes; the demands were increasingly for improved wages and conditions as well as political reform.

In 1842, the combination of a falling demand for cotton and the rise of Chartism created tensions that resulted in a general strike across the industrial Midlands. Up to half a million workers were involved, over an area stretching from Dundee to Cornwall. It lasted twice as long as the General Strike of 1926, and was probably the largest and most comprehensive industrial action of the 1800s (Jenkins, 1980). We should not, at this far remove, too readily gloss the word 'strike' and dismiss this as a relatively benign event, causing some vague inconvenience to the country but now of only historical importance. The English worker has long been oddly tolerant of social structures similar to those that had caused revolution in other countries, and this occasion was no different. As Jenkins (1980) points out, the working class still largely supported the principle of aristocracy; their complaint was against the 'shoddocracy', the new industrialists motivated only by profit. However, although the "operatives and mechanics" (Jenkins, 1980, p. 22) sought reform not revolution, at this time there was no successful model upon which the working class could base their attempts to influence those in power; "the English [working-men] ... fight not against the government, but directly against the bourgeoisie; and for the time, this can be done only in a peaceful manner" (Engels, 1845/1973, p. 231). A decade of petitions had achieved little, but the working class had persisted with them. Meetings had been labelled as riots, and the leaders imprisoned, hanged, or transported. The Strike of 1842 was a well-organized, and very serious, confrontation between the state and the industrial workforce; this was a very civil war.

The industrial revolution had brought with it a rapid population shift to the suddenly expanding cities, based around coalfields and textile mills—this had created the potential for massed action. The wealthy industrial centres in previously sparsely populated areas contained separate, desperate communities of poverty. These communities were the dwelling areas within the city, inhabited by those of similar occupation and employer, but whose income was not generated within the community, but within the factory. The market system of employment meant that jobs were filled by auction, by negotiating the lowest price that would be accepted, and the individual worker had become a production unit within an economic structure; industry had become industrialised. In England there were more production units than places for them, and unemployment and widespread poverty had become an increasing problem—identified, by some critics, as being caused by the economically powerful using the threat of unemployment to drive wages below subsistence level. The *Australian and New Zealand Monthly Journal*, a publication promoting emigration—and the New Zealand Company—argued that “superabundant labour enables the capitalist to use the unemployed and half-famished workman as the instrument of intimidation, by threatening the introduction of other labour into his factory, unless such wages be accepted as his avarice may dictate” (Capper, 1842).

Overcrowding, electoral inequality, poor working conditions, poverty and ignorance: these were threads under tension, pulling at the social fabric of an England heading towards at least a strike, and perhaps a revolution. The rhetoric of the day made some priorities clear. Survival depended food and shelter, personal development depended upon education: “[t]he wants of the body must be supplied before we proceed to inform the mind, and intellectual pursuits are mockery to a man without bread” (Capper, 1842, p. 75). Emigration was viewed by many—including Dickens—as a practical non-violent solution to these problems. As noted earlier, it was certainly part of Dickens’s intentions for the girls of Urania Cottage to establish new lives away from the perils of their past. On a more personal level, five of Dickens’s six sons made their lives outside of England, and have their graves beyond its shores. Emigration was promoted as a solution because, it was argued, that reducing available labour would drive wages up in England and simultaneously provide new opportunities—usually within the developing colonies—for those who departed.

Pre-eminent amid the wants of this country is a sound and general system of education. But where are the funds for its support? ... [h]ow shall a man decide upon questions of politics or religion who neither writes his own name, nor can read it when written? Ignorance stands the great opponent to every improvement, and poverty is the grand bulwark of ignorance: remove one, and a sure and easy road is opened to the destruction of the other; and ... emigration [we argue] will do this. (Capper, 1842, p. 76)

In this utopian new world, “[t]he incendiary harangue will be forsaken for the lecture, or the concert of a Mechanics’ Institute—the gross gratifications of the pot-house will be left for the pleasures of literature” (Capper, 1842, p. 77), and education would allow each individual to understand themselves as part of a united society rather than becoming Justice Talfourd’s “various orders of society, each hardened unto each and holding itself aloof” (Dickens, 1854b, p. 209). Beneath the surface of the struggle for electoral reform, and improved working conditions moved the current of educational change.

The 1842 strike—not a revolution—took place; it was partly a Chartist protest and partly a class struggle, and it showed the way forward for a century of effective working class action. Needless to say, the full might of the state was brought to bear on the strikers, but its widespread nature made it difficult to quash. Jenkins (1980) cites a letter from the Home Secretary, Sir James Graham, in which he stated that “it is impossible even if you had a standing army ten times greater than the British to provide troops for every town and village throughout the manufacturing districts” (p. 195). Nonetheless, it was eventually controlled, if not actually crushed. However, as Engels (1845/1973) noted, “the working men do not respect the law, but simply submit to its power when they cannot change it” (p. 233); they would wait. During the course of the strike there was two days of rioting in the mill town of Preston; four workers were shot and killed by authorities. The workers of Preston, too, would wait. Things were quiet again, but by 1846, the textile industry was in the grip of a severe recession, and the mill owners reduced the wages of the workers, with the promise that they would be restored when the economic conditions improved. So it was that by the late 1840s there had been much unrest, some violence but little short term success in gaining a voting franchise or improving workers conditions. Although the Chartists had their last major protests with

the 1848 revolutions in Europe as a backdrop, the sparks of revolution still did not ignite the tinder of the mill towns. However, tensions rose again when, by 1849, the textile industry had begun to revive, but the mill owners in Preston ignored the concessions the workers had made and denied any agreement to restore wage levels. The Chartist movement itself faded, but the power of united action from within the working class, and the use of the newspaper, to apply social and economic pressure to those who would prefer to ignore them had been a lesson learned. The stage was being set for a new and greater confrontation between the owners and the workers in Preston's mills.

### **A visit to Preston**

Industrialisation had created the mill towns, and fostered political unrest; the combination had also sped the rise of newspapers reporting national and international events. The rise of factories had concentrated the opportunities for employment into newly created urban areas and into the older cities, with little concurrent growth of housing, sewerage and fresh water supplies. The unrest had focussed some attention on the working class, and it was becoming apparent to even a casual observer that many of England's inhabitants were living in poor conditions. The strikes had brought this to the attention of the general reader; newspapers of the day, of course, reported on the increasingly widespread industrial unrest. We have seen *The Morning Chronicle* as the vehicle for the early reporting of Charles Dickens but it was to break new ground in late 1849. Investigative journalism took its first steps with a series of articles called *Labour and the Poor* which began publication on the 18<sup>th</sup> of October 1849, and continued daily into 1850. They were presented in the alternating sequence: The Manufacturing Districts, The Metropolitan Districts, and The Rural Districts. The "Special Correspondent" for the sections on the manufacturing districts was a young man called Angus Reach, and he was indefatigable. He went through factories and mills, talked to workers and unemployed and visited their homes, interviewed mill owners, walked the streets and visited the night spots, and made a careful record of his travels. Now the daily reader was exposed to the results of a national study, the like of which had never been attempted before, and likely never since. I draw on this work to argue for the accuracy of Dickens's portrayals and descriptions of life in a mill town, as shown in *Hard Times*. Dickens was writing fiction, but he was presenting fact, and illustrating truth.

Dickens named the chapter in which his mill town, Coketown, was described as *The Key-Note*, so it seems that he saw as important the physical conditions in which the novel is set. We, as modern readers of his work, should not dismiss too quickly as metaphor or hyperbole those aspects of imagery which seem to be grotesque or sharply drawn caricature; we risk overlooking the accuracy of Dickens's observations. Coketown, he describes thus:

It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but, as matters stood it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled. It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of building full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long, and where the piston of the steam engine worked monotonously up and down, like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness. (*HT*, pp. 20-21)

Certainly the vigorous use of simile and metaphor to describe buildings and factories with reference to living beings highlights the unnaturalness of Coketown, and makes the passage entertaining. The painted face of the savage, the serpents of smoke, and the melancholy elephant do not exist; but what of the blackened bricks and the purple river? The first of Angus Reach's articles tells us:

The traveller by railway is made aware of his approach to the great northern seats of industry by the dull leaden-coloured sky, tainted by thousands of ever smoking chimneys ... and the rivers, if they be not locked and dammed back, and embellished with towing paths upon the banks, run turbid and thick-charged with the foulness of the hundred mills they have aided in their course ... grass looks brown and dry, and foliage stunted and smutty. The roads, and even the footpaths across the fields, are black with coal dust ... . Huge, shapeless, unsightly mills, with their countless rows of windows, their towering shafts, their jets of waste steam continually puffing in panting gushes from the brown, grimy wall. (Reach, 1849a)

Even the purple colour of the river seems to have a basis in fact. The entry for Bradford tells the reader that "the 'Bradford Beck,' a rapid stream which flows through the town,

would, if arched over, make a capital main sewer. The brook at present runs the colour of ink” (Reach, 1849b). Although Dickens may seem to be using the language of exaggeration, it is neither the language nor the representation of a fiction. The evidence suggests that his description of a mill town highlights rather than embroiders the facts of such places. And Dickens had been in a mill town early in the year that *Hard Times* was written; he had visited Preston to report on the latest industrial dispute.

The mill owners in the Lancashire town of Preston were resisting the demands of the mill workers for the restoration of the ten percent cut in wages that had been agreed in 1847. The workers in surrounding towns had no such difficulty in having this payment reinstated. In Preston, it became a problem. Most of the owners agreed, but a few held out. The workers organised a series of rolling strikes against those mills, intending that those in work would then be able to support those on strike. However, the ensuing conflict resulted in a lock-out by the mill owners, not because of the demands, nor even the strikes themselves, but because of the united approach taken by the workers (The Times, 1853). The dispute raged from October 1853 through to May 1854, and was widely reported in the national newspapers (Ashworth, 1854). Dickens visited Preston in January 1854, specifically to get some background for *Hard Times* (Slater, 1998). However, he also used the occasion to write *On Strike*, an article that he published in his newspaper *Household Words*. In this article, Dickens reproduces “the following sufficiently general and discursive hymn ... sung in long metre by the whole audience” (Dickens, 1854c, p. 558):

Assembled beneath thy broad blue sky,  
To Thee, O God, thy children cry.  
Thy needy creatures on Thee call,  
For Thou art great and good to all

Thy bounty smiles on every side,  
And no good thing hast Thou denied;  
But men of wealth and men of power,  
Like locusts, all our gifts devour.

Awake, ye sons of toil! Nor sleep  
While millions starve, while millions weep;

Demand your rights; let tyrants see  
You are resolved that you'll be free. (p. 558)

Dickens's following line is the wonderful literary non sequitur: "Mr Hollins's Sovereign Mill was open all this time. It is a very beautiful mill" (Dickens, 1854c, p. 558). Whatever the charms of Mr Hollins's mill, the hymn Dickens quoted may well have been distributed in printed form, as Henry Ashworth (1854, p. 36) also reproduces it in his record of the same events. What has only recently become apparent, is that the hymn has a Chartist history; a recently discovered Chartist hymnbook—the only one known to exist—includes a version with a much less anodyne third verse:

No longer view yourselves as *things*  
Made for the use of useless kings!  
Demand your rights! Let tyrants see  
You are resolved that you'll be free! (Unknown, 1845, p. 4)

Did Dickens know this version? That would then explain the otherwise odd choice of phrase, "sufficiently general" in his introductory sentence. Dickens would have been well aware that Carlyle had warned, more than a decade earlier, that Chartism had changed its shape, but not gone away.

The distracted incoherent embodiment of Chartism ... this has been put down; or rather has fallen down ... but the living essence of Chartism has not been put down. Chartism means the bitter discontent grown fierce and mad, the wrong condition ... or the wrong disposition, of the Working Classes of England. (Carlyle, 1840a, p. 2)

Perhaps Dickens was more alert to this undercurrent than he has been given credit for. It is also worthy of note that in both versions of the hymn, there is the clear message that the Christianity displayed is not that of self-sacrifice, but of justice in this world rather than the next. Using a neatly apropos phrase, a recent article on the analysis of the hymn notes that for the Chartists "Hard times ... were caused by man's selfishness rather than the Lord's judgment; quite a different message to that put out by mainstream Christianity" (cited in Addelman, 2013); this is a viewpoint that is consistent with the perspective adopted by Dickens for his *Hard Times*, and for his life.



## A house divided

From the ashes of the revolutions and of Chartism a Hobgoblin did indeed arise, not—at least initially—the communism predicted by Marx but an increased willingness by members of the working class to unite against the forces of capital and tradition. Dickens was deeply concerned about the state of affairs, and even as late as 1855, could not discount the possibility of revolution; in a letter of April that year he wrote:

I believe the discontent to be much the worse for smouldering, instead of blazing openly, that it is extremely like the general mind of France before the breaking out of the first Revolution, and is in danger of being turned by any one of a thousand accidents. (Dickens & Hogarth, 1880, p. 395)

Doubtless he had earlier been concerned that events in Preston might furnish such an accident. In the article that Dickens wrote about Preston, he clearly stated his own position in relation to employer/employee relationships when he argued that the two parties are “those whose interests must be understood to be identical or must be destroyed” (Dickens, 1854c, p. 558). The growing evidence of divisive conflict within the nation concerned him; he echoed the sentiments of Marx and Engels, who had also noted that such “a fight ... ended, either in revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes”.<sup>62</sup> (Marx & Engels, 1844/1998, p. 50)

Dickens also professed a liking for “the words employers and employed, in preference to Capital and Labour” because, as he shrewdly observed, the “stereo-typed terms” often take the place of “sense and moderation” (Dickens, 1854c, p. 553). What he does not say, but his writing implied, is that such words also serve to obscure the individual experiences of those involved, and Labour becomes “something that occasionally rose like the sea, and did some harm and waste (chiefly to itself), and fell again” (*HT*, p. 121).

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<sup>62</sup> It is ironic that the divisions between employers and employed—that Dickens feared so much— did in fact occur, but that they may have actually helped control the worst excess of *laissez faire* capitalism in the twentieth century. In 1918 the world’s first Marxist revolution toppled the Russian monarchy and created the USSR socialist state. Lanchester (2010) argues that this established an alternative economic model to capitalism and was the “equivalent of an ideological beauty contest” (p.10) with each side competing to demonstrate that they offered the better way of life for their citizens. In the west, this resulted in socialist policies such as free education and healthcare, paid holidays and increased sensitivity to issues around human rights coming into existence alongside the market forces of capitalism. Lanchester also argues that the collapse of the soviet bloc has removed this constraint. I suggest that our current climate is very similar to that in which Dickens was writing, where economic forces over-rule the social obligations of genuine democracy.

Nonetheless, Dickens's largely sympathetic portrayal of the Preston operatives in the article is not reflected in his subsequent description of the union activity in *Hard Times*—that would have sat uneasily with his disquiet about social conflict—nor in the irritatingly helpless figure of the power-loom weaver, Stephen Blackpool. In fact, Dickens went to some pains to ensure that his representation of Coketown did not enable it to be associated with any specific real location, but only identified as a generic mill-town. Dickens even went so far as to rebuke a friend who had written an article (P. Cunningham, 1854) for the *Illustrated London News*, in which he had identified Preston as Dickens's model for Coketown. The letter in response, from Dickens, not only corrects the error, but gives his explanation for the decision to invent a town:

I don't know where you may have found your information, but I can assure you that it is altogether wrong ... in this instance it has this pernicious bearing: It localizes (so far as your readers are concerned) a story which has a direct purpose in reference to the working people all over England. (Dickens in Storey et al., 1993)

From the beginning, however, the reality is that the text has always been linked to the Preston lock-out; for example, a contemporary reviewer wrote that

[w]hen it was announced, amid the strikes and subsequent derangements of commerce, that Mr Dickens was about to write a tale ... to be called 'Hard Times' ... [i]t was imagined the main topic of the story would be drawn from the fearful struggle which was being then enacted in the north. (Sinnott, 1854, p. 604)

This on-going association with a particular historical and geographical context has informed much of the contemporary criticism and has obscured much of Dickens's intent, exactly as he feared it would. It seems reasonable to take the author at his word, and look more closely at what he did write rather than how closely he approached some target at which he was not aiming.

### **Ah yes, but what to teach?**

"Now what I want is, Facts!" Such was the first sentence presented to the reader of 1854 April Fool's Day issue of *Household Words*, and the first sentence of *Hard Times*. There seems to be no significance in that choice of starting date, certainly I have found no

discussion of it in Dickens's letters or elsewhere. However, there is an appealing irony that a work which asks for so much more than facts should be introduced to its public on that day, in that way, and by a character such as Thomas Gradgrind; a man who is shown to be tragically foolish. Jane Sinnett, who had "imagined" the strikes in the north might be the subject of *Hard Times* was quick to point out that it seemed to her that while the relations between masters and men was present in the work, "this purpose is subordinated and made incidental to another, which is to exhibit the evil effects of an exclusive education of the intellect, without a due cultivation of the finer feelings of the heart and the fancy" (Sinnett, 1854, p. 320). She also notes that she is unaware of the existence of any educational system such as that which Dickens describes, and that "if there are Gradgrind schools they are not sufficiently numerous to be generally known" (p. 320). Perhaps her lack of awareness says more about her own social distance from the experiences of those in the working class than it does about prevailing education systems. For many years Dickens had been an active campaigner for causes that could catch and hold his fancy, and one area in which he had sustained an interest was that of education. The nature of the man himself ensured that it would be the excesses and injustices that most attracted his attention, and could be expected to draw forth the most vivid portraits from his pen. He was, after all, a satirist before he was a reformer, but with *Hard Times* he penned a critique not a satire; he drew blood not cartoons this time.

It is true that there is little or no evidence to suggest that Dickens was at the forefront of any move to construct an education system, although in 1846 he did suggest to Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth—then Permanent Secretary of the Education office—that they collaborate in running a model Ragged School (Litvack, 1999). There is neither indication of a response, nor any real suggestion that Dickens was an original or systematic thinker on the subject of educational reform. Hughes (1905), Manning (1959) and Collins (1963) have each written substantial, although conflicting, volumes on the subject. Hughes maintained not only that Dickens was "a careful and progressive student of the fundamental principles of education" (p. 2), but that he was "the first and greatest English student of Froebel" (p. 8). Collins, on the other hand, not only questions Dickens's studiousness, but is adamant that "there is no reason to believe that he read or was otherwise influenced by Froebel, or any other important educational theorist" (p. 17). That Dickens was no theorist is an opinion shared by both Collins and Manning, but the latter also questions the influence that Dickens's writing is supposed to have had on

educational reform. Manning (1959) argues that the issues about which Dickens wrote were already on their way to resolution. Dickens, he suggests, was a participant in a popular cause rather than a leader. The one thing that all three writers seem to agree on is that Dickens was much better at telling the reader what he disapproved of than systematically constructing a system that he considered effective. However, it is well to remember that an inability to affect a cure is no indication of a misdiagnosis, much less is it evidence of the absence of a disorder. The common feature of most educational initiatives of the time was a focus on the morality of the working class and of the labouring poor (Hopkins, 1994; Thompson, 1966). Such instruction was also intended to reinforce individual acceptance of class barriers, while increasing the productivity of the workforce. This was an age when it was widely believed that “the public peace could only be ensured by the due subordination of the various classes of society” (James Kay-Shuttleworth, cited in Hurt, 1972, p. 113) and education was thus understood to be an important tool for ensuring the preservation of society’s institutions, to which the benefit of the labouring individual was duly subordinated.

The development towards a centrally controlled national school system had been underway at least since the teacher training programs established by Kay-Shuttleworth were introduced as a way of standardising and improving skills within the teaching profession, and arguably for some time before (Hurt, 1972). Dickens takes a side-swipe at the product of this scheme with the evocatively named Mr M’Choakumchild, the new teacher at Gradgrind’s school, but there is no real force to the blow; as Leavis would later note, the target of Dickens’s satire was often just a part of the setting through which his characters moved, “a matter of including among the ingredients ... some indignant treatment of a particular abuse” (Leavis, 1962, p. 250). What does seem to have been of greater concern to Dickens was the motivation behind the curricula of the increasing number of schools in England. The poor had long been objects of charity and competing religious intervention through education, but there was also a thriving marketplace of what were called ‘adventure schools’ (Searle, 1993). These were small businesses supplying a primary education, for a modest fee, to the children of the poor. Many parents seemed to prefer both the “easy-going admission and withdrawal practices” (Searle, 1993, p. 246) which allowed flexibility of attendance, and the secular nature of these schools, which rather than devoting time to moral training and religious indoctrination concentrated on an education more focussed on improving the job prospects of the pupils.

