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The Influence of the Victorian Society on Dickens's *Hard Times*

Završni rad

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Abstract

In *Hard Times* Dickens provides an insight into the Victorian world. He takes on the role of a social commentator, criticizes the industrialization of England and reveals among the most urgent issues of the time the mechanization of human beings, social inequality, extinction of fancy as a consequence of industrialization, and the unjust position of women. He depicts a time suffused with advancement and change in every aspect of life and exposes the downsides of such a prosperous era. The fictional city of Coketown is represented as a mirror, reflecting 19th century England. Due to industrialization and factories everything ultimately becomes mechanized. Reason takes over the heart, consequently destroying all that is natural, leaving its victims empty inside. Dickens's Coketown inhabitants know of nothing more than labor and their worldview is based purely on facts. Within an avid industrial society, money is the initiator, which results in all spheres of life revolving around it. Capitalism is a double-edged sword for it both improves and wrecks the society. Precisely this cognition is central in *Hard Times*, where Dickens, by means of juxtaposing his upper and working class characters unveils its disadvantages. He wants to put a stop to the extinction of fancy and urges his fellowmen to hold on to their humanity. The novel's message is a warning, for if we chase only after the materialistic in life, and allow it to suppress our joy and imagination, in the end, we are no better than the industrial tools, just a bunch of machines.

Keywords: *Hard Times*, Victorian world, industrialization, facts, capitalism

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....2

Table of Contents.....3

Introduction.....5

1. Industrial Expansion in the Victorian Era…….5
2. Dickens as a Social Commentator.....6
3. *Hard Times* – Dickens's Critique of the Industrial Society.....8

3.1. Coketown – a City of Fact.....8

3.2. The Mechanization of Human Beings.....9

3.2.1. 'Hands' Rather than Individuals.....10

3.3. Social Inequality – Class Division.....12

3.3.1. Blackpool – Dickens's Symbol for the Oppressed.....13

3.4. A World of Fact.....15

3.4.1. Extinction of Fancy.....15

3.4.2. Child Labor.....16

3.4.2.1.Emotional vs. Intellectual Growth of Children.....17

3.4.3. Opposition between the Capitalists and the Circus People.....19

3.5. The Position of Women.....22

3.5.1. Louisa.....22

3.5.2. Sissy.....23

3.5.3. Rachael.....24

Conclusion.....25

Works Cited.....26

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to give an overview of the Victorian Age and the lifestyle of its society, with an emphasis on the disadvantages derived from the sudden economic rise in 19th century England. This will be accomplished by taking a closer look at Charles Dickens's social novel *Hard Times*. As a critique of the industrial society of this period, it reveals the