Related to these ‘adventure schools’ were the Birkbeck schools founded by William Ellis, a Utilitarian friend of John Stuart Mill. Once again, these were schools intended for the children of the poor, and each child paid fees of 6d a week. These schools bore a remarkable resemblance to the Gradgrind School of *Hard Times*.

Dickens’s descriptions of the mill towns are independently attested, and so is the existence of schools of type of which Mrs Sinnett was so dismissive—and with teaching methods to match. *Hard Times* begins with Gradgrind’s call for facts, and his demand that nothing else be taught. It is immediately apparent that such a school is not dealing in a classical education of the type characteristic of that received by the upper classes, but in a functional education delivered to working class children in the form of a distorted object lesson. This type of lesson originated with the Swiss educator Johann Pestalozzi, who theorized that the best way to encourage children towards abstract thinking skills was for them to observe, classify, describe, and name objects that were in their presence. With the assistance and encouragement of the teacher, and with increasingly complex questions being asked, children would be supported in their development of the ability to think abstractly. They would be able to move from objects to ideas, and to understand ideas that may be encapsulated within objects (Sengupta, 2003). It was intended to be a genuine voyage of discovery for the students, however its English form became dominated by the teacher guiding the students towards “correct” answers and moral positions.

In *Rational Schools*, an 1852 article on Birkbeck Schools published in *Household Words*, (Morley, 1852b) there is an exchange between students and teacher which starts with a riddle, as the students try to guess the object they will investigate. It was a penny. The children were guided to the observations that it was round, brown, heavy, opaque, malleable (the process for this discovery was not mentioned), tenacious, and inorganic—that is devoid of organs. Elizabeth Mayo’s book of lessons tells us that its qualities are that “[i]t is round, flat, mineral, metallic, opaque, bright, copper, cold, reddish-brown, fusible, hard, odorous, artificial, useful, heavy, durable, and uneven” (Mayo, 1857, p. 45). In the example given, a penny, the object of the lesson was physically present. This was as Pestalozzi had originally intended, although the underlying subtext of political economy was not. However, Mayo, and the many who adopted her methods, replaced the object with a picture of an object.

As with Freire's codifications, there becomes then a danger that the object of study is no longer a thing in itself to be investigated, but instead becomes a construction intended to direct—and limit—the thoughts of the students. That philosophy, of course, becomes an irresistible target for Dickens; he contrasts the object lesson with real world understanding and illustrates the gulf. Sissy Jupe, a circus girl in *Hard Times*, knows horses well, she has been surrounded by them all her life, but she doesn't know how to correctly *define*—and delimit—a horse. In a wonderful piece of Dickensian madness, both Sissy and the reader learn that the definition is: “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 (*HT*, p. 7). This definition is remarkable for both its precision and its uselessness. Dickens reproduces the list-like qualities of Mayo's object lesson and ridicules the emptiness of the information learned and recited. The horse is, of course, not present. Nor does the ability to recite this information indicate any real knowledge of horses—not even the ability to recognise one. This is an object lesson without an object, and it is written by Dickens into a passage that contains no grammatical subject; there is neither subject nor object in the lesson. This is education as a transaction and knowledge as a commodity, exchangeable for approval within the schoolroom. Freire would recognise it immediately, and so did Dickens.

The specific—and stated—aim of the Birkbeck schools was the indoctrination of the children into accepting their place in society (Schlicke, 1998). William Ellis himself outlined this objective in his succinctly named *Education As A Means Of Preventing Destitution: With Exemplifications From The Teaching Of The Conditions Of Well-Being And The Principles And Applications Of Economical Science At The Birkbeck Schools*; he claimed that “the qualities which all men ought to possess, and to which ... all ought to be trained, are the disposition to labour, to learn, to inquire, to save, to fulfil engagements, and to obey the law” (Ellis, 1851, p. 20). Modern western governments would no doubt have some sympathy with these goals; their unimaginatively and uncritically instrumental nature is directed at producing a passive, diligent, and willing contributor to the economy.

The use of the penny as an object for study in Morley's article was neither accidental nor ironic; the schools had—and still do have—an overtly economic focus. Moreover, it was an economic focus intended to produce a docile and willing work force, as a later lesson

recorded by Morley illustrates. This group of students is a little older than the first, with the youngest being around eleven years of age. The lesson is still about money, but the intention is clearer: “let a scrap or two out of their present lesson testify. ‘What are wages?’ Answers vary in form; ‘The reward of labour,’ ‘Capital employed to purchase labour,’ and so forth” (Morley, 1852b, p. 339). As with the lesson of the penny, the children are guided to produce a list of properties to describe a good labourer. In *Hard Times*, a mill owner and employer, Josiah Bounderby, claims to know the value of time, and so too were the children in this class learning it. Punctuality is identified as a valuable quality in a workman: “he must be punctual. If he is not punctual he is of less value than a man who is skilful, industrious, sober, honest, and punctual as well” (Morley, 1852b, p. 339). As Morley noted: “the boys were becoming grounded in the truths that regulate the life before them, and ... they knew it. They were learning how they must work, and why they must work” (1852b, p. 340). They were not, of course, learning that the laws of political economics were not natural laws, nor that those laws would not apply equally to their employers.

For the working class the ‘object lesson’ became a replacement for the moral education of the Bible (Gribble, 2004), and economics replaced ethics as a guiding social principle. Dickens makes a direct reference to this moral transfer, in a transparently concealed criticism of Harriet Martineau, when he wrote, in *Hard Times*, that “[b]ody number three, wrote leaden little books for them, showing how the good grown-up baby invariably got to the Savings-bank, and the bad grown-up baby invariably got transported” (*HT*, pp. 41-42)<sup>63</sup>; in a single sentence he satirises the use of literature as a mechanism for propaganda as he mocks the conflation of moral justice and monetary gain. He also evinces his increasing concern over the growing influence of industrial morality on the decision-making of the state. That parliamentary ‘dust-man’—and school owner, and trader in lives—Thomas Gradgrind “sat writing in the room with the deadly statistical clock, proving something no doubt — probably, in the main, that the Good Samaritan<sup>64</sup> was a Bad Economist” (*HT*, p. 162). Clearly, not only were there Gradgrind schools, but

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<sup>63</sup> Harriet Martineau came to popular attention with a series of short books called *Illustrations of Political Economy*, which extolled the moral virtues of a society based on economics. It is tempting to think that Dickens wrote *Hard Times* in its distinctively terse form, as his response to these parables of capitalism triumphant.

<sup>64</sup> In Luke 10:29-37 a man was robbed, beaten and left on the side of the road. Senior members of the church ignored his plight, and it was a Samaritan—a theological opponent—who gave him aid. The parable explicitly questions exclusive definitions of ‘neighbour’, suggesting instead that shared humanity rather than shared ideology is the common ground.

Dickens was also aware that there was a philosophy in the wider community—and increasingly supported by the state—that would support the ideas promoted by these schools.

Charles Dickens was interested in education, and had a wider acquaintance with its variety than his wealthier critics are likely to have had. Perhaps his interest stemmed from his own keenly felt lack of educational opportunities. Whatever was the original cause, throughout his career he displayed an enthusiasm for encouraging education on some level. He spoke and published extensively on the subject, in one form or another. One of his early works, *Nicholas Nickleby*, was apparently written with the intention of using the novel as a platform from which to launch an attack on the Yorkshire schools so John Forster (1876), his biographer records. These institutions were a worthy target indeed, as they were more famous for their inhumanity than their educational standards. Dickens's scathing description of Dotheby Hall and its brutish proprietor, Wackford Squeers, was both a memorable piece of writing, and a contribution to the demise of such schools. However, Dickens was also more constructive; he was an active supporter of adult education through the Mechanics' Institutes<sup>65</sup>, an organisation that had been founded in 1823, to provide technical education for the workforce. They were most often funded by local industrialists, and had the production of a sober and skilled worker as one of their objectives

As noted in a previous chapter, Dickens also became heavily involved in the Ragged School movement after visiting—and writing about—Field Lane school in 1843. The Ragged schools were charitable institutions for the children of the poor intended to instil good work habits and improve their opportunities within their social position.

The name implies the purpose. They who are too ragged, wretched, filthy, and forlorn, to enter any other place: who could gain admission into no charity school,

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<sup>65</sup> The London Mechanics Institute later became Birkbeck College—and is currently Birkbeck, University of London— in honour of its founder. The naming of the Birkbeck Schools by William Ellis while also a tribute to Dr George Birkbeck, is unrelated to the College. In contrast, the Yorkshire Schools were notorious for harsh treatment and low standards, Dotheby Hall and the odious Squeers in *Nicholas Nickleby* were both based on a grim reality (Emery, 2006). Dame schools, such as that in *Great Expectations*, were small private schools run by women, usually in their own homes. The standards varied enormously, but lessons often involved little more than simple spelling and exposure to New Testament verses. However, not all Dame schools provided such inadequate education and many also provided a useful childcare service (Emery & Clayton, 2001).



and who would be driven from any church door; are invited to come in here, and find some people not depraved, willing to teach them something, and show them some sympathy, and stretch a hand out, which is not the iron hand of Law, for their correction. (Dickens, 1912, p. 4)

Alongside a muted criticism of the churches—surely the good Samaritan would himself have been turned away—there is mention of “correction” through education; Dickens, in 1846 at least, is comfortable with some elements of an instrumental education, although he does criticise the schools for their lack of secularity. We, as modern readers, should remain aware that although there were many charitable educational programs in place, their goals were seldom free from self-interest. Remember that by 1851 there were around 17000 schools run by the National Society for the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church, with almost a million pupils (Manning, 1959, p. 50), pupils who needed food today as much as salvation tomorrow. These Principles, Dickens contended, had strayed from the simple idea of real world intervention in poverty.

Dickens’s efforts to provide real world change in the circumstances—and therefore the outcomes—of life for the poor of London, was not limited to Ragged Schools. He also became involved in setting up, and running of Urania Cottage. This was a project, begun in 1846, to educate and rehabilitate “fallen women”—to use the phrase of the time—and give them a new future in the colonies (Hartley, 2009). Perhaps we may be forgiven for wondering how a working class girl in an eighteenth century mill town could fall at all; the very idea represents a middle class moral concept of how working class life should be, rather than any understanding of real life circumstances. Thus, the intervention itself was a middle class rescue attempt, to save the girls from a problem created and existing in middle class minds. Nevertheless, the task was seen as laudable in its day, and Dickens continued this work, in association with Angela Burdett-Coutts until 1858. It is intriguing—and I propose no explanation—that even with such close contact with the girls of Urania Cottage, over such an extended period of time, Dickens only ever created inauthentic working class girls in his fiction. Sissy Jupe, in *Hard Times*, could have served as inspiration for Eliza Doolittle in George Bernard Shaw’s *Pygmalion*, so far from speaking as a North Country circus girl is her speech. However, of particular interest to discussions around education was the clear implication of the Urania Cottage project; that it was possible for someone who had “fallen” to regain their footing in society. This

goes beyond the notion of “correction”, and in fact is in conflict with much of the religious based thinking of the time.

The relationship between faith, morality, behaviour, and education was—and in fact remains—an area of conflict between various groups. For example E. P Thompson, in *The Making of the English Working Class* (1966) noted the how closely the virtues promoted in the working class by Methodism reflected the values of middle-class utilitarian thought, and the worker was taught to “‘bear his Cross’ of poverty and humiliation” (p. 369) in joyless obedient acceptance. Intellectual enquiry—wondering, as Dickens expressed it in *Hard Times*—was not to be encouraged, but “the acquisition of *useful* knowledge could be seen as godly and full of merit” (Thompson, 1966, p. 738). “Stick to Facts, sir!” (*HT*, p. 5) Gradgrind commanded his new teacher; “never wonder” (*HT*, p. 41) he commanded his daughter. However, Dickens saw education as an active process of enquiry, rather than a passive one of submission to authority; education as an involvement with, rather than a limitation on, the life opportunities of the participants. It is perhaps here that Dickens and Freire can be seen at their closest. Both were men of faith, and for both their faith demanded works. Dickens and Freire responded to the injustices that they saw, and central to both was the recognition that there exists no working-class human being born different from those more fortunate. There are only people born with differing opportunities to benefit from being born human.

The author of *Hard Times* believed that the nature and quality of education is a key element in the growth of society; in fact he seems to believe that education is both a beginning and an end for any society that would promote social justice. He stresses his point by dividing his text into sections variously labelled: sewing, reaping, and garnering to illustrate his point that education was not simply the mechanical operation represented by Carlyle’s “machines for Education: Lancastrian machines; Hamiltonian machines; monitors, maps and emblems ... a secure, universal, straightforward business, to be conducted in the gross, by proper mechanism, with such intellect as comes to hand” (Carlyle, 1840b, pp. 267-268), but was an organic process that has a predictable outcome. The biblical heritage of the reference also reminds the modern reader of the pervasive nature of religious belief in Dickens’s time, and how it was a lens—both metaphoric and actual—for understanding the world and events. This was a world of temperance movements and salvation, of Sabbatarian sermons on the demonic practise of

enjoying Sunday<sup>66</sup>—all of which Dickens satirises in *Hard times*—and of sectarian contests for the souls of sinners. This was a world of Missionary societies and good works, of ‘saving’ the poor, raising the fallen, and colonising an Empire.

Dickens too had a religious belief; he was brought up an Anglican but spent much of his adulthood if not as a Unitarian at least in sympathy with some of their thinking. Dickens was no more a theologian than an educational theorist. Nonetheless, a particular mindset is evident, a belief in good works and in modelling life on the common representation of the life of Jesus. The first chapter of *Hard Times* is entitled “The one thing needful”; clearly a reference to Luke 10:40-42, where Mary chooses to listen to the words of Jesus rather than do the household chores; *Hard Times* displays a heavy reliance on Victorian Christianity which will be explored a little further a later chapter of this thesis. Nevertheless, it is revealing that Dickens had used this phrase of “one thing needful” ten years earlier in a discussion on education; in an address in aid of the Birmingham Polytechnic Institution he had claimed that:

If we would reward honesty, if we would hold out encouragement to good, if we would eradicate that which is evil or correct that which is bad, education comprehensive, liberal education is the one thing needful, and the only effective end. (Dickens in Shepherd, 1937, p. 100)

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<sup>66</sup> Dickens included a more acerbic attack on Sabbatarians three years later in *Little Dorrit*, when he has Arthur Clennam thinking back on his years of joyless Sundays:

There was the dreary Sunday of his childhood, when he sat with his hands before him, scared out of his senses by a horrible tract which commenced business with the poor child by asking him in its title, why he was going to Perdition?— a piece of curiosity that he really, in a frock and drawers, was not in a condition to satisfy — and which, for the further attraction of his infant mind, had a parenthesis in every other line with some such hiccupping reference as 2 Ep. Thess. c. iii, v. 6 & 7. There was the sleepy Sunday of his boyhood, when, like a military deserter, he was marched to chapel by a picquet of teachers three times a day, morally handcuffed to another boy; and when he would willingly have bartered two meals of indigestible sermon for another ounce or two of inferior mutton at his scanty dinner in the flesh. There was the interminable Sunday of his nonage; when his mother, stern of face and unrelenting of heart, would sit all day behind a Bible — bound, like her own construction of it, in the hardest, barest, and straitest boards, with one dented ornament on the cover like the drag of a chain, and a wrathful sprinkling of red upon the edges of the leaves — as if it, of all books! were a fortification against sweetness of temper, natural affection, and gentle intercourse. There was the resentful Sunday of a little later, when he sat down glowering and glooming through the tardy length of the day, with a sullen sense of injury in his heart, and no more real knowledge of the beneficent history of the New Testament than if he had been bred among idolaters. There was a legion of Sundays, all days of unserviceable bitterness and mortification, slowly passing before him (Dickens, ca. 1930, p. 34).

Dickens, in contrast to Martineau, Stephen, and even Freire is arguing not that education is a tool to create social justice, but that it is a good in itself and social justice derives from it. Although Dickens set his novel against a background of industrial conflict, and the class differences between some of the major characters, provide an almost Marxist perspective to some elements of the book, Dickens was no Marxist. In her 1970 work *The Moral Art of Dickens*, Hardy proposed that Dickens's social criticisms were:

linked by his recognition of the lack of love, justice, nature, and human wholeness, by his shrewd perception of the transformation of moral values into economic ones, and the debasement of human relations and groups. The result is ... a sense of capitalist human sacrifice seen precisely in at least some Marxist ways. (p. 10)

However, although Marx and Dickens saw many of the same things, saw the same problems, even lived in the same city and wrote at the same time, they did not share the same ideas. As we have seen, Dickens's presentation of organised labour is unflattering, and his fiction contradicts his own observations and experiences in Preston. He wanted education, not revolution, and he wanted it with a simple Christian philosophy. So, in *Hard Times* Dickens critiques the form of education as a process with only utilitarian outcomes, an education directed at "usefulness". By doing so, Dickens raises the question of to whom such an education is of service, but he does so to raise awareness rather than a barricade. He does this by illustrating the outcomes for three students. Gradgrind's children, Tom and Louisa, are of a social class that was generally understood to be superior to the working poor, so, when the results of their strictly fact based education became obvious, it could not be blamed on any class-based inferiority of character. By so doing, Dickens opened himself up to criticism by those who could otherwise have sought refuge in the consolation of social superiority. However, the perspective of the observer is recorded in the observations they make.

The same Mrs Sinnett who had argued against the existence of Gradgrind schools was also critical of Dickens's lack of understanding of the intellectual difference between the "simplest and least cultivated" members of society and the mental complexity of those having "more cultivated natures". The effects of education and etiquette, combined with better breeding meant, in her understanding, that "[o]riginal and picturesque characters are therefore much more common among the poorer orders; their actions are simpler,

proceeding from simpler motives, and they are principally to be studied from without” (Sinnott, 1854, p. 606). Continuing to demonstrate both her class position and the patronising attitudes that accompanied it, she proposed that in contrast to the ‘poorer orders’—a description which triggered no critical voice in her head—the character of members of her upper classes, those more cultivated, although “more uniform in appearance, are in reality much more complex and various”, and that “[b]eneath the apparent uniformity lurk thousand-fold shades of difference, indicative of the mind within” (Sinnott, 1854, p. 606). Dickens seemed less sure that class position indicated much more than opportunity and luck. The good Mrs Sinnott chose not to address the specific cases of Tom and Louisa—perhaps she included the children of one who was both a merchant and a politician among the poorer orders—but their behaviour seems to indicate amorality rather than complexity. The third child is Sissy Jupe, a girl who comes from beyond the fringe of society. She fails to absorb the lessons of the industrialised schoolroom, and so saves herself. Her humanity is not eroded by the thousand-fold shades of indifference that the teaching disguised.

It is tempting—and I am easily tempted—to suggest that Dickens was concerned about the difference between industry and business—making a product or making money, and even education as a product or education as a source of income—after all Josiah Bounderby, the nearest thing to a villain in *Hard Times*, is both mill owner and banker, industrialist and businessman. That is perhaps a step too far, but it is only not *quite* supported by the text, and should remain open for discussion. Throughout the pages of *Hard Times*, the author seems to have a single minded focus on his subject, from the first word until the last; the opening words seem to give the reader insight into the author’s thinking and purpose. However, although it seems clear that a utilitarian, fact based education is the target of his attention, for Dickens education was in some ways instrumental and utilitarian. Dickens himself did not encourage either a classical or an extended education even for his own children. His two daughters had no formal schooling but were taught by governesses, and his seven boys each received an education intended to fit him for a career, often in the services. It seems that they were expected to make their own way in the world, as their father felt he had. Although Dickens has Gradgrind open *Hard Times* with his claim that only facts are useful, it is not the concept of a useful education that is being satirized nor even the claim that a useful education can be achieved through fact alone. There seems to be something more, and there is. Dickens

opposed the philosophy from which education without wonder or fancy—that word again—sprang, and the social outcomes that stemmed from it. Dickens has presented the reader with a thought experiment. In the ambiguity of those opening words from Gradgrind he presents his listeners with the key. His claim that “You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts” (*HT*, p. 5) leaves the audience to decide whether he is simply identifying humanity as reasoning animals whose mind (perhaps at the expense of emotions) can best be formed by this educational approach, or whether he proposes that the outcome of an education based solely on fact can result in nothing more than reasoning animals, or perhaps the metonymic ‘hands’ of the industrialist’s dream.

Within his words lies the notion that an education of fact, at the cost of imaginative abstract thought, is an effective method for the transformation of human beings into reasoning animals or partial humans, whether or not that be the educator’s intention. This representation of dehumanisation encourages an overtly Freirean analysis, but also raises some questions of the Freirean perspective because Dickens’s view seems to avoid the Marxist alternative to capitalism that directs Freire. The second half of Dickens’s sentence however, becomes sadly prophetic, for indeed “nothing else will ever be of service to them” (p. 5) after such a start in life. Dickens’s concern is that businessmen, no matter how charitable their intentions, when allowed to place efficiency/economic targets on education inevitably devalued personal development for the student but increased the economic utility of the outcome, because that which was measured became that which was valued. *Hard Times* was Dickens’s response, and his thoughts on an alternative.

## 5. Josiah Bounderby: The man who wasn't there

*Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth,  
that shall he also reap. (Galatians 6:7)*

In some ways, this chapter begins in a similar place as that where the previous chapter began: with reference to the now famous commentary by F.R. Leavis. However, it is because I disagree with Leavis's (1962) claim that "Hard Times is not a difficult work; its intention and nature are pretty obvious" (p. 249) that I have returned to it. This claim should no more be uncritically accepted than Simpson's earlier judgement that "the story is stale, flat, and unprofitable; a mere dull melodrama, in which character is caricature, sentiment tinsel, and moral (if any) unsound" (Simpson, 1854, p. 362). *Hard Times* was the work of a mature Dickens; by 1854 he was in his early forties and was the most popular novelist in the world. He was also a social critic and a keen observer of his world. As has been mentioned earlier, he did not write *Hard Times* solely for his own amusement nor for that of his readers but rather to draw attention to a 'great wrong'.

I will heed the implied warning that Ruskin gave—that neither simplicity nor contradiction can be assumed—when he suggested that "[t]he 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" and also accept his contention that "[Dickens's] view was finally the right one, grossly and sharply told" (Ruskin, 1860/1866, pp. 25-26). Ruskin's comments on *Hard Times* are widely reproduced and therefore well known. Such reproductions seldom, if ever, point out that the comments were written only, and literally, as a footnote to Ruskin's argument that ethics should underpin economics. One particular character in *Hard Times*, Josiah Bounderby—a "dramatic monster" in Ruskin's view (p. 26)—is notably successful economically, but would make a poor choice for an ethical exemplar. Josiah Bounderby shoulders his way through the pages of the novel and through the lives of the other characters, both physically and metaphorically. He is a loud, confident, strutting man "made of coarse material" (*HT*, p. 15). The narrative may not be centred upon him, but it is centred around him; he is pervasive in the text. In this chapter I will develop in more detail the evidence supporting my claim for the central importance of Bounderby to the

text, the accuracy of Dickens's portrait of an individual that embodied bullying aspects of capitalism.

However, neither dramatic presentation nor ethical deficiency constitutes evidence for Bounderby's historical reality, so I shall also present that argument in this chapter. Firstly, I will demonstrate how closely and accurately Dickens spun the threads of historical truth and his own acute perception of human nature together, and then wove them into the fabric of *Hard Times*. In a previous chapter, Dickens's reportage of events was shown to be built upon "nothing but Facts!" (*HT*, p. 5), and so it is with the characters he depicts. Josiah Bounderby is not simply a dramatic monster, a fictional villain of convenience. His character, and behaviour, conforms to a model that we can now identify—but which Dickens could only observe. And it is most likely that Dickens had observed, and critiqued, some prototypical Bounderby; perhaps only one individual—now lost in time—served as Dickens's model. However, it may be that Dickens's monster, like that of Frankenstein, is made up of parts from several individuals. What we do know is that Bounderby will not have been a product solely of Dickens's imagination, but will have been based on observations of people that Dickens had personally encountered, for that is how Dickens worked. It is with this claim that I shall begin.

### **Character and observation**

It seems to me reasonable that a reader should demand a substantial degree of theoretical consistency from any one work. Of course, all authors are human and as such they are prone to oversight or error. Equally they may—and in a long writing career almost certainly will—develop, refine, and even replace their ideas over time. Nevertheless, theoretical inconsistency within a single work is likely to be ascribed to the first of these causes whereas a difference across works may be defended by calling upon the second. Similarly, because the interpretation of any text takes place within a relationship between reader, writer, and word, it seems reasonable to suggest that those interpretations which resolve apparent contradictions within the text are to be preferred over those that create them, or leave them unresolved. In *Hard Times*, the character and story of Josiah Bounderby presents the reader with conflicting ideas that need either synthesis or explanation to maintain the integrity of the text. The fictions that Bounderby disseminates seem no less fanciful and imaginative—albeit less moral—than the fairy-tales that

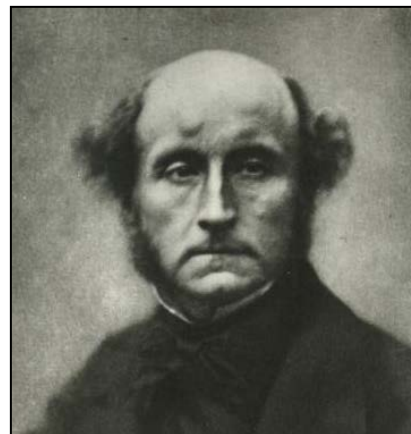


Dickens praises. In a text which, since its earliest publication, has been widely understood to promote the ethical value of imaginative fancy in education (eg. Sinnett, 1854), the existence of such a central and corrosive persona whose story is revealed within the text to be a fanciful fiction of his own creation cannot be ignored.

Although the story in *Hard Times* seems simple enough, we must proceed with caution in any analysis of its characters and its sources. Not everything is as simple as it seems. *Hard Times* begins in a school room, with Thomas Gradgrind's famous speech on the value of facts, and a description of Gradgrind himself. Dickens noted that Gradgrind, the speaker, had a

square wall of a forehead, which had his eyebrows for its base, while his eyes found commodious cellarage in two dark caves, overshadowed by the wall. ...The ... speaker's mouth was wide, thin, and hard set. ...The ... speaker's hair...bristled on the skirts of his bald head, a plantation of firs to keep the wind from its shining surface, all covered with knobs, like the crust of a plum pie, as if the head had scarcely ware-house room for the hard facts stored inside. (*HT*, p. 5)

Dickens may have claimed the portrait as that of Thomas Gradgrind—and, of course, he did—but surely his model for the sitting was the utilitarian philosopher and political economist John Stuart Mill (pictured). However, other than the physical description, very little of the character or philosophy of Mill belongs to Gradgrind. Some of the more obvious symmetries of their life histories are simply coincidence. Nevertheless, there are undoubtedly parallels between elements of Mill's



John Stuart Mill

own experience and the relationship between Louisa Gradgrind and her father. Mill wrote in his *Autobiography* (Robson, 1981) that a nervous breakdown, or perhaps a bout of severe depression, that he suffered had been brought about by his education in the habits of analysis at the expense of emotional development. He confessed that:

All those to whom I looked up, were of opinion that the pleasures of sympathy with human beings, and the feelings which made the good of others and especially

of mankind on a large scale the object of existence, were the greatest and surest source of happiness. I was well convinced of this, but to know that a feeling would make me happy if I had it, did not create the feeling. My education had failed, as I thought, to give me these feelings in sufficient strength to resist the dissolving influence of analysis, while the whole course of my intellectual cultivation had made precocious and premature analysis the inveterate habit of my mind.(p. 142)

Seemingly more telling was his admission that his father was the last person that he could turn to for help, because “[m]y education, which was wholly his work, had been conducted without any regard to the possibility of its ending in this result: and I saw no use in giving him the pain of thinking that his plans had failed” (p. 139). When this is compared with Louisa Gradgrind’s physical and emotional collapse, her words make the symmetry striking.

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. (*HT*, p. 164)

I do not know that I am sorry, I do not know that I am ashamed, I do not know that I am degraded in my own esteem. All that I know is, your philosophy and your teaching will not save me. Now, father, you have brought me to this. ... [Gradgrind] saw the pride of his heart and the triumph of his system, lying, an insensible heap, at his feet (*HT*, p. 165).

What should we make of this? Two lives in despair—for the same reasons and in the same ways—one of them fictional and the other an eminent philosopher. The similarities seem too great to ascribe to coincidence, and yet we must do just that; Mill did not publish his autobiography until 1873, almost twenty years after the appearance of *Hard Times*—and three years after Dickens’s own death. It would be difficult to accept that Mill’s story was such public knowledge, and at such an early date, that it was available as a source for Dickens to model his character upon. It is more plausible that Mill drew upon his analysis of *Hard Times* when he examined his own life and constructed his own story, but there is no evidence to support that idea either. As a final irony, both Gradgrind and

Mill were members of parliament, although Mill did not gain his seat until 1865<sup>67</sup>, more than a decade after the publication of *Hard Times*. The implication must surely be that Dickens, although unable to theorise in an academic way, was able to present a very real portrayal of the process of human emotional development, and the influence of upbringing. A scientific theory is expected to have both explanatory power and some predictive capacity; here we have a novel that displays just those qualities.

### **Practical Art and educational good taste**

It is difficult to be sure where any boundary between truth and fiction lies in Dickens's work; indeed, the concept of such a boundary may be a fiction in itself. Dickens—as always, the journalist and observer—more than once based his characters on people he knew, merging the real individual with a satirical caricature to create his fictional figure. It must have made many associates of Dickens scrutinise his work more carefully than a reader more distant from such an author might do. In the best known example, Harold Skimpole—a selfish and unprincipled character in *Bleak House*—was so obviously modelled on Leigh-Hunt that the ease of identification caused concern among Dickens's friends (Brewer, 1930). The conflation of the identifiable individual with the behaviour of the fictional villain caused so much anguish to its subject that Dickens was unable to completely repair the friendship.

A surviving letter from Dickens, written in January 1854, to his good friend Charles Knight—writer, publisher, and educator—is clearly a response to Knight's concerns that a book he had recently published, and provided Dickens with a copy thereof, would result in his appearance in the forthcoming *Hard Times*. Dickens wrote:

My satire is against those who see figures and averages, and nothing else—the representatives of the wickedest and most enormous vice of this thime—the men who, through long years to come, will do more to damage the real useful truths of political economy than I could do (if I tried) in my whole life; the addles heads who would take the average of cold in the Crimea during twelve months as a reason for clothing a soldier in nankeens on a night when he would be frozen to

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<sup>67</sup> In 1866 he became the first MP to call for women to have the vote, which is also at odds with the oppressive nature of the Gradgrind avatar.

death in fur, and who would comfort the labourer in travelling twelve miles a day to and from his work, by telling him that the average distance of one inhabited place from another in the whole area of England, is not more than four miles. Bah! What have you to do with these? (Dickens in Dickens & Hogarth, 1893, p. 329)

Ignoring, for the moment, the insight into the author's motivation for writing *Hard Times*, Dickens's reply serves not only as a reminder that he would happily caricature the physical attributes of an individual of his acquaintance, and so make them identifiable, but also that the character on the page was intended to draw attention to some reality that had offended Dickens, and so was given characteristics that the original model did not share. His friends had every reason to be cautious, as Leigh-Hunt had discovered; "it was to [Dickens] a matter of indifference what might be the humiliation he brought to his originals" (Brewer, 1930, p. 6). Of course, Thomas Gradgrind—of whom more will be said later—was the medium for Dickens's satire against reducing humanity to statistics, irrespective of any possible original.

Dickens's enthusiasm for displaying his own perceptive genius for observation may sometimes seem to overwhelm any critical consideration of how the reading public might be expected to separate the caricature from the character—to recognise the border between fact and fancy. Perhaps, on occasion, his genius did outstrip his judgement. Nonetheless, Dickens often noticed that which others missed at the time, and which continued to be overlooked in later times. For example, in *Hard Times*, Dickens writes of a "third grown person present" in the Gradgrind schoolroom. The description is of an aggressive 'government officer', one who directs the pupils towards an arid artistic world devoid of fancy. This worthy "had it in charge from high authority to bring about" a time when "Commissioners should reign upon earth" (*HT*, p. 8), and to do so through educating the public taste. His conflation of taste with fact, and the threadbare logic of his design theory is mercilessly parodied in a question and answer session about the representation of flowers on carpets. The government official's position is summarised in his final speech:

You are to be in all things regulated and governed," said the gentleman, "by fact. We hope to have, before long, a board of fact, composed of commissioners of fact, who will force the people to be a people of fact, and of nothing but fact. You must

discard the word Fancy altogether. You have nothing to do with it. You are not to have, in any object of use or ornament, what would be a contradiction in fact. You don't walk upon flowers in fact; you cannot be allowed to walk upon flowers in carpets. You don't find that foreign birds and butterflies come and perch upon your crockery; you cannot be permitted to paint foreign birds and butterflies upon your crockery. You never meet with quadrupeds going up and down walls; you must not have quadrupeds represented upon walls. You must use," said the gentleman, "for all these purposes, combinations and modifications (in primary colours) of mathematical figures which are susceptible of proof and demonstration. This is the new discovery. This is fact. This is taste. (*HT*, pp. 9-10)

Fielding (1953) has argued convincingly—and in entertaining style—that the speaker originated as a satirical portrait of Henry Cole, then Superintendent of the Department of Practical Arts. Certainly, Dickens's planning notes for the chapter *Murdering the Innocents* have both the name "Cole" and the phrase "Marlborough House Doctrine" in a prominent position (see Stone, 1987, p. 253). However, when it comes to assessing the accuracy of Dickens's satirical insight, there are two significant points which arise from this identification. Firstly, as Fielding indicated, it allows us to identify the source of the speech, and to wonder—notwithstanding that we should never wonder—whether it may be rather less of a parody than a modern reader might think. I suggest that it is accurate reporting. As I intimated with the earlier example of Angus Reach's investigations, Dickens's genius lay in observation, understanding, and presentation, rather than invention. Even with his characters, he built upon what he knew. It is, therefore, not safe to simply assume a lack of knowledge on his part when his stories do not agree with our understandings, and that is the second point. Dickens invented the interpretive narrative in which he presented facts, but seldom the facts themselves. The Gradgrind who saw his beloved daughter collapse at his feet finally understood this; facts are sewn to the fabric of fancy. To Cole and his associates, however, English industrial design—including textile design—had rather too much fancy and too little fact.

The Department of Practical Art had been established in 1852—under the auspices of the Board of Trade, which gives a clue to the industrial nature of the undertaking—after a protracted and almost Machiavellian campaign by Henry Cole to gain control over art education in England; a struggle detailed in Macdonald's very readable work: *The History*

*and Philosophy of Art Education*. There were two Superintendents of Schools of Practical Art appointed to this new department: Henry Cole and Richard Redgrave. Earlier, in 1849, the pair had founded an influential magazine, *The Journal of Design and Manufactures*, which was aimed at improving the quality of industrial design into conformity with their ideas. They continued to produce and edit the journal until 1852, when the larger stage of the new department became available. Cole was indefatigable in the promotion of his theories of design and, arguably, this motivated his involvement in the organization of The Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all Nations—The Great Exhibition—of 1851. The Exhibition itself demonstrated the technical and industrial supremacy of Great Britain in comparison to other countries, but was widely understood to have exposed the lack of any similar mastery in design (Fielding, 1953; MacDonald, 1970). The journal’s short life began with Cole’s agitation for improvement in design, spanned his work with the Great Exhibition—during which Cole used it to highlight the perceived inadequacies in British design—and concluded with his appointment to the Department of Practical Art.

In his paper *Charles Dickens and the Department of Practical Art*, Fielding (1953) quotes a brief passage from *Observations by Owen Jones Esq.* This was an introduction to an 1853 catalogue of works taken from the Great Exhibition, and placed on permanent display in the new Museum of Manufactures<sup>68</sup> at Marlborough House. Fielding suggested that the introduction was “probably the immediate source” of Dickens’s understanding of the principles of design suggested by the department. He argued that “it is unlikely that Dickens learnt of them elsewhere”, because it was an area of little general interest or publicity. The passage itself is certainly so similar to that which appears in *Hard Times* that coincidence is an unlikely explanation.

There are here no carpets worked with flowers on which feet would fear to tread, no furniture the hand would fear to grasp, no superfluous and useless ornament which a caprice has added and which an accident might remove. ... We have no artificial shadows, no highly wrought imitations of natural flowers, with their light and shade, struggling to stand out from surfaces on which they are worked, but

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<sup>68</sup> This was the beginnings of the South Kensington Museum, later to become the Victoria and Albert Museum.

conventional representations founded upon them. ("First Report of The Department of Practical Art," 1853, p. 231)

However, this document may have been Fielding's source, but it was not the origin of these words. The words, the sentiments, and Jones's association with Cole and Redgrave—and in all probability with Dickens—can be traced back at least to the time of the Great Exhibition itself.

Owen Jones, a Welsh architect, had been responsible for the interior decoration and layout of the 1851 Exhibition, and had worked closely with Cole. They shared similar ideas about design, and the June 1851 issue of *The Journal of Design and Manufactures* featured an article written by Jones. This article, published the month following the exhibition's opening, was entitled *Gleanings from the Great Exhibition of 1851*, and contained the following comments:

I beg the wandering artist ... [to examine the objects within] the departments of India, Tunis, Egypt and Turkey. He will find here no carpets worked with flowers whereon the foot would fear to tread, no chairs that the hand would fear to grasp, no superfluous ornament which an accident may remove. ... We do not see, as in European works, a highly-wrought imitation of a natural flower, with its light and shade struggling to stand out from the surface on which it is worked, but a conventional representation sufficiently near to suggest an image to the mind. (Jones, 1851, pp. 91-92)

This is clearly the original form of both the later, slightly reworded, passage in *Observations* and Dickens's inspiration for the 'government officer' in Gradgrind's classroom being so concerned about people being "allowed to walk upon flowers in carpets" (*HT*, pp. 9-10). However, the earlier date means that the words had been in the public domain for several years longer than Fielding seems to have believed. This, in itself, suggests a longer running and more public debate than first suggested. Indeed, the extended timeline also gave Dickens more time to learn of these ideas elsewhere.

In August of 1851, two months following Jones's original article, *The Journal of Design and Manufactures* has an unattributed piece—although it must have been approved by, if

not written by, Cole and Redgrave—entitled *Universal Infidelity In Principles Of Design*, which cites a letter to *The Times* in which the correspondent urges the reader to:

[t]ake the section of carpets. ... Here ... we have got into a habit of covering the floor we tread upon with a luxuriance of vegetation and a lavish expenditure of colours. ... The uses of a carpet are no mystery, and any sensible person ... will have no great difficulty in deciding what style of ornament is unsuitable for such an article. ... Again, no-one will contend that flowers represented as real, and fruit rounded off so that you are tempted to stoop down and gather it, and vegetation that threatens the foot with hopeless entanglement, are proper designs to tread upon. ("Universal Infidelity", 1851, p. 159)

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the writer of the letter then continues on, lavishing praise upon the “plain, simple, and mathematically severe” virtues of the machinery department at the Great Exhibition, with its “unbending precision”—Hibbert and Platt’s cotton machinery apparently having particular aesthetic appeal—and to recommend that the English “industrial classes” should seek inspiration from “a careful study of the Indian collection”. A second letter was reproduced, in part, this time from *The Morning Chronicle*, and here the writer lends further support for Dickens’s satire of fact based notions of taste. Our new contributor argued thus:

[w]hat we want are canons of taste—laws of beauty—principles and axioms of propriety. ... We are aware of the answer to all this—it is urged that tastes vary, and that manufacture must follow taste. But our question is, whether there is any taste in this variableness of taste—whether taste ought so to vary—whether, if its rules were discovered, or rather elucidated, taste is not as fixed a thing as truth—whether beauty has not laws. ("Universal Infidelity", 1851, p. 161)

Cole, Redgrave and Jones all thought that beauty had laws, and they intended to display them at work in the Museum of Manufactures. Jones’s original words—those published in the *Journal of Design and Manufactures*—were reworked by Jones for the museum exhibit of ‘Correct Principles in Decoration’; he transformed what had been a commentary into the position statement reproduced by Fielding. A contrasting exhibit of ‘Examples of False Principles in Decoration’ became popularly known as the ‘Chamber of Horrors’, and was pilloried by Henry Morley (1852a) in *Household Words* in an article



called *A House Full of Horrors*, which appeared on December the 4th. The Museum of Manufactures—itsself an outcome of the School of Practical Art—was located within Marlborough House and had Cole as its first director. Jones was also closely involved in this project, and along with Cole and Redgrave was instrumental in selecting the exhibits (MacDonald, 1970) for the museum. In 1852, Jones gave a series of public lectures on design principles, both at the new Museum (MacDonald, 1970) and at the Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce<sup>69</sup> (Jones, 1852). Lectures in which the familiar theme was presented by Jones as a series of propositions, including:

Proposition XXII. Flowers or other natural objects should not be used as ornament, but conventional representations founded upon them, sufficiently suggestive to convey the intended image to the mind without destroying the unity of the object they are employed to decorate. (Jones, 1852, p. 38)

The paper continues, noting that even in some old illuminated manuscripts “highly-finished representations of natural flowers were used as ornament” despite the obvious fact that they were “unfit for the pages of a book where the affected relief was in danger of crushing” (Jones, 1852, p. 41). Furthermore, we learn that that the

weaver violate[s] our proposition at every step. ... [with] carpets, which are more and more admired from the more perfect knowledge of botany they display, violating the sense of propriety at every step: we walk on flowers and tropical plants crushing beneath our feet”. (Jones, 1852, p. 42)

The preceding paragraphs focus only upon the theme of flowers represented on carpets. In reality, there were similar expressions of widespread concern about the types of artwork appearing on wallpapers and fabrics (see Victoria and Albert Museum, 2013); concerns which Dickens also acknowledged in *Hard Times*. No reasonably interested observer could have been unaware of the discussions, and Dickens was much more than an ordinary observer, and he was certainly interested. In 1849 he had joined what was then the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, and was subsequently appointed to the "Committee for the Working Classes"—set up to enable the

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<sup>69</sup> The name Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce was frequently abbreviated to the Society for Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce. It became popularly known as the Society of Arts. Since 1908 it has been the Royal Society of Arts, the name under which it is now known. However, the full name of the organisation remains the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce.

attendance of the working classes—during the preparation for the Great Exhibition. Furthermore, he was vice-president—the president was H.R.H Prince Albert—of the Society from 1850 to 1852 (RSA, n.d.), the period of the Exhibition itself. He was actively involved, as a member the Council of the Society of Arts—as were Owen Jones, Henry Cole, and Richard Redgrave’s brother Samuel—in the promotion of lectures delivered to the Society as a result of the Exhibition (Society of Arts, 1852).

Fielding’s claim that the “new ‘Marlborough House Doctrine’ aroused such slight controversy and was so little known that the purpose of the satire almost certainly passed unrecognized by the general reader” (Fielding, 1953, p. 274), is not supported by the evidence. Not only was the doctrine promulgated and promoted in Cole’s influential journal, it seems to have been intrinsic to the Great Exhibition itself, and to public lectures afterwards. The ideas formed the basis for a new government department, and for the foundation of what would become the Victoria and Albert Museum. It was sufficiently common knowledge to have had letters on the subject published in at least two major newspapers—newspapers that represented opposing political positions and therefore indicate a general rather than partisan interest. Dickens’s parody—which now seems too strong a word—represented the historical position more rather than less accurately than subsequent scholarship.

The origins of the government officer’s speech are earlier and more public than Fielding realised. Similarly, Fielding’s assertion that “there was no connexion between Practical Art and ordinary schools for children. Both the ideas and action of [*Hard Times*] are flawed” (1953, p. 276) must be questioned, and indeed Macdonald does so. He points out that by 1854, not only had classes for teachers and pupil teachers of public day schools been established, but that Marlborough House art masters-in-training were conducting weekly lessons in parochial schools and Government inspectors were forwarding the results of local examinations to Marlborough House. As Macdonald eloquently put it:

it is not unreasonable to suppose that one of these gentlemen, or an official from Marlborough House ... might have been tempted to address pupils upon the lines of Redgrave’s *Principles of Decorative Art*, which were akin to Jones’s propositions and were published in a cheap manual by the Department. (MacDonald, 1970, p. 231)

Not unreasonable at all. It seems that Dickens's implied claim about the philosophy of the government officer is supported by historical evidence, and so too is the presence of the officer in the classroom. That we cannot confirm this for more than a hundred years after *Hard Times* was published is a flaw in the research and available evidence, not in the original work. In fact—a phrase borrowed from Mr Gradgrind—Dickens seems to combine accurate historical observation with perceptive commentary. Fact, rather than fancy underpins *Hard Times*.

### **A man devoid of sentiment**

The rigid design philosophy that Dickens understood as the “Marlborough House Doctrine” is also found outside the schoolroom, in the architecture of Gradgrind's home, and the functional design of Coketown itself. Additionally, the luxuriance of Dickens's garden imagery in the main text may be read both as metaphoric allusion to the vitality of life, and as a response to those who would constrain fancy within prescriptive borders of propriety. The first garden image is in the description of Gradgrind's recently built home, Stone Lodge. The property is well suited to its role as a mausoleum for wonder and a monument to utilitarian life. It was:

A great square house, with a heavy portico darkening the principal windows, as its master's heavy brows overshadowed his eyes. A calculated, cast up, balanced, and proved house. Six windows on this side of the door, six on that side; a total of twelve in this wing, a total of twelve in the other wing; four and twenty carried over to the back wings. A lawn and garden and an infant avenue, all ruled straight like a botanical account-book. (*HT*, p. 12)

Thomas Gradgrind was on his way to this “uncompromising fact on the landscape” when he apprehended his two eldest children attempting to catch a glimpse of a travelling circus. His response to the discovery that his children had strayed from the rigid pathway he had prescribed is the reader's introduction to Mr Bounderby. Gradgrind asks his daughter Louisa, “what would Mr Bounderby say?” Not, it should be noted ‘what would Mr Bounderby think’; *Hard Times* relies on the actions, rather than thoughts, of its characters, to convey its message. This is characteristic of Dickens's writing style, that “[h]e never develops a character from within, but commences by showing how the nature

of the individual has been developed externally by his whole life in the world” (Horne, 1844, pp. 21-22). The first instalment of Dickens’s new serialised novel, ends with the words “‘What would Mr Bounderby say!’—as if Mr Bounderby had been Mrs Grundy” (*HT*, p. 14)

The final words of the first instalment of *Hard Times* compared Josiah Bounderby with Mrs Grundy. The opening words of the second instalment again make this comparison: “Not being Mrs. Grundy, who *was* Mr Bounderby?” It was a good question then, and it remains a good question now. However, we might first ask who was the Mrs Grundy that Mr Bounderby was not. In her original form she was a character in a play by Thomas Morton (1807/1798), but a character who never actually makes an appearance on stage. On the first page of Morton’s play we find the question: “What will Mrs Grundy say?”<sup>70</sup> Gradgrind echoes this phrase in his introduction of Bounderby to the text of *Hard Times*. Mrs Grundy seems to have been more memorable than the play itself<sup>71</sup>, and she quickly became a metaphorical presence<sup>72</sup>. By the time that Dickens was writing, she had become synonymous with the powerful and conservative forces of public opinion; she was the anonymous, but ever vigilant, judgemental and influential watcher from behind the curtains. Mr Bounderby might not be Mrs Grundy, but by repetition of the phrase, and positioning it at the end of one instalment and the beginning of the next, Dickens has made it clear to the reader that there is some similarity between the two. Bounderby will later be seen to be a different type of moral regulator to Mrs Grundy, one who uses the power of social convention for his own benefit. However, in the early pages of the text, the reader first becomes aware that Bounderby has sufficient influence for his opinion to be of significance to Gradgrind, if rather less so to Louisa. Dickens has identified and outlined a relationship in which the imposition of one person’s values upon another—Freire called it “*prescription*” (1970/1996, p. 29)—and the latter’s acceptance of them, was a basic element in social manipulation. Dickens called it Mrs Grundy. Furthermore, Dickens’s words can also be read as a hint that Bounderby was himself distanced from the influence of social conventions, and the opinions of others.

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<sup>70</sup> The play then asks “what will Mrs Grundy think?” It’s tempting to assume that Dickens deliberately dropped this, but it is probably more likely that the metaphor had already removed the second clause.

<sup>71</sup> For a brief period between July and September 1865 there was even a New York magazine entitled *Mrs Grundy*, in which Dickens’s novel *Our Mutual Friend* was advertised.

<sup>72</sup> She makes her metaphorical presence felt in—among other places—Samuel Butler’s *Erewhon*, Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*, and even in John Stuart Mill’s *The Subjection of Women*.

It is ironic, and clearly intentional, that Dickens introduces Bounderby by telling the reader who he is not. Dickens's use of Mrs Grundy's name—she is, after all, only a name, a character that never appears in the reality of her own text—underlines the significance of such an introduction. The contrast is stark when we look back at the earlier introduction of Gradgrind himself: “Thomas Gradgrind, sir. A man of realities. A man of facts and calculations” (*HT*, p. 6). Gradgrind is stated to be a man of realities. Whereas Bounderby is suggested as being even less substantial—in some yet-to-be-revealed way—than Mrs Grundy, a woman who is only a name. Indeed, although Dickens describes him as “a big loud man. ... made out of coarse material”, Dickens stresses that Bounderby was a man who appeared “inflated like a balloon”, that he “could never sufficiently vaunt himself a self-made man”, and that he was characterised by “windy boastfulness” (*HT*, p. 15); he was an insubstantial man of substance. The contrast between Gradgrind and Bounderby is an important one within the text, and their respective introductions prefigure this. Yet, it seems, that they were close friends, despite Dickens's hint that Bounderby was a man of substance only in metaphor.

To return to the question of “who *was* Mr Bounderby?” we can do no better than to let Dickens give us more information. Although an initial—and perhaps cursory—reading of the text appears to say that Gradgrind and Bounderby were close friends, it does not say that at all. In fact, what Dickens wrote was:

Mr Bounderby was as near being Mr Gradgrind's bosom friend, as a man perfectly devoid of sentiment can approach that spiritual relationship towards another man perfectly devoid of sentiment. So near was Mr Bounderby—or, if the reader should prefer it, so far off. (*HT*, p. 15)

What a masterpiece of confusion and one sidedness. The initial paradox of the relations between Bounderby and Gradgrind is that genuine friendship is not possible without sentiment—it is an emotional bond. As Dickens illustrates repeatedly, fully human relationships demand both an emotional connection and a concern for the well-being of the other; the absence of such care and concern denies friendship. Friendship, to be authentic, must be reciprocal, so Bounderby's lack of sentiment is sufficient to ensure a lack of reciprocity. The relationship between the two men is, at best, an exchange of overlapping monologues, rather than authentic dialogue. Bounderby fulfils a Freirean role

of ‘oppressor’ in all his interactions with others. Not only would he not agree with Freire that “it is not our role to speak to the people about our own view of the world, nor to attempt to impose that view on them, but rather to dialogue with the people about their view and ours”, he would not even understand such a non-instrumental exchange. Bounderby deposits his opinions onto his audience in a series of ‘communiqués’ (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 77). So, whatever the relationship between Bounderby and Gradgrind, it is something other than friendship; it can hardly be friendship if neither party has any sentiment towards the other and if true communication is absent. So, if Bounderby is “perfectly devoid of sentiment”, and thus defined as incapable of genuine friendship, then what is the basis of his relationship with Gradgrind? Yet, even this line of thought threatens to be too simple.

Despite Dickens’s repetition of the phrase “perfectly devoid of sentiment” and his mention of both men, the passage introduces a slight ambiguity. The absence of sentiment is more firmly attached to Bounderby than to Gradgrind. The reader might naturally assume that “another man perfectly devoid of sentiment” is a reference to Thomas Gradgrind, but the grammar does not make this reading necessary. In fact, there would be little change in the denotative understanding if the sentence had finished after the word “relationship”. The course of the novel develops this ambiguity and at first suggests, and then makes clear, not only that—of the two men—Bounderby was the one truly without sentiment, but that the underlying causes of their apparent similarities were in conflict. Dickens clearly shows in *Hard Times* that although Gradgrind considered sentiment to be a poor basis for decision making, it nonetheless influenced his behaviour. Gradgrind, with his offer to take Sissy Jupe into his home and to see to her education, demonstrated that rather than being “perfectly devoid of sentiment”, he was simply insulated from his own feelings and trapped in an ideology. His belief in the primacy of rationality was no more than an untested ideological overlay. Josiah Bounderby’s confidence concealed no such ambiguity.

The least discerning reader of *Hard Times* could hardly fail to notice the didactic nature of this work. A number of critics have pointed out (e.g. Samuels, 1992; Welsh, 2000) a strongly allegorical tone to *Hard Times*; the characters seem to represent ideas as much as people. I will later illustrate Bounderby as the unholy trinity of capitalism, but Thomas Gradgrind has been suggested as representing the industrial, educational, and

governmental forces of utilitarianism (Humpherys, 2011). However as Gradgrind had recently retired from the wholesale hardware trade, I suggest that the identification should be with the mercantile rather than the industrial. Gradgrind and Bounderby then have common ground but different ideologies. The uncertain, and eventually conflicted, relationship between Gradgrind and Bounderby is integral to this depiction, although it is more often mentioned than it is questioned. Dickens at first presents their similarities to the reader—they both view others as something less than fully human, either a statistical unit or an economic unit—and he then uses the novel to illustrate the fundamental differences between them. The allusion to friendship between the two suggests that Dickens views the apparent ‘friendship’ between capitalism and utilitarianism to be based on inauthentic dialogue. One party to the exchange is naïve, and the other is cynical, and does not reveal the truth of their position. Certainly, Gradgrind’s statistics—the statistics of the state—are an attempt to use mathematical modelling to understand, and to control, individual behaviours, but it is not done for his own benefit. Bounderby, in contrast, uses the discourse of the free market—money as morality—to manipulate others for his own ends. Ruskin, as noted earlier, had claimed that Dickens’s presentation was of “Mr Bounderby [as] a dramatic monster, instead of a characteristic example of a worldly master” (1860/1866, p. 26) and he claimed that this weakened the text. However, as Leavis was later to point out, the arbitrary demand that characters must “go on living outside the book” (1962, p. 249) can assume an importance in the mind of the critic that the original author might dispute. Ruskin recognizes both the dramatic nature of Bounderby and the sharply drawn nature of the text, but seems reluctant accept them on the author’s terms.

Let us assume for one moment that the ‘Bully of humility’ was, as allegory or drama might allow, an embodiment of some list of qualities that Dickens wished to present to the reader. In such a case, I suggest that Ruskin was in error; Josiah Bounderby is in fact a characteristic example, not of all worldly masters but of a particular type. If it should be that Dickens was able to see this when others could not, then we must give due credit to the acuity of his observations. The modern reader, and observer, has an additional century and a half of both capitalist enterprise and work in psychology to draw upon. We now have popular newspapers running articles with titles such as *Why Your Boss Could Easily Be a Psychopath* and *11 Ways to Tell If Your Boss Is a Psychopath*. There is an increasing awareness, supported by academic research, that manipulative, ego driven, individuals

with little empathy for others, and even less remorse for the damage they cause, are often found in leadership roles in business organisations (Boddy, Ladyshevsky, & Galvin, 2010). The psychopath is now one of the most widely studied personality disorders, if it is a disorder. Perhaps the psychopathic personality is simply less typical rather than less normal. A recent work on the subject ((Dutton, 2012) argues that while psychopathic traits are commonplace, it is the number and the strength of them in any individual that is significant. Bounderby demonstrates several of the behaviours Dutton describes, and he does so very clearly. His lack of empathy is obviously enough displayed, but the lies and his self-created past are also a part of the same pattern. Similarly, impulsive behaviour, such as his dismissal of Stephen Blackpool from his employ, and when he ends his marriage with the words “I always come to a decision, ... and, whatever I do, I do at once. ... I have given you my decision, and I have no more to say. Goodnight” (*HT*, p. 183). Such impulsive behaviour is characteristic of the psychopath (Dutton, 2012). Equally characteristic, Dutton claims, is a total lack of remorse, a lack of regret for actions past and injuries caused—an attitude exemplified in Bounderby. It is because of this, that in *Hard Times* it is Bounderby who could claim to be the most successful character; he is unhurt and unchanged by the events of the novel. He is a wealthy man at the beginning of the novel, and continues to be so throughout. Only if the reader questions the utility of the scale being used to judge success—a scale with no weighting for meaningful human relationships between equals—can any different assessment be made. Dickens, through the behaviour that Bounderby displays, eerily presages the modern studies that show psychopathic and manipulative tendencies are common traits among successful businessmen. In the process, Dickens also described a personality type that was not to be identified and labelled for another twenty years. The earliest extant description of the psychopath as one who was quite capable of apparently normal social functioning, but to whom, “beside his own person and his own interests, nothing is sacred” (*The Pall Mall Gazette*, 1885, p. 3) was published in 1885, accompanied by an editorial comment that “it seems to be that if egotism is fully developed in a human being he becomes ‘morally irresponsible’”.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> The suggestion was also made, to avoid any legal defence of ‘psychopathy’, that such individuals should be immediately hanged. In retrospect, had this advice been taken, the ethical obligation of commerce to the community well may have been taken more seriously than it seems to have been.



## Josiah Bounderby ... and what not?

Josiah Bounderby, as an individual, is an example of the psychopath in power, and as portrayed, is an uncannily accurate piece of observational writing. However, Bounderby is more than Ruskin's "dramatic monster", and more than a satirised individual. He is also an allegorical representation; he is Dickens's portrait of the personified character of unrestrained capitalism. The first thing that Dickens tells us about who Bounderby is—rather than who or what he is not—is that he is "a rich man: banker, merchant, manufacturer and what not" (*HT*, p. 15). Bounderby is the holy trinity of capitalism: the money, the market, and the manufacture. As is Dickens's satirical wont, just as Bounderby is a self-made man, his biography is a self-penned fiction. It is fitting in a work that extols the virtues of imagination, fancy and emotion, that Dickens moulds Bounderby's story on the form of a fairy-tale. More seriously, by doing so Dickens critiques the image of the self-made industrialist as being a self-vaunting fabrication, a hollow shell with the semblance of substance. The question of Bounderby's identity is a major sub theme within the novel, and one that remains unsatisfactorily unresolved even at the end. Perhaps that is fitting for a character who is constructed from what he is not. Nonetheless, from the beginning, Bounderby constantly refers to his difficult past, one of privation and struggle, of abandonment and self-determination. It is a rags to riches fairy tale, and like any good story of this type it begins in a lowly birthplace; Bounderby had not even the luxury of a stable. He himself described his start in life by saying, "I was born in a ditch, and my mother ran away from me" (*HT*, p. 28). Dickens ridicules the seriousness of such a claim by having Bounderby's audience reply "pointedly, that he was not at all astonished to hear it". So, having been abandoned at birth—in Bounderby's self-creation myth at least—young Josiah is left to the care of his drunken grandmother, a woman who he remembered as "the wickedest and the worst old woman that ever lived". It seems that she was not beyond selling young Josiah's shoes so that she could buy drink. Indeed, he recollects that on occasion she would "lie in her bed and drink her fourteen glasses of liquor before breakfast!" (*HT*, p. 16). Needless to say, this intrepid hero of his own story ran away as soon as he was able to fend for himself, and made his fortune—as is the way in such stories. As though following a script, he became in turn "[v]agabond, errand-boy, vagabond, labourer, porter, clerk, chief manager, small partner, Josiah Bounderby of Coketown". It would be an attentive reader who noticed that all but one of these is a label for a space to be filled by a person; Dickens, writing with a scalpel, makes

them all labels without identity. Josiah Bounderby—that little paragon of self-construction—had achieved his commendable progress through the ranks of commerce without the benefit of education. Instead, he had “learnt his letters from the outsides of the shops ... and was first able to tell the time upon a dial-plate, from studying the steeple clock of St. Giles’s Church, London, under the direction of a drunken cripple” (*HT*, p. 17). He was, and remained, proud of “his old ignorance and his old poverty” (*HT*, p. 15). In this, Bounderby’s lasting and inordinate pride in his lack of education, and in his corresponding lack of refinement, Dickens breaks from the fairy-tale but captures the spirit of the times.

Although Bounderby is fictional—he is a character in a novel and a satirical, symbolic representation of the ‘self-made man’ of industry—he is not a fiction. As I have argued earlier, his personality is real. So too is the disjunction that Dickens reveals, between the fairy tale of the self-made man, and the self-mythologizing of the individual succeeding separate from their life circumstances—while ignoring the reality of the impacts of industrialisation—not a fiction. As Marx so famously noted, “[m]en make their own history, but ... they do not make it under self-selected circumstances” (Marx, 1852/n.d.). The fiction is in the notion that individual success can be explained solely by individual endeavour. It is this mythmaking—the trivializing of the role of circumstance as a constraint on agency—that Dickens labels one of the “fictions of Coketown”, and he inserts a comment in his role as narrator:

Any capitalist there, who had made sixty thousand pounds out of sixpence, always professed to wonder why the sixty thousand nearest Hands didn't each make sixty thousand pounds out of sixpence, and more or less reproached them every one for not accomplishing the little feat. What I did you can do. Why don't you go and do it? (*HT*, p. 85)

Of course, as the example of Bounderby illustrates, it is to the advantage of the ‘capitalist’ to justify success as the moral product of hard work, rather than of advantage or luck. The moral high ground then belongs to employers in wage negotiations with the ‘hands’. Dickens recognised this, and intended *Hard Times* to publicise it. Thus there is the second of the unambiguous claims of purpose made by Dickens regarding his intentions for *Hard Times* (The first is the earlier letter to Charles Knight regarding “those

who see figures and averages, and nothing else”). In his letter of reply to Mrs Gaskell, the author of the forthcoming novel *North and South*<sup>74</sup>, Dickens stated that *Hard Times* was intended to draw attention to “[t]he monstrous claims at domination made by a certain class of manufacturers, and the extent to which the way is made easy for working men to slide down into discontent under such hands”. (Dickens in Dickens & Hogarth, 1893, p. 333)

The monstrous claims of domination that the novel is intended to bring attention to are the ‘myths’ that Freire later elaborated on in more detail. To label a story—or a social explanation of agency, cause, and effect—as a myth is to do more than label it as untrue, it is to ascribe to it the power of a metanarrative. Freire’s ‘myths’ have their antecedents in Dickens’s Coketown ‘fictions’. They are the sinister fairy-tales of oppression; a “powerful aid . . . [that] must be as much preserved in their simplicity, and purity, . . . , as if they were actual fact” (Dickens, 1854a, p. 97). As I proposed in an earlier chapter, if an explanatory story can be implanted in the human mind, that same mind will bend the facts to preserve it. Rational thought processes are then left to work within the constraints of the conclusion. Freire outlines some myths prevalent in—and hence constitutive of—the capitalist structures with which he was familiar. It is unlikely to be coincidental—and is of concern to me—that Freire’s myths would have been as readily recognised by Dickens as they must be by a modern reader; it was Dickens and Freire, however, who could see them as ideological myths.

The myth that the oppressive order is a ‘free society’; the myth that all persons are free to work where they wish, that if they don’t like their boss they can leave him and look for another job; the myth that this order respects human rights and is therefore worthy of esteem; the myth that anyone who is industrious can become an entrepreneur—worse yet, the myth that the street vendor is as much an entrepreneur as the owner of a large factory...; the myth that Rebellion is a sin against God; the myth of private property as fundamental to personal development (so long as the oppressors are the only true human beings); the myth of the industriousness of the oppressors and the laziness and dishonesty of the oppressed,

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<sup>74</sup>Mrs Gaskell had expressed concern that *Hard Times* would include a workers’ strike, and so make her own work seem repetitious.

as well as the myth of the natural inferiority of the latter and the superiority of the former. (Freire, 1970/1996, pp. 121-122)

These and more, listed in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, are all illustrated in *Hard Times*. Freire identified another myth: that of universal education selectively administered. The historical situation within which Dickens was situated had not yet reached the point at which that could become a possibility. Nonetheless, Dickens did understand that once social domination by employment becomes established it will be protected. And one of the tools for the protection of the status quo, as it has always been, is access to education.

### **An economy of effort**

Industrial growth in England had, in fact, begun with a relatively low educational level throughout the country, and education had not been critical to the initial stages of industrialization. Hands—“a race who would have found more favour with some people, if Providence had seen fit to make them only hands, or, like the lower creatures of the seashore, only hands and stomachs” (*HT*, p. 52)—were needed, not complete people; certainly there was nothing to be gained by developing those mental abilities that had no economic advantage for the employer. Consequently, the successful new businessmen valued education neither as a means of economic achievement, nor as pathway of personal development. Instead, it was largely viewed as a social attribute. The traditional and classical education of the upper classes was symbolic of a social eminence already attained, and so, much of the middle class educational aspiration was that of emulation; it reproduced the classical education for social purposes (Sutherland, 1973). Access to education, in Dickens’s time, was largely restricted to those whose parents could pay directly for it. Furthermore, wealth had traditionally been associated with a class-based system of landowning, and was considered evidence of a similarly class-based moral superiority. It was, literally, a god-given signifier of divine, and hence social, approval. The new industrial class of self-made man had, presumably, acquired wealth on individual merit, without accepting either divine blessing or temporal obligation. Nevertheless, they claimed—and, in fact, still claim—financial success as a moral justification for their dominance over others, rather than as its outcome.

That Dickens was uncomfortable with the increasing influence that industry was having not only upon local society, but upon the state itself, he also makes clear in *Hard Times*. The economy, which had once been a force powering the ship of state was fast gaining control of the steering as well—and not all the hands on board were benefitting from the course being steered. Sissy Jupe articulated this when discussing with Louisa the answer to a question in school. Sissy had been asked whether she must not be in a “thriving state” because the country’s economy was doing so well, but, as she explained to Louisa—and by extension, to the reader:

I thought I couldn’t know whether it was a prosperous nation or not, and whether I was in a thriving state or not, unless I knew who had got the money, and whether any of it was mine. But that had nothing to do with it. It was not in the figures at all. (*HT*, p. 47)

Sissy, of course, was making an important point, and one that is still valid; the nation may be doing well, but that does not mean that the benefits of such national prosperity are reaching all members of society. This, in itself, calls into question the notion of “a thriving state”—what is being measured that leads to a conclusion of prosperity in the face of obvious poverty? Then, as now, the rhetoric was of the economic value of industry—still with elements of moral superiority being claimed by those most advantaged by it—and the need to reduce costs to achieve ‘better’ outcomes. Apparently, should the ‘hands’ wish to dine on venison, and sup on turtle soup, then they should be working harder for less money. The actual mechanism by which the rewards would then accrue—or trickle down, in a warm benevolent stream—to the workers was never made explicit, or real. “This has been the result of our commercial prosperity!—*more wealth for the rich and more poverty for the Poor!*” (Dickens, 1854c, p. 555) protested the workers in one mill town, in those times.

The state generally shared the factory owners’ perspective, however the Hobgoblin of a workers’ revolution—and communism—still prowled the industrial cities of the North. The introduction of legislation, seemingly intended to constrain the power of the factory owners and improve the safety and well-being of the factory workers was also an attempt to relax the very real tensions that were evident, even from as far away as the House of Parliament. The employers responded as they still do, with claims that increased costs

would drive them out of business. Josiah Bounderby of Coketown—who carries that prepositional phrase ‘of Coketown’ on twelve of the thirteen occasions his full name appears *Hard Times*—is by his name, very explicitly linked to the industrialist core of Coketown. He was undoubtedly one of those brought close to ruin by these laws; the “millers of Coketown” were a remarkably fragile group. As Dickens rather caustically observed, “[h]andle them never so lightly, and they fell to pieces with such ease that you might suspect them of being flawed before” (*HT*, p. 86). One might indeed suspect a flaw; the “Coketowners” do seem to have been particularly susceptible to financial ruin.

They were ruined, when they were required to send labouring children to school; they were ruined, when inspectors were appointed to look into their works; they were ruined, when such inspectors considered it doubtful whether they were quite justified in chopping people up with their machinery; they were utterly undone, when it was hinted that perhaps they need not always make quite so much smoke. (*HT*, p. 86)

However—fortunately for themselves—they had also proven themselves to be surprisingly resilient in the face of adversity. As Dickens pointed out, one of the other fictions of Coketown, was that state intervention into the practices of industry would result in the mill owners making good on their threat to “pitch [their] property into the Atlantic”—a threat that “had terrified the Home Secretary within an inch of his life, on several occasions” (*HT*, p. 86). So far this had not proven necessary; the capital, the factories and the fumes had all increased and multiplied, and the mill-owners had prospered. The ‘hands’, working in their ‘Fairy palaces’ with the ‘melancholy mad elephants’ to keep them company had multiplied as the factories had, but not prospered as the factory owners had. Stephen Blackpool put a more personal perspective on Sissy Jupe’s observations on prosperity, pointing to the differences in the outcomes between the owners and the ‘hands’ of Coketown:

Look round town — so rich as ’tis — and see the numbers o’ people as has been broughten into bein heer, fur to weave, an to card, an to piece out a livin’, aw the same one way, somehow, twixt their cradles and their graves. Look how we live, and wheer we live, an in what numbers, an by what chances, and wi’ what sameness; and look how the mills is awlus a goin, and how they never works us no nigher to ony dis’ant object — ceptin awlus, Death. (*HT*, pp. 114-115)

When the only objective of work is sustenance then humans are distanced from themselves. As Freire argues, they become dehumanized ‘objects’ rather than ‘subjects’ engaged in the transformation of their world; they internalise and accept the world of the oppressor. Dickens doesn’t argue this—it is no political treatise—but, once again, he illustrates it. When Bounderby asks Blackpool what remedy might be successful—and this is an antialogic question intended as a manipulation rather than as the instigation of any true communication—the response is thus: “I donno, sir. I canna be expecten to ’t. ’Tis not me as should be looken to for that, sir. ’Tis them as is put ower me, and ower aw the rest of us. What do they tak upon themseln, sir, if not to do’t?” (*HT*, p. 115). Dickens shows here—among other things—that the ‘hands’ are not seeking revolution, and as Freire pointed out, people in such a situation are unlikely to seek their own liberation, instead they “fatalistically transfer the responsibility for their oppressed state” (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 145) to some agency external to themselves.

As it happens, those few factory owners who themselves had failed had done so because of circumstances not of their own choosing, to agency external to themselves. Fortune had conspired against them; luck had not gone their way; no blame could be attached to them. This, as Dickens pointed out, should by no means be confused with those whose circumstances were the result of such a lack of foresight and planning that they were born into a working class family. Indeed, when Josiah Bounderby had purchased a new property for himself, it was one that had previously belonged to another Coketowner.

The bank had foreclosed a mortgage effected on the property thus pleasantly situated, by one of the Coketown magnates, who, in his determination to make a shorter cut than usual to an enormous fortune, overspeculated himself by about two hundred thousand pounds. These accidents did sometimes happen in the best-regulated families of Coketown, but the bankrupts had no connexion whatever with the improvident classes. (*HT*, p. 128)

That, it seems is the problem with the “poorer orders” who, because “their actions are simpler, proceeding [as they do] from simpler motives” (Sinnett, 1854, p. 606), spend their money so unwisely.

The Coketown magnates were careful with their money, and they spent it on nothing unless it provided them with profit or comfort. It was neither profitable nor comfortable

to have an element of social responsibility legislated into the business of making money. It was then, an imposition when the state insisted that employers must provide some education for the children that they employed. Specifically, the state insisted that industry was both morally obliged and legally obligated not only to ensure that business owners and investors had a financial return, but also to recognise—and treat—workers as fully human, rather than as incompletely human ‘hands’. This was, of course, an insistence by the state that money be spent on the ordinary worker by those who were profiting most from the work, and to do so with the aim of social improvement. The Factory Acts implied that a simple financial exchange of money for work—moderated only by the demands of a market which was dominated by the employers—was not adequate compensation, by those employers, for the social changes and the demands that affected the lives of the working class. This was a non-trivial positioning by the state; one which was contested in those times and continues to be contested in these times.

Bounderby, psychopath and capitalist, neither sees nor cares about social injustice; his position—as a personification of Coketown’s fictions and Freire’s myths, and as a representative of the industrialists—is clearly stated: “Here I am ... and nobody to thank for my being here, but myself”. This, despite the fact that he has falsified his entire life story to exclude the advantages conferred upon him by birth, family, and luck. However, knowledge and awareness are not synonyms. Bounderby knows he is a liar, but in no way is he aware of it; there is no conduit between fact and fancy here. Bounderby has created his own narrative interpretation of the historical facts, and certainly some editing of the facts was required in places, but only to get the truth to conform to the narrative. This is the way of ideology—as with the capitalist myth of the market—once a desired truth has been established, facts that do not fit can only be misinterpretations of fact, to be discarded or corrected. It is that, earlier discussed, belief perseverance that is part of the way human beings think. Neither Bounderby nor the Coketown capitalists have an ethical base, their attempts to create the appearance of an ethical position are hollow and self-serving. A simple substitution of the word ‘Coketowner’ for ‘oppressor’ in Freire’s words highlights the nature—and the on-going existence—of the ideology that Dickens critiqued in *Hard Times*:

[T]he [Coketowners have developed] the conviction that it is possible for them to transform everything into objects of their purchasing power; ... Money is the



measure of all things, and profit the primary goal. For the [Coketowners], what is worthwhile is to have more—always more—even at the cost of [others] having less or having nothing. (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 40)

They have started from their conclusion and worked backwards. This is a difference that Dickens draws between the ideologies of Josiah Bounderby, and Thomas Gradgrind; no matter how misguided he may be, Gradgrind is doing what he thinks is best for others. However, as both Dickens and Freire point out in their respective texts, it is impossible to make decisions for others without taking agency from them.

### **A marriage made in a ‘fairy palace’**

Dickens was in the habit of including satire that was almost extraneous to his main objects. In the works prior to *Hard Times*, his target had often simply been a part of the setting through which his characters moved; “a matter of including among the ingredients...some indignant treatment of a particular abuse” as Leavis was to observe (1962, p. 250). Perhaps because of this, although marriage figures prominently in *Hard Times*, it is not immediately obvious that it is central to the goals that Dickens himself claimed for his work, and so there is a temptation to consider it to be secondary. No doubt there is a criticism of the divorce laws of the day, but as Humpherys (2011) pointed out, the progress of Louisa’s marriage to Bounderby follows—and helps shape—the structure of the text. The division of the novel into three books, *Sowing*, *Reaping* and *Garnering* has procreational, biblical, and metaphorical overtones. Humpherys noted that the end of the first book was Gradgrind’s presentation of Bounderby’s proposal, and the disquieting conversation that ends with Louisa’s acceptance and marriage. The second book ends with her flight from that marriage and her rejection of her father’s philosophy and assistance, and her collapse. Gradgrind could only lay her on the floor, “the pride of his heart and the triumph of his system, lying, an insensible heap, at his feet” (*HT*, p. 165). The third book, *Garnering*—the word literally means gathering and putting grain into storage for the future, so the metaphor is clear—ends with Louisa living out a solitary life without a husband or children of her own. She passes nothing on to posterity except the fairy tales she tells to the children of others.

Josiah Bounderby's narrative, as I have said, has similarities to a fairy tale, and no good fairy tale ends without a wedding and the couple living happily ever after. However, Bounderby's story is a mockery of a good fairy-tale; it is based on deception and advantage rather than amusement and charm. So it is with his marriage to Louisa Gradgrind. It is a mockery of marriage—barren both literally and metaphorically. If she was the princess who never smiled, he was not the frog to be transformed by a reluctant kiss. And it was a very reluctant kiss indeed. On the occasion of an early kiss upon her cheek, Louisa had wished her brother to “cut the piece out with [his] penknife”; Louisa no longer wished to claim ownership of that part of herself upon which Bounderby had intruded. With his marriage to Louisa, Bounderby had purchased his kiss—and ownership of his wife—in the marketplace, and that was no place for sentiment. So it was that the frog did not become a prince, but instead was revealed to be a toad with “a great puffed head and forehead, swelled veins in his temples, and such a strained skin to his face that it seemed to hold his eyes open and lift his eyebrows up” (*HT*, p. 15). Not only had Bounderby claimed the girl-who-had-been-Louisa as an object, but she had also given up her rights of self-ownership. Dickens reminds the reader of this, with an exchange between Bounderby and his wife. Louisa tells him that she doesn't understand what he would have, and he replies “Have?” . . . . “Nothing. Otherwise, don't you, Loo Bounderby, know thoroughly well that I, Josiah Bounderby of Coketown, would have it?” (*HT*, p. 148).

The marriage of Louisa Gradgrind to Josiah Bounderby is also the marriage of an allegorical victim to her oppressor. She is the product of an education of fact, the ‘reasoning animal’ of Thomas Gradgrind's ambition. The marriage serves as a mechanism for joining the Gradgrind and Bounderby families—the social scientist and the capitalist—into an unnatural and infertile alliance. Both literally and metaphorically Louisa and Josiah are unlikely bedfellows; their respective motives for the partnership prove inadequate to ensure its survival. Bounderby—the archetypal oppressor—seeks ownership, to be “possessive of the world and of men and women” (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 40). However, as Louisa said: “[w]hen I was irrevocably married, there rose up into rebellion against the tie, the old strife, made fiercer by 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” (*HT*, pp. 164-165). The human being that was Louisa—and that Louisa could have been—resented being reduced to less in a marriage without affection or fancy. A

marriage contracted in the mistaken belief that the sacrifice of herself would result in a greater good for others. She had not broken that 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 a counter. (*HT*, p. 215)

But she had miscalculated the cost. So too, Dickens suggests by analogy, does society when it accepts the mercenary ideology of a loud—but ethically empty—section of the population, at the expense of common humanity of all. Louisa’s collapse and her admission of a “hunger and thirst ... which have never for a moment appeased; with an ardent impulse towards some region where rules, and figures, and definitions were not quite absolute” (*HT*, p. 164) denies the universal validity of the purely numerical exchange of the marketplace, in human relations.

Stephen Blackpool is trapped in a hopeless marriage with a drunken wife who seems to disappear for lengths of time and then reappear in his life. She was “foul to look at, in her tatters, stains, and splashes, but so much fouler than that in her moral infamy”. There is a clear implication that, in her behaviour, Blackpool has grounds for divorce. The divorce laws of England had long been the subject of calls for reform, but, as always when religion and culture come into conflict with the lived existence of those near the base of the social pyramid, structural change was slow to take place. Blackpool, like Louisa—and even Bitzer, for whom economic rationality justifies accumulation at the expense of reproduction—is trapped in a marriage that denies rather than allows life. Neither love nor progeny are possible. The structure of society—the rules by which he must live his life—deny him the opportunity of divorce and remarriage. Family without marriage is equally denied because, as he says, “there’s a law to punish me, [and] every innocent child belonging to me”. Stephen’s future is a bleak one.

A monologue on the divorce laws that Bounderby delivers to Blackpool—he could never dialogue with him—is less a satire of the situation than it is a précis of an actual court ruling. It is the voice of Dickens the angry journalist that we hear, not that of Dickens the

writer of fiction. Stephen asks if there is a law that might allow him the freedom to divorce and remarry, Bounderby responds:

Now, I tell you what! ... There is such a law. ... But it's not for you at all. It costs money. It costs a mint of money. ... Why, you'd have to go to Doctors' Commons with a suit, and you'd have to go to a court of Common Law with a suit, and you'd have to go to the House of Lords with a suit, and you'd have to get an Act of Parliament to enable you to marry again, and it would cost you (if it was a case of very plain sailing), I suppose from a thousand to fifteen hundred pound, ... Perhaps twice the money. (*HT*, p. 60)

The despairing Stephen, of course, had no access to such a large sum, even to buy the chance of a decent future<sup>75</sup>. A powerloom weaver, during the prosperous years of the 1840s, might have been able to earn 30 shillings a week, one and a half pounds, but this was now the 1850s and wages had fallen and living costs risen; a thousand pounds would need a long lifetime for Stephen to save.

Perhaps Dickens didn't model Bounderby's words on those of Justice Maule, a decade earlier, in 1845, but the similarities testify to a long standing tension between the law and the people. Justice Maule, in sentencing a poor workman, whose wife had run off to a life "no better than one of the wicked" and who had then taken another wife, and was now being sentenced on charges of bigamy. The Justice was clearly aware of the injustice involved (as evidenced by the sentence handed down—a single day in prison), and chose the occasion to launch a sardonic attack on the law. *Punch*, a new satirical magazine, reported that:

He told the culprit ... that the law was the same for him as it was for a rich man, and was *equally open for him*, through its aid, to afford relief. ... He [the prisoner] *should have brought an action* against the man who was living in the way stated with his wife, and *he should have obtained damages*, and then *should have gone to the Ecclesiastical Court* and obtained a divorce, which would have done what seemed to have been done already, *and then he should have gone to the House of*

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<sup>75</sup> The Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 was to mean that proof of adultery—with the accompanying public shame—rather than an Act of parliament, allowed the ordinary citizen access to divorce. It established the model upon which marriage was based as that of a contractual agreement rather than a religious sacrament.

*Lords*, and, proving all his case and the preliminary proceedings, *have obtained a full and complete divorce*; after which he might, if he liked it, have married again. ... The prisoner *might perhaps object to this*, that he had not the money to pay the expenses, which would amount to about £500 or £600—*perhaps he had not so many pence*—but this did not exempt him from paying the penalty for committing a felony, of which he had been convicted. (cited in Graves, 1921, p. 22, emphasis in the original)

For Dickens, that relationship that is most essential to life—love, physical and emotional—and which should be the very part of society that is the organic centre is presented as linked with death, the biological is constrained by the mechanisms of authoritarianism. Freire went to great lengths to contrast life-loving with the death-loving social structures, stressing that overwhelming control is symptomatic of that which he termed ‘necrophilic’. To create an object from a human being, it is first necessary to remove the life. Dickens seems to get close to this in his treatment of marriage and of Blackpool particularly—he is associated with death. He lives in “a room not unacquainted with the black ladder” (*HT*, p. 54), and the woman he has loved for years lives in a street in which the undertaker kept another such ‘black ladder’. Death is the only escape from Coketown. In a discussion with his employer—Josiah Bounderby of Coketown—Stephen comments that as a worker his life is such that each day brings him closer to death, and nothing else. Death is indeed the only escape from Coketown. The closest to physical intimacy he gets with his beloved Rachael, is to be allowed to hold her hand as he dies. Her last words to him are a pitiful travesty of the marriage vows they were denied: “I will hold thy hand, and keep beside thee, Stephen, all the way” (*HT*, p. 204). The institutions of society were—in those times, of course—“[f]ro’ first to last, a muddle”. (*HT*, p. 203)

Is Josiah Bounderby the villain in *Hard Times*? He is certainly no hero, but what does he do that is villainous? He is bombastic, but that is a fairly trivial offence. He is an unpleasant, over-bearing, self-important social bully; and that is the extent of his villainy. He fabricated a story of his own past, but many people have been guilty of rewriting their biography to present themselves in a better light. In any event, whether his narrative was true or false his personality was easy enough to assess with accuracy. He lied but he did not conceal. His relationship with Louisa seems easy to criticise, but he neither seduced nor abandoned her. He simply asked her to marry him, and she accepted. The transaction

might be distasteful to the reader, but surely if there was any deception, it was by Louisa, and that was self-deception. Louisa's marriage was also Bounderby's marriage, so he was necessary to Dickens if not—finally—to Louisa.

That Bounderby's friendship with Gradgrind was flawed seems obvious, but still his role seems rather less than villainous. Once again, he contributed to the misunderstandings that passed as friendship, but he was not the sole author of them. The two men, outwardly similar in their attitudes, had a parting of the ways when Gradgrind suggested to Bounderby that his wife be allowed to absent herself from the marriage for an extended, and indeterminate, period of time. This was after Louisa had fled from the marriage that she had rebelled against, and a potential lover that she had nearly succumbed to. Bounderby, knowing this, merely said that she must choose which roof she lived under, and that he would treat her decision as final. Inflexible would seem to be the most serious charge that could be laid against him. Josiah Bounderby of Coketown does not even seem a particularly bad employer. There is no suggestion that he was different from any other mill owner. Perhaps he was an overly harsh employer in his dismissal of Stephen Blackpool, but that was dramatically necessary for Dickens. And, although the reader knows all the circumstances surrounding the dismissal, and the eventual result, Bounderby's actual culpability was small.

Bounderby, the man, is no more a villain—and arguably less so—than Gradgrind. However, Bounderby the personification of the evils of unrestrained capitalism is truly a villain. He negates humanity. Bounderby—and industrialised capitalism—is the subject of a self-created, and ultimately fictional, definition. The man and the ideology are supported by myth, by stories they tell, and use to control others. Again, it seems appropriate to draw upon the work of Paulo Freire for a philosophical perspective, for he proposed that humans *are* as the result of dialogical interactions with others (e.g. Freire, 1970/1996, 1998; Freire & Shor, 1987). Bounderby has no authentically dialogical relationships with others, because he was not in any “process of [authentic] being” (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 81) , but was a static entity. Bounderby represents the Freirean oppressor; the economic imperative bullying society into conforming to its needs. Freire states that prescription is basic to oppression, and Dickens presents this in Bounderby. Freire says:

[P]rescription represents the imposition of one individual's choice upon another, transforming the consciousness of the person prescribed to into one that conforms with the prescriber's consciousness. Thus, the behaviour of the oppressed is a prescribed behaviour, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor. (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 29)

Dickens illustrates Freire's claim. Through Gradgrind he demonstrates the centrality of authentic dialogue for the education of the fully human—Louisa's collapse explains it to Gradgrind and illustrates it for the reader. Through Bounderby, Dickens demonstrates the centrality of dialogue for living as fully human. Although Bounderby was as near being Gradgrind's friend as circumstance allowed, the discussions between the two of them are mutually exclusive; that which Gradgrind interprets as concord is revealed as concurrent monologue, for there is no reciprocal humanity in Bounderby. This lack of authentic dialogue is shown to be true for all of Bounderby's interactions with others. Freire has written that "dialogue cannot exist without humility" (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 71), and Bounderby is "[a] man who was the Bully of humility" (*HT*, p. 15). He can only survive by denying genuine encounter with other people, and with the world. He had denied himself the opportunity to re-interpret his own life, denied himself access to uncertainty, to critical thought, and so, to change. His behaviour remains consistent throughout the text, as it must; he is unchanged and unchangeable by life's experiences, because he does not experience life. Bounderby—and the industrial ethos of Coketown—is 'necrophilic', seeking to manage and constrain human lives and futures by reducing them to objects of trade. He interprets everything through his own created immovable fictions, creating for himself a changeless identity without a context, and in so doing, to paraphrase Freire, had created himself as "a fixed entity, as something given—something to which people, as mere spectators, must adapt" (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 120). If the characters in the book fail to adapt to Josiah Bounderby, the same is unlikely to be true of the reader. Regardless of Bounderby's autobiographical fictions, the reader engages in a dialogical relationship with the text, and comes to know him from his behaviour, rather than from the 'facts' of his self-description. He is Coketown.

## 6. Fact and Fancy: the evolving nature of knowledge

Any examination of the theory of knowledge illustrated in *Hard Times* must, sooner or later, face facts. The text itself even begins with Gradgrind's position statement, that: "Now, what I want is, Facts" (*HT*, p. 5). However—as any reader of fairy tales should know—having wishes granted can have unexpected outcomes. Gradgrind got his facts, listed them, catalogued them, and passed them on to his children. However the products of his vision, of his ideal fact-based education system, proved disastrous. Dickens claimed that Gradgrind had overlooked something important; not that facts were not necessary for education, but that they were not sufficient. Whereas the boys and girls of the model school had been exhorted to "discard the word Fancy altogether" (*HT*, p. 9), Dickens seems to claim that fancy is a vital part of knowing. So, now, what I want is, Fancy.

### **A word of uncertain meaning**

Dickens, in *Hard Times* and other works, makes it clear that fancy—to him at least— is complementary to fact. It is somehow associated with childish lore, with fairies and ogres, with *Robinson Crusoe* and *Sinbad the Sailor*—but also with the development of human kindness, empathy, love of nature, and a hatred of tyranny. If, as Dickens proposes, fancy cannot be taught with just facts, how might stories and fables—and even *Hard Times* itself—access the minds of learners? So it is that my thesis completes the circle and returns to evolution and narrative thought. It is well accepted that the human love of stories has an evolutionary basis—actually, that is the only scientifically acceptable possibility (Boyd, 2009; Egan, 1999; Gottschall, 2012). What I have suggested is that narrative structure is the fundamental form of thought, with reason a later evolutionary addition. However, the development of reason has not weakened the influence of the old structures. The narratives of childhood—whether of Santa Claus or cultural norms—become the foundational texts for the reading of the world. They are created by the human susceptibility to story (Gottschall, 2012), and preserved by the human resistance to change. Bitzer was more than wrong when he claimed that the heart was only good for the circulation of blood; he had missed the metaphor of emotion and so the dialogue had



no meaning. Throughout *Hard Times* Dickens calls for fancy to be given meaning: through the story of *Hard Times* Dickens addresses that call directly to the heart of his readers.

Plato suggested that literature could affect the attitudes and behaviour of those exposed to it. Dickens, however, explicitly claimed it as not just affective but formative. Plato and Dickens agree that, educationally, a society needs to be aware of the power of stories. There is no culture on earth that does not tell stories, and listen to them. They are part of human evolutionary history (Sugiyama, 2001). The stories help create and maintain to define and maintain the cultures in which they are embedded—changing the stories is changing the culture. Although Dickens’s fairy stories sometimes included fairies and need not have been texts—however he often mentions them as books—he also included *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Arabian Nights* as fairy tales. This is a more expansive description than would be applied today, and he specifically ascribes this socially constructive power to them. In *Frauds on the Fairies* he says of fairy tales that they introduced gentleness, mercy, forbearance, courtesy along with care of others, love of nature and an abhorrence of tyranny—which is a rather impressive list. In the same passage, he went on to claim that “a nation without fancy, without some romance, never did, never can, never will, hold a great place under the sun” (*HT*, p. 97). Dickens then criticized those in the theatre for attempting to destroy what he felt were the very foundations of nationhood; he appears to be claiming that the interpretation of the written word onto the stage—and presumably the screen would be similar—involves the presentation of one particular interpretation. The ambiguity is lost, the relationship between text, reader and imagination has been constrained by a prior interpretation. Dickens concludes with the assertion that “it becomes doubly important that the little books themselves, nurseries of fancy as they are, should be preserved. ... in their simplicity, and purity, ... as if they were actual fact” (*HT*, p. 97). The last line is the keynote. The difference, for Dickens, between fact and fancy is the rather obvious—but often overlooked—conclusion that fancy is that which is not fact.

Fancy is an area of Dickens’s work, particularly in *Hard Times*, that has received considerable attention (e.g. Collins, 1961; Pollatschek, 2013; Sonstroem, 1969). Sonstroem argues for fancy, in *Hard Times*, as two distinct entities. The first is imaginative play, unrestricted by reality, and the second is empathy and compassion—

sentiment. However, for Sonstroem, the forces of Dickens's 'fancy' are confused and they present no clear and attractive opposition to Gradgrind's 'facts'. Additionally, he suggested that this may be because the imaginative world and the tabular world interact and touch in ways that Dickens was unable to accept. Collins (1961) reviewed the possible meanings across a wider range of Dickens's work and concluded that Dickens viewed fancy as closely related to "earthly joys—to fun, colour, enthusiasm, [and] vitality" (p. 88). Fancy of this kind is observable in *Hard Times*; Sleary's plea that "the people mutht be amuthed, thquire" is of this type. In the same paper, Collins also drew attention to some of Dickens's earlier writings, where fancy is synonymous with harmless entertainment—often in the reading of fairy tales and fiction—to relieve the stresses of everyday life. *Frauds on the Fairies* illustrates this kind of fancy as the author introduces fairy tales by claiming that "[w]hat enchanted us then, and is captivating a million of young fancies now, has, at the same blessed time of life, enchanted vast hosts of men and women who have done their long day's work, and laid their grey heads down to rest" (*HT*, p. 97). This is all true enough, but seems—to me at least—to have missed something, perhaps by trying to restrict the 'robber fancy' to such a confined space.

Collins points out that none of the implications of Dickens's 'fancy' stray far from the personal convictions of the man, which is true enough—but it also requires that attention be paid to understanding those convictions. Pollatschek argues differently altogether, proposing that Dickens actively resists the sort of definitions that would keep a Gradgrindian happy, and that in *Hard Times* he switches between meanings for fancy. Dickens creates ambiguity and "opposes utilitarian attempts to force a single meaning onto the word" (Pollatschek, 2013, p. 278). Whether the difficulty is caused by the deliberate resistance that Pollatschek suggests or simply a wider range of meanings than Collins or Sonstroem have proposed, a single meaning for 'fancy' in *Hard Times* is difficult to define. I suggest that this is simply because Dickens himself had no single clear definition: it is a catch-all word. Fancy was oppositional to measurable, countable, bankable, weighable and otherwise quantifiable facts. Fancy also gave respite from the grinding, repetitive, mundane, onerous demands of the lived experience of many. Fancy was also wonder and hope of the kind illustrated in the poster I used in my introduction; a small child supported by books, looking over the wall of everyday and into a world of new ideas and possibilities. Wonder, curiosity, and a spirit of enquiry are as much a part

of fancy as anything else is, and therein lies the threat to education. Neither Dickens's empty vessels nor Freire's containers can store such activity.

Dickens, of course, had no sense of his writing having any evolutionary links, not in such terms at least. However, he was certainly aware that the history of storytelling had its educational aspects. The parables in the bible would have shown him that. He was also conscious that his stories affected the way people responded and behaved in the real world, and that such responses were not the outcome of any appeal to reason. He would have named it as an appeal to fancy, and he considered fancy to be an intrinsic part of being human. In that he was correct, for it comes from the beginnings of human thought. Dickens recognised knowledge as being facts and stories. Bounderby has a story with no facts, Gradgrind has both facts and a story—an ideology in his case—Louisa has facts but insufficient narrative to construct a meaningful life. Readers too, recognise this and respond to it—but it will not be a rational response (Palencik, 2008). It is human to seek to make a pattern from events and from otherwise isolated facts, but this tendency to create narrative is no incidental by-product of the processes of evolution, rather it is central to some of the mental functions that define the species (Carroll, 2004). However, a narrative requires that additional information be added to the facts. Dickens gave his readers the information that enabled them to interpret their facts in new ways. Gradgrind's tabular statements and the figures in his little blue books are the facts that will be used to create more facts. The facts may be no more important than the narrative that includes them and explains them. From the combination, conclusions are drawn and used as new 'facts' to be written into new stories—or old ones, the ideology of Coketowners has long outlasted Coketown. The truth is separate from the narrative, and the narrative is the more powerful. So long as its explanatory or predictive power accords with the mental model of its audience, the story is the thing—it is also what allows metaphor, and satire, to work.

In a satirical article from 1837, directed at the proliferation of societies determined to direct the poor in the direction of either salvation or employment, there are glimpses of Dickens's growing concern that education was being taken over by ideologues. He reported on the meetings of the fictional but rather delightfully named Mudfog Association for the Advancement of Everything. There is a section early in the report on their first meeting that discusses establishing infant schools and houses of industry for

fleas—Dickens criticises prevailing attitudes towards the poor by using this dehumanising metaphor—“in which a system of virtuous education, based upon sound principles, should be observed, and moral precepts strictly inculcated”. Further on, in the same satirical report, the statisticians discuss the worrying influence of fairy tales on infant education. After noting that the recorded adventures of *Jack* were the principal children’s books in circulation—sometimes in his role of Giant-killer, and sometimes with a Beanstalk, and on occasion accompanied by a girl named Jill— there was a discussion about the virtues or otherwise of these texts. It was argued that because Jack and Jill went *up* the hill to fetch their pail of water, and that doing so was a “laborious and useful occupation”, this particular story might be exempt from the general censure. However, it seems that there was another issue that could not be ignored: “the whole work had this one great fault, *it was not true*” (Dickens, 1837, p. 410, emphasis in the original). Indeed, in the subsequent paragraph, the worthy Association also considered “the immense and urgent necessity of storing the minds of children with nothing but facts and figures”. So, there it is—and seventeen years before *Hard Times*—the problem with fancy is that it is not fact.

In *Hard Times* the word ‘fancy’ has the rather endearing quality of meaning what Dickens, the reader, and/or the character using it decide that it means. There is an ambiguity attached to the word ‘fancy’, and it defies all efforts to insist on an exact definition. I am unable to resist the temptation of using England’s oldest known fairy-tale character—Humpty Dumpty—to explain Dickens’s use of the word:

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master that’s all.”  
(Carroll, 1872, p. 124)

Indeed, is the word master of the meaning, or the meaning master of the word? Humpty Dumpty’s slightly nebulous—fanciful?—prescription of meaning is entertaining in its own right, but it contains a truth. The use of words and meanings is one of mastery, and of control. I am reminded of *supercalifragilisticexpialidocious*, a wonderful, mysterious

word of uncertain origin and no apparent meaning<sup>76</sup>. I ‘learnt’ this word at primary school, and was very proud to have done so; it was a fanciful word and it meant what schoolchildren decided it to mean—but it had to be a good meaning, an exuberant meaning. The existence of the word is a fact, but the meaning is beyond the clinical denotative constraints of the dictionary. In fact—or beyond fact—it is a word, and a world, of “wonderful no-meaning”.

It is the sense of something beyond facts—and therefore beyond the absolute certainty that is inseparable from them—that pervades both *Hard Times* and Dickens’s use of ‘fancy’. When Mrs Gradgrind—whose marriage had reduced her from a subject to an adjunct in life’s sentence—lay dying, she wanted to write a last letter to her husband, and she spoke of this to her daughter. She said that there was “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. ... I want to write to him, to find out for God’s sake, what it is”, she then asked for a pen. She was too weak to hold a pen and too feeble-minded to hold a thought, and so she died trying.

[s]he fancied, ... 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. (*HT*, p. 152)

Dickens displays his explicit ambiguity towards the meaning of ‘fancy’ here. One of the reasons that Thomas Gradgrind had chosen his bride had been that “she had ‘no nonsense’ about her. By nonsense he meant fancy” (*HT*, p. 18), and yet, in her last moments, she ‘fancied’. Her fancy, stifled for years, produced ‘figures of wonderful no-meaning’—and Dickens’s use of ‘wonderful’ denies that it has ‘no-meaning’. There is, Dickens hints, something beyond fact that defies the label of ‘meaning’ but equally rejects being ‘meaningless’.

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<sup>76</sup> My memory stems from the 1964 movie *Mary Poppins*, but the word pre-dates that. The Oxford English Dictionary comments:

Made popular by the Walt Disney film ‘Mary Poppins’ in 1964. The song containing the word was the subject of a copyright infringement suit brought in 1965 against the makers of the film by Life Music Co. and two songwriters: ... In view of earlier oral uses of the word sworn to in affidavits and dissimilarity between the songs the judge ruled against the plaintiffs.

If, in 1837, Dickens had concerns, by 1854 he was convinced that society was becoming inhuman and dehumanizing, losing its way by following the wrong path. Religion—to Dickens—had become moralizing and sermonising rather than being actively engaged in changing the world for the better. He excoriated those attempting to remove what solace the working poor could find, because of some biblical puritanism, and all the while they ignore the larger message of the Christian ideal. Coketown, it seems, was no more free of them than anywhere else:

there was a native organisation in Coketown itself, whose members were to be heard of in the House of Commons every session, indignantly petitioning for acts of parliament that should make these people religious by main force. Then came the Teetotal Society, who complained that these same people would get drunk, and showed in tabular statements that they did get drunk, and proved at tea parties that no inducement, human or Divine (except a medal), would induce them to forego their custom of getting drunk. ...Then came the experienced chaplain of the jail, with more tabular statements, outdoing all the previous tabular statements, and showing that the same people would resort to low haunts, hidden from the public eye, where they heard low singing and saw low dancing, and mayhap joined in it. (*HT*, p. 22)

The religious framework—part parable, part sermon—upon which *Hard Times* is constructed, and the biblical metaphors and references used throughout the text, are a part of Dickens's response to this type of religious involvement. He uses the structure of a sermon to rail against both scientism and religionism; forces that sought to constrain both fact and fancy.

### **The philosophy of a parson**

A brief discussion, at this point, on the structure of the text will provide insights into Dickens's intentions with *Hard Times*. As a Victorian, Dickens was a product of his time. His religious thinking was simple and based on the simple creed of "do good always". Although he came from an Anglican family, he was more comfortable with the Unitarians and was associated with them from 1842 onwards. His *The Life of Our Lord* reflects this, with its quiet denial of the divinity of Jesus—of whom he has an angel say "[t]here is a

child ... ,who will grow up to be so good that God will love Him as His own Son” (Dickens, 1934, p. 13). It was also a time of strong anti-catholic sentiment that had existed since Henry VIII, and was only beginning to abate<sup>77</sup>, signs of which can be found in several places throughout Dickens’s work (Gardiner, 2011). In Dickens’s world, entertainment, for the middle class at least, was often created within the home with music, reading and writing, and amateur theatrical performances (Thomas, 1985). Popular within the family was the reading aloud of the fiction of the day. At the time that Dickens was writing, it was common for families to sit around in the evening and read portions of a novel aloud. This allowed a literary work to be more than a text in the conventional ‘written’ sense; it became both a performance by the reader and an auditory experience by the listener. In a way quite unlike that of the modern world, novels were designed to be heard as much as read. This, coupled with the strict Christian morality of the time, makes Thackeray’s comment on himself and his fellow novelists easier to understand: “our profession seems to me as serious as the parson’s own” (cited in Thomas, 1985). If novelists could be compared with churchmen, then the relationship was even closer between schoolmasters and clergy. In the nineteenth century a schoolmaster was often a clergyman, and the two professions had similar social status (Wardle, 1970).

*Hard Times* contains the words and language of both the teacher and the churchman. The text shares characteristics of message and style with a particular type of spoken English: the sermon. In his discussion ‘Hard Times: The Style of a Sermon’, Green (1970) makes a convincing case for reading the language of the novel in this light. He argues that the lack of ambiguity in the words—from which I must exempt fancy—the rhythm of the words and the insistent use of repetition fit the style of the sermon—spoken, repetitive, and emphatic—more closely than any other form. It is a text not only for readers, it is for listeners as well. The audience is intended to *hear* the words and feel their rhythm:

*No little Gradgrind* had ever seen a face in the moon; it was up in the moon before it could speak distinctly. *No little Gradgrind* had ever learnt the silly jingle, Twinkle, twinkle, little star; how I wonder what you are! *No little Gradgrind* had ever known wonder on the subject, *each little Gradgrind* having at five years old dissected the Great Bear like a Professor Owen, ... *No little Gradgrind* had ever

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<sup>77</sup> There is still anti-catholic legislation enshrined in the laws of succession for the English monarchy: no heir to the throne may be a catholic, nor may they marry one and retain the right of succession.

associated a cow in a field with that famous cow with the crumpled horn who tossed the dog who worried the cat who killed the rat who ate the malt, or with that yet more famous cow who swallowed Tom Thumb. (*HT*, p. 11)

Dickens mixes his childish stories with the sonorous tones of the pulpit; it is an easy passage to read aloud. There are five repetitions of the phrase *little Gradgrind*—Dickens had previously stated that there were five little Gradgrinds, and so he produced them—creating an audible emphasis to this section. An even more pronounced example is Gradgrind’s opening address on facts, with its imperative sentences and sense of philosophical certainty. Green further proposes that the flatness of characters like Gradgrind and Bounderby is intended to remove ambiguity from the focus of the sermon: the unmistakable condemnation of the men and their utilitarian system. As earlier evidenced, Dickens presented the main characters and their society in a way that encourages the critical reader to see them as being too certain of their own certainties; as he noted elsewhere, “[t]he Vicar of Wakefield was wisest when he was tired of being always wise” (Dickens, 1854a, p. 100). Freire too, frequently warned against such over reliance on ideology, because reality is both changing and interpretable. Certainty should not become inflexibility, or the understanding of reality will no longer be a reflection of the world but its cause. *Hard Times* not only has the style of a sermon, it also has some of the content.

That there is some biblical reference in *Hard Times* is beyond question; in Dickens’s mind, education was the only way to bring a biblically conceived social justice and morality to society. I have already noted that the first chapter of *Hard Times* is entitled *The one thing needful*, a reference to a passage in the New Testament, Luke 10: 42, where Mary has chosen to listen to the words of Jesus rather than tend to everyday chores. Her sister complained to Jesus, and Jesus replied to her that there were many things to consider, “[b]ut one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her” (*KJV*). Mary did that which was necessary to her learning rather than her housework. I also indicated that Dickens had previously used this same phrase, in an educational context, calling for “education comprehensive, liberal education [a]s the one thing needful, and the only effective end” (Shepherd, 1937, p. 100) in the effort to “eradicate that which is evil or correct that which is bad” in society. This call for liberal, non-vocational,—and, I suggest, ethical—education shows clearly that the author of *Hard*



*Times* believed the nature and quality of education to be a key element in the growth of a moral society. In fact he seems to be suggesting that it is both a beginning and an end for any society that would promote social justice. It is only a liberal education that can enable members of any society to identify the ‘evil’ and the ‘bad’ within the structure; only liberal education can encourage the type of thinking that will lead to the recognition of moral decisions. He stresses this by naming the books within the novel *Sowing, Reaping, and Garnering*; a biblical reference and an agricultural metaphor that makes it clear that Dickens viewed education not as a mechanical, industrial operation, but as an organic process of growth, that nonetheless has a predictable outcome. In a reference to Matthew 7:16, Dickens predicts that it is by the fruit—the outcomes—that education will be judged. Gradgrindian, scientific, education took the “golden waters” of human potential and used them “for the fertilization of the land where grapes are gathered from thorns, and figs from thistles” (*HT*, p. 150); this is a distorted, maimed garden indeed.

In analysing *Hard Times*—still one of Dickens’s most controversial works—the importance of the role of the Bible cannot be reduced to simply noting the abundant references. The Bible, and Dickens’s Christian belief, is intrinsic to *Hard Times*, it is in the structure and in the fabric of the text. Surprisingly, this close examination of the relationships between the two texts seems to have been “neglected or misunderstood in recent discussions” (Gribble, 2004, p. 428). Gribble suggests that this is at least partly a result of the postmodernist repression of the Bible; she notes, for example, that in an important and detailed discussion of the moral thinking in *Hard Times*, Nussbaum (1991) makes no mention of its biblical debt. The central thesis proposed in *Why The Good Samaritan was a Bad Economist: Dickens’ Parable for Hard Times* is that the parable of the Good Samaritan provides the structural and moral foundation for the novel (Gribble, 2004). Gribble provides a convincing argument that this parable gives clues to the understanding of plot and characters, and provides “the foundation of its metadiscursive interest in the nature and significance of narrative” (p. 427). Although Gribble does not mention it, I suggest that it is particularly important both to the original parable, and to the analogy, that those who failed to help the injured traveller were a Levite and a priest, both of whom have religious obligations. As a result, the parable—told as a response to a question about obligations under the law—has Jesus indicating a moral interpretation of the legal term ‘neighbour’, in contrast with the strictly religious dogmatism shown by the

priest and the Levite. Dickens's Christianity was based on good works rather than doctrine:

Remember! – It is Christianity TO DO GOOD always—even to those who do evil to us. It is Christianity to love our neighbours as ourself, and to do to all men as we would have them do to us. It is Christianity to be gentle, merciful, and forgiving, and to keep those qualities quiet in our own hearts, and never make a boast of them, or of our prayers or of our love of God, but always to show that we love Him by humbly trying to do right in everything (Dickens, 1934, p. 124).

This would seem too, an explanation for the otherwise intractable problem of Sleary and Gradgrind colluding in orchestrating young Tom's escape from justice. Just as the Samaritan made his decision based on a sense of human decency, and ignored the dogmatic prohibitions of the law, so too did Sleary. Gradgrind himself showed that he did have a heart, and that he loved his prodigal son; he had already lost his daughter to his own merciless teaching.

Martha Nussbaum has formalised part of this argument from *Hard Times*, in her book *Poetic Justice*—an extension of her 1991 paper. However, she continues to avoid the clearly Christian references underpinning Dickens's text<sup>78</sup>, focussing instead on utilitarian rationalisation. Nussbaum suggests that justice within society is best served by more empathetic and emotional input into the decision making of the judiciary in particular, but society's leaders in general. She further claims that reading literature will encourage this change in thinking, by providing an emotional bridge between individuals whose lives and circumstances would otherwise remain separate from each other, and allowing the lawmakers' imaginations to inform the rational process (Nussbaum, 1995). The link that Nussbaum discusses is real; joining through imaginative 'fancy' the emotions and understandings of different worlds. The central claim in *Poetic Justice* is that the rational must be understood through the imaginative, and that the reading of novels focuses the reader on the possible, and asks them to contemplate themselves in different contexts. However, Nussbaum's interest is in the moral and ethical aspects of the educative value of literature, and how they might bring an additional element into the decision making

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<sup>78</sup> A discussion on why she may have chosen to do this can be found in Kidder (2009)

process. She stops short of questioning the nature of the relationship between education and literature, and whether education should be solely based on an instrumental rationale. Nussbaum draws heavily upon *Hard Times* to present her argument against uncompromising economic utilitarianism, but she does not explore overtly, or in any detail, the relationship between education and humanisation. Although Nussbaum argues that “in today’s political life we lack the capacity to see one another as fully human” (Nussbaum, 1995, p. xiii), and that this has often been brought about by our reliance on technical models of human behaviour, she doesn’t elaborate on what being ‘fully human’ might be, nor how education might affect this. The argument in *Poetic Justice* is directed at the education of the leaders, rather than that of the people themselves, suggesting that improving the governance will improve the subjects. This is in contrast with the thinking of Paulo Freire—himself drawing upon the work of Marx—that once the subjects identify themselves as unique individuals dehumanised by an oppressive system they will act to improve the governance (Freire, 1970/1996). However, it will be by overturning the existing social structures rather than reforming them. Dickens—reformer but no revolutionary—might well agree with Nussbaum’s criticism of ‘technical models of ... behaviour’ but would resist Freire’s solution. In *Hard Times* he suggests a concept of fancy that includes Nussbaum’s perspective but presents an alternate vision to that of Freire. However, when Nussbaum asks—with reference to *Hard Times*—how “fancy [is] connected with charity and generosity, with general human sympathy and beneficent use of reason” (Nussbaum, 1995, p. 37) she avoids engaging with Dickens’s own answer, which can be found in *Hard Times*, represented in the words and actions of Sissy Jupe.

### **A pedestrian girl from a horse riding circus**

In a book that is widely understood to be promoting the virtues of fancy, it is puzzling that Sissy Jupe, the one character who seems intended to embody such virtues, appears to be as un-fanciful as can be imagined. Indeed, in a strange parody of Dickens’s own description of Mrs Gradgrind, it could be said of Sissy that “it is probable she was as free from any [fancy], as any human being not arrived at the perfection of an absolute idiot, ever was” (*HT*, p. 18). Sissy Jupe was brought up reading fairy tales—she used to read *The Arabian Nights* to her father—which should have made her a little well spring of fancy, and an ideal candidate for an education that blended fact with fancy. However, she clearly learned very little at Gradgrind’s school, and her educational attainments were

largely confined to the misunderstanding of lessons. Dickens devoted considerable effort to outlining Sissy's errors; he is rather obviously drawing attention to something which he felt was important to the text, and the world. The first of Sissy's reported misunderstandings informs the reader what that was, because Sissy "had only yesterday been set right . . . , for returning to the question, 'What is the first principle of this science [of Political Economy]?' the absurd answer, 'To do unto others as I would that they should do unto me'" (*HT*, p. 46). Sissy's first principle is clearly a reframing of Matthew 7:12 "all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them" (*KJV*). Having established the principle, Dickens provides a series of illustrations in which the bewildered Sissy confuses 'National Prosperity' with 'Natural Prosperity', 'statistics' with 'stutterings', and individual experience with that of the aggregate. All of the examples draw the reader's attention to the suffering that is concealed within generalised statements about the well-being of the economy; the greatest good for the greatest number—a principle associated with utilitarian thought, although not originating with it—may leave unaddressed the lived circumstances of many. What—the reader is invited to consider—of those who are not doing well?

The determinedly pure-hearted Sissy stayed in Gradgrind's school—as the result of charity—because she could not believe her father had deserted her. "[S]he lived in the hope that he would come back, and in the faith that he would be made the happier by her remaining where she was", and she resisted "the superior comfort of knowing, on a sound arithmetical basis, that her father was an unnatural vagabond" (*HT*, p. 46). Such a 'knowing' would be a descent into what Smith (2013) calls *knowingness*, which he has identified in Dickens's work as indicating "cunning in contrast with innocence" (p. 377), and which he has described as the condition in which a belief is held with "an un-seemly degree of self-confidence" (p. 376). The 'un-seemly' is significant in the context of the passage because Dickens is clearly juxtaposing Sissy's charitable confidence in her father's goodness against a judgemental assessment that he was "a runaway rogue and a vagabond" (*HT*, p. 29). The 'arithmetical' absence of Signor Jupe provides no sound basis for either—or indeed any—assessment of his character. However, the irony of it being Josiah Bounderby of Coketown who passed judgement on Sissy's father is obvious. So, Sissy—Dickens's representative of fancy—has a life, and a way of relating to the world, that is built upon faith, hope, and charity. The words of Corinthians 1:13 can be heard, and with them the knowledge that charity was the greatest of the three. Dickens must

have had in mind the same verse when he envisioned Bounderby—with his “brassy speaking-trumpet of a voice” and his “great puffed head”, a “man who could never sufficiently vaunt himself a self-made man” (*HT*, p. 15)—for Corinthians 1:13 also mentions that without charity a person could “become as sounding brass” and that “charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up” (*KJV*). Not only is the contrast between Sissy and Bounderby deliberate, it is also clearly located in Dickens’s Christianity, and his bible. Sissy may not have been subject to the flights of fancy that it might be assumed that Dickens was defending in *Hard Times*, but her humanity and concern for others tells the modern reader that Christian charity was a central part of what Dickens understood as fancy.

Sissy’s education can now be understood as being unsuccessful because the facts were pushed upon her, without the context of her world-view—and fancy—being taken into account. It is not she who needs to change, in order to integrate, but the structure of the education system that needs to be transformed. Dickens warned the reader right at the start of *Hard Times* that he contested the view that education “is a mere question of figures, a case of simple arithmetic” (*HT*, p. 7) to be conducted “always with a system to force down the general throat” (p. 8). That he does this in a chapter entitled *Murdering the Innocents*, of itself should guide the reader towards the text’s message. The title is a reference to a bible story (Matthew 2:16-18) in which an attempt is made by Herod to kill Jesus by killing all young children. Dickens is accusing Gradgrind of doing the same through an education system based on the principle that “[f]acts alone are wanted in life” (*HT*, p. 5). Dickens’s presentation of fancy takes on a fuller meaning if it is also understood to include a guiding principle or even a life force. A fact-based definition of a horse—such as that given by Bitzer—is lacking this: it is incomplete, static, and devoid of life, rather than untrue. Dickens used the parody of the object lesson to show that the subject was absent—the horse was not bounded by its definition. To force the concept of fancy into Gradgrindian conformity and to seek a single rigid definition—or even a list—is to constrain the vitality that is its essence. Education, Dickens proposes, is not a matter of accumulating facts, and filling pitchers, but a process more like the Freirean ideal of a constant transformation towards becoming more fully human. “Thomas Gradgrind, sir. A man of realities. A man of facts and calculations. ... [R]eady to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to” has missed the point. The best part of human existence cannot be counted and measured.

Dickens was no Luddite resisting technology and change, nor was he seeking a return to some illusory romantic golden age. As it happens, he was not even opposed to Gradgrind with his figures and calculations; fortuitously a letter survives where he states his position without equivocation. Writing to Henry Cole<sup>79</sup> in June 1854—mid-way through the publication of the weekly issues of *Hard Times*—and probably in response to Cole’s identification of himself with the ‘third gentleman’ in the schoolroom, Dickens noted:

I often say to Mr Gradgrind that there is reason and good intention in much that he does—in fact, in all that he does—but that he over-does it. Perhaps by dint of his going his way and my going mine, we shall meet at last at some halfway house where there are flowers on the carpets, and a little standing-room for Queen Mab’s Chariot among the Steam Engines. (Dickens in House et al., 2001)

Not only is Dickens not opposed to Gradgrind or his ideas, he recognises that Gradgrind’s educational intentions are good, and even that they are based on reason. Dickens simply thinks that Gradgrind puts too much emphasis on fact, and expresses the hope that some middle ground will be reached where fact and fancy—the measured and the immeasurable—can share the schoolroom, with each making its distinctive contribution to the life of the student.

Dickens, not only in *Hard Times* but most clearly in that text, makes educational claims for both fancy—however the word be understood—and stories. The claims are both practical and philosophical, addressing both what should be taught and why it should be taught. In an important passage, Dickens writes of idealised childhood learning, with a young girl “first coming upon Reason through the tender light of Fancy, she [saw] it a beneficent god, deferring to gods as great as itself; not a grim Idol, cruel and cold, with its victims bound hand to foot” (*HT*, p. 150). This is no denigration of reason, but rather a call for it to be understood as only part of a complete education. Dickens uses the metaphor of sacrificing unwilling victims to the ideology of scientism to illustrate that facts—in the wrong hands and used for the wrong ends—result in the death of a just society. The wrong hands are identified with the ‘Coketowners’, those who would—and do—judge the value of a person’s life by the measure of profit extracted from it, rather than the human virtues intrinsic to it.

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<sup>79</sup> Cole was a particularly suitable recipient for such a letter. Not only was he interested and successful in industrial design—as well as serving with Dickens, Owen and Redgrave on the committee of the RSA during the Great Exhibition—but he also went on to write children’s books.

The very title of Dickens's *Hard Times*—with its allusion to Carlyle's *Signs of the Times*—gives additional confirmation of the author's intention with the work. However, in the way of these things it is easier to understand after examining the text itself. The 'Hard' may be read as a reference to—and a criticism of—both the difficult circumstances of many of the English working class, and the ideology of the "hard fact men" that Dickens illustrates. Perhaps Dickens puts too much faith in the merits of imaginative literature and its ability to redress the balance—and perhaps he doesn't. After all, fancy—as Dickens interprets it—will not be introduced into society through fact and calculation; it must come in some other way. Can imagination, empathy, forbearance, courtesy, and the host of other qualities that would aid in transforming a "reasoning animal" into something "more fully human", really spring from childhood stories? Is Dickens correct when he describes childhood fables as being "beautiful, humane, impossible adornments of the world beyond: so good to be believed in once, so good to be remembered when outgrown, for then the least among them rises to the stature of a great Charity in the heart" (*HT*, p. 150). The notion, mentioned in the previous paragraph, of "coming to Reason through ... Fancy" not only implies that reason needs to be tempered by humanity, but touches—accidentally no doubt—upon the possibility that human thinking processes act in just this way. It is only by education—or miseducation—that hard facts can gain primacy over the human heart.

## 7. In two fields of action

The intention of my thesis was to examine the possibility that literary works might have a special contribution to make to educational philosophy, and to do so using the particular example of Dickens's *Hard Times*. The methodology employed was inter-disciplinary, or perhaps simply eclectic, because both literature and education—including its philosophy—are themselves indebted to the wide range of human experience embedded in a historical framework. They are all, inevitably, products of a particular time, place, and way of thinking. It is possible to read a novel as no more than time-filler while waiting for a bus, and that is undoubtedly the fate of many books. However reading can also be a reciprocal process of engagement, where the reader acts upon the text and is informed not simply by the words on the page but by the challenge contained in the ideas and representations. This is the Freirean approach to reading “through which the reader’s understanding of social reality is progressively deepened and extended” (Roberts, 1996, p. 150), and through which I have examined *Hard Times*.

Reading is a physical, biological process, as well as being a process of intellectual engagement with a text. However, the special contribution that a literary work might make seems likely to be based upon its form as a permanent text, historically located in its production but not in its interpretation. Its permanence makes it available for repeated re-reading over time, with subsequent readers bringing new understandings and leaving with new interpretations. In addition, there is evidence that suggests that narrative-type mental processes may be an evolutionary outcome of the development of the mind. The evidence is suggestive rather than conclusive, but it exists, and its presence in this thesis is the result of my following the hints that Dickens made, and re-reading existing studies to produce a reading of the world that conforms with Dickens’s suggestions.

The main question that underpinned my thesis was, “what contribution can a reading of *Hard Times* make to philosophical and historical discussions around education, with particular attention being paid to how any such contribution might be demonstrated through an analysis of educational themes and relationships within the text?” *Hard Times*



is more than ‘a literary work’, or a ‘text’, it is also a story, and stories can both capture and nourish the imagination. They exist in a universe where a “willing suspension of disbelief for the moment” (Coleridge, 1817, cited in Partington, 1998) permits the presentation of ideas that may not follow all the rules of the reader’s, or listener’s, known world. However, because of this, stories can also illuminate those rules in a new way for their audience. In his apologetic review of *Hard Times* Forster (1854) defended the work by saying that a novel could not be expected to argue a thesis. Four years later, Stephen (1858)—apparently in response to Forster’s defence—proposed that this was a weakness in using a novel for instruction; a novelist invents his/her facts, and thus is able to defend charges of inaccuracy by claiming the work was not a political treatise. My extended study of the historical context in which *Hard Times* was located has shown that Dickens had no need to defend charges of inaccuracy, and has added to our knowledge of the times. Stephen and Forster had both confined themselves—rather than the text—by boundaries of their own making. They argued about the category into which the book should be placed, and about how much fact it might or might not contain. They assumed that fiction cannot be factual and that only fact can influence thought. But it may be that it is the story—like the child’s fables that Dickens mentioned—and the nature of story itself, that has the power to influence the reader. Dickens was a storyteller, and so his tools were those of language, of words and imagination; the tools that nature may have provided rather early in our history.

### **Reasoning animals**

People construct stories to help them to understand ideas and concepts; they are the basis for schema theories of cognition, where explanatory patterns are constructed and new information is fitted in (Driscoll, 2005). As with belief perseverance—and the two may be related—these patterns/schema are resistant to change even in the face of contradictory information. In these cases, and others, by supplying or utilising a story, the facts become easier to remember. Dickens knew this well, he noted of Sissy Jupe that she “was extremely slow in the acquisition of dates, unless some pitiful incident happened to be connected therewith” (*HT*, p. 46). A narrative can act as an *aide mémoire* for facts or concepts; remember the story and remember the idea. Sometimes the intention behind a story is educational, seeking to provoke a new understanding within the mind of its audience. The parables of Jesus are stories of this type, and within each story is a message

for the listener to grasp and think upon. One feature of the parable is its lack of a final explanation to the audience; it is left to the individual to understand the words and interpret the moral message—I suggest that this feature makes *Hard Times* more nearly a parable than a novel. In the end, stories, imaginative stories, have a long history as an aid to both memory and understanding. This thesis is built around the idea that the interpretive involvement of the audience allows stories—and particularly stories in text form—to transcend history but highlight realities—and myths.

I proposed, in my chapter *Footprints of the Tiger*, that there is a body of evidence that lends support to a claim that narrative-type processing—indicated by behaviours suggestive of some link between agency, cause and effect—seems widespread in the animal world, rather than being an exclusively human characteristic (e.g. Harper & Garry, 2000; Skinner, 1948). However, there can be little doubt that humans have the more developed tendency towards the creation of story, explaining their world with myths and legends, and developing their various cultures in the process (Boyd, 2009; Sinclair Bell, 2002). Interestingly,—to me at least—Dickens himself seems to have had some idea that there was an evolutionary link between different species that was suggestive of some relationship between humans and ‘unreasoning’ animals—particularly those animals with which he was familiar, dogs, horses, and of course ravens. Perhaps the strongest hints to Dickens’s position were put into the mouth (beak?) of a raven. I have mentioned that Dickens had at least two pet ravens, Grip and Grip the Second, and that he was fascinated by them. It is from his ravens, and his Megalosaurus making its way through London mud, that the chapter sprang. I will let Charles Dickens’s son repeat his evidence from an earlier chapter, and tell a story about Grip the Second:

The raven, indeed, was a source of perpetual amusement to us. It was delightful to watch him going through the most studied pretence of busily burying something in a particular spot, knowing well that we were watching him, covering up the hole with earth in order to deceive us, and then surreptitiously burying it in an entirely different place. (Dickens, 1928a, p. 15)

This behaviour strongly suggests that the raven was not only aware of its audience, but aware that members of the audience may have plans separate and different from itself. Even the act of burying suggests that the bird has some awareness that the object

continues to exist even when it is not visible (object permanence), which resembles an early stage of abstract thought (Smith, 2009). I do not claim that all animals think alike, or even think. However, I do suggest that Dickens may have wondered whether the ancestral mechanisms of all thought may be shared—and they do seem to show signs of being universal. If reason may indeed be approached through fancy, as Dickens has stated, and fancy has some evolutionary past, as he has hinted, then the political treatise and the thesis may indeed be at a disadvantage. That might begin to explain why, as Trollope said, “monthly novels convince, when learned quartos fail to do so” (1855/1900, p. 186) and why Dickens chose to write *Hard Times* rather than a treatise.

It is not possible to reason with a raven, and yet it is possible to influence a bird’s behaviour (Marzluff et al., 2010). Reason and facts are not the agents of change in birds or people; as Skinner showed all those years ago. In some yet-to-be-understood way, the change of behaviour—which has a resemblance to learning—seems to be related to a narrative-style processing of information, a cause and effect understanding of the world (Skinner, 1948). An individual seems to add information to the facts of the body’s experiences; stories—including myths and ideologies—may assist in that process by providing a context through which to interpret facts. This context is—I believe—part of that which Dickens labelled fancy. My argument was—and still is—that a literary work, in this case *Hard Times*, can provide insights and illuminate perspectives that aid our understanding of educational themes, and further, that these ways of knowing cannot readily be accessed without using such texts. *Hard Times* does reward careful re-reading and study. Freire does aid in the understanding of the dialogue contained within the text, especially the distinction between authentic and inauthentic dialogue. It is only in a written format that the insights contained within *Hard Times* could be made available for such intense inspection, so long after their first audience has passed away. This part of my thesis has explored aspects of the nature and importance of the link—suggested by Dickens—between evolution, narrative-type processing of information, and the significance of a literary work in addressing matters of an educational nature. Specifically, it has considered Charles Dickens’s novel *Hard Times*, with some illumination from the educational philosophy of Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and proposed that Dickens’s call for fancy has evolutionary support for its importance.

Fundamental to my question about the reading of *Hard Times* was looking for a possible explanation for the power of a literary work to contribute to our constantly changing readings of the world. Dickens addressed this in *Frauds on the Fairies* when he defended children's stories against those who—each “mounted on a foaming hobby [horse]” (1854a, p. 97)—would rewrite them as propaganda for their own ends. He maintained that:

[T]he little books themselves, nurseries of fancy as they are should be preserved. ... Whosoever alters them to suit his own opinions, whatever they are is guilty, to our thinking, of an act of presumption, and appropriates to himself what does not belong to him. (1854a, p. 97)

Literature is written. It doesn't change unless it is changed. Yet, that is not quite true, because each reader approaches—and appropriates—the text from their own world; each reading of the word to read the world opens up new possibilities of fancy.

Literature really is a nursery of fancy. Even this thesis, which draws so heavily on *Hard Times*, dares only to interpret Dickens's text, and to draw from it. I cannot transform it; instead it remains available for a growing body of readers and researchers to nurture their own ideas. Reading is a form of mental processing, and it has the ability to bring about change in the reader. Even non-fiction can excite a reader; after all, who has not watched a child learning about dinosaurs or some other subject of wonder? And there is the point yet again, fact approached through fancy is a powerful tool; the facts become embedded in the fancy. However, the fancy can be the myths of industry—in Freire's Brazil or Bounderby's Coketown—as readily as it can be Dickens's charity and wonder. The ability to touch the emotions, to appeal to the narrative-type processes that the brain seems to instinctively use, to go beyond facts, to by-pass reason, and to appeal to the heart: that is what literature gives in a way that nothing else can. That which Stephen (1858) had claimed as literature's weakness is its strength; a few facts gone astray do not diminish the effect on the reader or destroy the argument. As Butwin (1977) recognised of *Hard Times*, it was intended that the reader respond to the text in the world beyond the text. The literary convention that characters must live beyond the page is an arbitrary one, and irrelevant to Dickens's purpose (see Leavis, 1962). His intention was for the reader to live beyond the pages and to complete the novel by further reading, or by taking action

for change, by Freirean praxis— “reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it” (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 33). Marx famously claimed that “philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it” (1845). The words in literature cannot be changed, they are the point, but the various ways in which a text can be interpreted must result in new readings of the world, and new philosophies to explain it—and new actions to transform it.

### **The utility of fancy**

In examining the contribution a reading of *Hard Times* makes to philosophical and historical discussions around education, and how it can be demonstrated through an analysis of educational themes and relationships in Dickens’s *Hard Times*, I used the early work of Paulo Freire. I used this to identify common themes between Dickens and Freire and to assist in my analysis. A Freirean perspective on the relationships between the characters—centred particularly around Josiah Bounderby—shed real light on the educational and social themes of the text and society.

Addressing these questions demanded that some attention be paid to such themes as: the theory of knowledge implicit in *Hard Times*; the form of pedagogy demonstrated in the book; the relationship between reason and emotion, and its significance for education and humanisation. Each of these themes has a historical context as well as a philosophical one, and my thesis devotes considerable time to locating the text of *Hard Times* in its place in both Dickens’s personal world and the social times in which it is set. It is only by an extensive examination of the relationship between the fiction and the fact that smaller details become available. In any text—whether by Dickens, Freire or some other—the words stand alone as a single work, and it is with them that the reader engages. However, by better understanding the historical situation in which it was written, further and differently informed readings of the work become available. Not only small details—such as the significance of ‘grinders’ in Victorian education—but larger ones become accessible to the modern reader by the historical study in these pages. My delving into the contemporary reports of the social conditions (e.g. Ashworth, 1854; Engels, 1845/1973; Reach, 1849a, 1849b) and the school lessons (Mayo, 1857; Morley, 1852b) of Dickens’s time refutes the claims of Dickens’s critics that he was badly informed and/or lacking in understanding (e.g. Martineau, 1855; Stephen, 1857). On the contrary, it seems that the

relative lack of enthusiasm for *Hard Times* was the class location of the critics—the readers still enjoyed it enough to improve the sales of the newspaper. The critics disputed his facts—but he has been shown to be correct—as a defence of their own explanations of how the world was, and why.

The extended use of historical study in this thesis has been rewarded by the contribution that it has made to modern understanding of the accuracy of Dickens's writing, and the processes by which he constructed at least one of his well-known works. I have shown clearly, that *Hard Times* is very heavily indebted to historical reality, perhaps as much as it is to metaphor. Gardiner (2011) notes that Dickens has often been accused of taking a rather casual approach to historical accuracy, and of using the past “merely as a convenient backdrop for purely fictional concerns” (p. 240). That may be so for the past, but *Hard Times* is contemporary with its author. I have found no previous study that has compared the industrial conditions that Dickens represented in *Hard Times* with the reality as reported in *The Daily Chronicle*, *The Times*, and recently discovered Chartist material (Addelman, 2013). Dickens's geographical and physical descriptions of Coketown combine reality with metaphor in a way that can be misunderstood in a later age; I have shown that Dickens has not created the background for this text. He has simply used the “glaring colours” that are needed by “[t]he artist who paints for the millions” (Trollope, 1855/1900, p. 189).

I have explicitly laid out new evidence that shows that earlier understandings of the relevance of the third gentleman in Gradgrind's classroom are incomplete (Fielding, 1953), and can still be improved upon. Dickens's vice-presidency of the Society of Arts at the time of the Great Exhibition certainly suggests that he was in a position to be aware of the contemporary discussions around utilitarian art and education. Similarly, his satirical use of the object lesson shows a high level of detailed understanding of the types of knowledge being promoted, its methods of promotion, and the philosophical—and sociological—connections with self-interest. My use of the historical approach has demonstrated that Dickens was both well situated and well qualified to make an insightful contribution on the nature and outcomes of education and its misappropriation by economic interests. I have provided an original insight into Dickens's interpretation of his own world, through my analysis of his depiction of Josiah Bounderby as a psychopathic allegorical figure. The Bounderbys of this world—for they are still of this world, it is not

just the poor who are always with us—are incapable of any critical perception of the outcomes of their activities. This understanding has enabled my thesis to demonstrate that Dickens’s critique was not of utilitarian thought, but of the ideological justification it provided for the dehumanising outcomes of unrestrained industrial capitalism.

Dickens’s simple philosophy—by simple I mean uncomplicated, rather than naïve—explicit and implicit throughout the text allows the modern reader to understand *Hard Times* in the context of its author’s worldview, only if that context is understood. Dickens’s use of the word ‘these’ in *Hard Times for These Times* gives the work a perpetually contemporary relevance that is lacking without it. It is located in the nineteenth century in some ways only, so the constant implication of the present cannot be overlooked. Indeed, that *These Times* was added to the volume version adds an ambiguity to the title that is unlikely to be accidental. I have earlier described *Hard Times* as a mid-Victorian thought experiment, and it now seems rather like a longitudinal one; as long as similar conditions persist, it will always be for ‘these times’.

There is an air of melancholy, or perhaps despair, to the final few pages of *Hard Times*. As I noted earlier, Dickens was intending to bring the reader’s attention to a problem rather than promote a particular solution—although, parable-like, the solution is implied. Freire (1970/1996) believed that education would allow people to “develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; [to] come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation” (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 64), and that this would empower them to change their reality. This hope of change is not evident within the pages of *Hard Times*. Dickens sees education is becoming aligned with the world of work, producing ‘hands’ or ‘minds’ rather than developing more complete human growth. Clearly the nature of what constitutes valuable knowledge is at issue for him—and through the text, it also becomes an issue for the reader—but so too is the response called for from the reader. The facts taught at the Gradgrind school are neatly packaged, commodified, quantifiably testable and scientifically true, but their exclusion of all else is shown to be destructive to the humanity of the student. It is not just the graminivorous horse—that disembodied object of the school lesson—that is lacking a heart, so too does the society that produces such lessons, and is being produced by such lessons. A key to Dickens’s theory of knowledge—his explanation of how knowledge should be evaluated, distributed, and

utilised—is the complementary difference between fact and fancy. I have argued in the previous chapter—and suggested throughout—that while Dickens’s notion of fancy may have included earthy amusement (Collins, 1961), kind-heartedness and compassion (Sonstroem, 1969), and metaphorical imagination (Nussbaum, 1995), it was a more encompassing concept than that, and it deserved the closer attention it has now received.

### **No business in education**

If education is not for the benefit of the student, then, as Freire has suggested, it will be for the benefit of another (Freire & Shor, 1987). Dickens too shows an awareness of this, and early in the pages of *Hard Times* he identifies the beneficiary for his readers. In an exchange with the representatives of ‘fancy’, some circus performers, Bounderby exclaims "You see, my friend, ... we are the kind of people who know the value of time, and you are the kind of people who don't know the value of time" (*HT*, p. 27). The concept of time having a value is an industrial one—a perspective I have discussed in my historical examination—but one which is easily overlooked by a modern reader. In a factory, in the world of work and money, time that has no immediately obvious output-related benefit is wasted. By extension, time spent learning unproductive knowledge is wasted, and the knowledge itself, by being surplus to use, is also waste. However, knowledge is not consumed and it remains available for use, to aid in considering and re-considering the world. Knowledge—as Dickens lays out for the reader’s contemplation—may in fact be productive or unproductive based only on the criteria by which it is judged.

The text of *Hard Times* illustrates Dickens’s concern that education, important as he clearly thinks it is, is being guided into wrong areas. He sees it being directed away from the recognition of each person as part of a community, class-based though the community may be, away from true dialogue and towards something else, something oppressive in a Freirean sense. Dickens seems to be suggesting that part of imagination, itself part of ‘fancy’, is an understanding of the possibility of multiple viewpoints. He allows his readers to examine the proposition that life—for all but philosophers and ideologues—does not consist of absolutes, but rather of attempts to interpret and understand what is happening—and attempts to live the fullest life possible in those circumstances. The ‘real’ world of most people is not fact-dependant and static. It is interpretive and fluid, it includes magic, superstition, jealousy and anger, it situates men and women as beings in



the process of becoming—as unfinished, uncompleted beings in and with a likewise unfinished reality (Freire, 1970/1996, p. 65). The education system of Gradgrind restricts knowledge to non-situational fact, which is then not available for any critical examination of the process of human existence, nor for the emotional and moral growth of the individual.

In its simplest form, education must result in a learned behaviour. Learning, as I noted in my introduction, is “a persisting change in human performance or performance potential ... as a result of the learner’s experience and interaction with the world” (Driscoll, 2005, p. 9). Dickens acknowledges the importance of the persistence of the change. The biography of his characters, once written by their education—including their upbringing and their individual responses to it—remains a story fixed to the page. Like a serialised novel, each section once done is beyond change and each future section is formed by its own past. If the education takes place within a framework of self-interest and personal profit, and/or with no regard for others then the behaviour of the learner is likely to reflect this. Business interests cannot be allowed to rule the country, because they will do it to advantage themselves. Even Plato, writing 2500 years earlier, had suggested that only if well-educated but economically disinterested philosopher-kings ruled could a just society flourish.

More than a century after Dickens’s death, a philosophy with similarities to that of Plato was proposed by Greenleaf (1977). He claimed that the best leaders are those whose main motive is to serve first, rather than those who seek the leadership of dominance. He called this leadership style ‘servant leadership’, and claimed that such leaders seek to empower their followers to “grow healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants” (cited in Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002). Dickens is part of this tradition—one that includes the Christianity of good works, not that of doctrine—that seeks social justice through humanitarian governance. Our last sight of Thomas Gradgrind is of “a white-haired decrepit man, bending his hitherto inflexible theories to appointed circumstances; making his facts and figures subservient of Faith, Hope, and Charity” (*HT*, p. 221) and despised by those former associates in Parliament who had decided they “owe[d] no duty to an abstraction called a People” (p. 221). Central to the claims of Plato, Dickens and Greenleaf—and indeed of Freire—is an underlying principle that social justice can only flourish where the interests of ‘others’ have at least equal

importance as those of ‘self’, and it is only through some degree of empathy with others that their interests can be understood. Choices that affect the lives of others must be ethical decisions based on ‘fancy’, on the obligation to have shared humanity as the baseline to work from, not towards.

In the end, what is Dickens really trying to say? What does his thought experiment encourage the reader to conclude? What does *Hard Times* contribute to the philosophical study of education? Perhaps it is that the purpose of education should be to develop the ability of a person to act upon and transform the system in which they live, as a necessary condition of being fully human. The repeated use of fairy tale metaphors and references takes the reader beyond the purpose of education, and into the timing of it. Dickens is specifically referring to the need for a childhood education that encourages the child’s world to nurture those values and beliefs which are central to a society modelled on the Golden Rule. In showing the effects of Gradgrind’s education of fact and statistics, he also shows that the developmental limitations created in children cannot be outgrown, cannot be undone, and that this has been known for a long time. Bitzer’s description of a horse, and Sissy’s inability to describe one, encapsulate different forms of knowledge. Bitzer’s horse has been transcribed into data, and rather than words attempting to express an understanding of a reality, the words have become the reality and the subject has been left behind. The vital link between the word and the world is shown to have been broken. Sissy cannot separate her understanding of the world from herself and her experience and reduce it to a defined boundary. Her childhood had been spent in the circus, a place where the impossible was an everyday occurrence and imagination was stock-in-trade. The limits of her world were never those of the other students in Gradgrind’s school, and so it could never destroy her. It seems that Gradgrind’s opening words were more than rhetoric, they were prophetic; it is only possible to form the minds of reasoning animals upon facts—indeed, nothing else will be formed but reasoning animals. Dickens and Freire saw more than this: becoming more fully human needs fancy.

Charles Dickens predicted the human cost of a ‘user pays’ society and the education system created to support it. Where Freire would later detail forms of oppression and dehumanisation in educational structures and practices, Dickens illustrated their effects. He prefigured Freire’s famous metaphor of banking education, describing students as vessels being filled to the brim with facts, and illustrated the necrophilic relationships of

which Freire wrote. Dickens, as novelist, used his skill to create a world designed to assist the reader in the interpretation of the text, and through this, to encourage the reader to question and re-interpret their own world. This is an important asset of any literary work: the ability to examine and illustrate ideas from non-scientific points of view, to include emotion and even passion, to call upon instinct and intuition to aid understanding—to approach reason through fancy, as evolution suggests must happen. Dickens made an attempt to highlight some of the issues that are raised when we ask questions like: “what is the nature of knowledge?”, “what is the purpose of education?”, and “what should teachers teach?” The close analysis of *Hard Times*, against its historical background, has shown not only that a literary work has a contribution to make to educational thought, but that *Hard Times* is a worthy object of study and deserves a special place on the Dickens bookshelf.

### **What now for these times?**

My own close reading of *Hard Times* has even forced me to re-evaluate my own responses to the differences between fact and fiction. It also indicated areas of further investigation. Clearly literature does have a special contribution to make to educational questions, firstly by its nature, and secondly in the individual insights available from particular texts.

The evidence of the evolutionary heritage of narrative-type information processing suggests that further study may reveal new educational possibilities. I have mentioned Skinner’s pigeons on several occasions. However, even after nearly seventy years there is no theoretical foundation for his observations or the behavioural aspects of educational psychology that have grown from it. It may yet be that consideration of a narrative construction of thought will provide clues to this non-factual process of learning. Further study may discover a link with the emotional responses that readers have to literature; Dickens’s efforts “to stimulate and rouse the public soul to a compassionate or indignant feeling that [things clearly wrong] must not be” (Dickens in Storey, Tillotson, & Easson, 1993, p. 405) may not be misguided.

Literary works form an almost inexhaustible pool from which to draw. Their historical location gives a modern reader access to information not otherwise available, and access

to the thoughts and fancies of the past—to that which formed today. As with *Hard Times* a literary work can be read as an experiment, with the results not available to the original author; there must be more of such works yet to be uncovered. *Hard Times* itself is not a completed text, there is more insight to be gained from further study: the relationship between Dickens and Bounderby seems likely to be a fruitful area of investigation, and how an ethical education system might be constructed is yet to be determined. Different literary cultures may provide even more valuable insights than would be available only through the English language, both through non-English interpretations of English works and through studies of non-English works.

As long as there exists a literary work, it will transcend the barrier of time and place. There will continue to be new ways of reading the world revealed through new ways of reading the words.

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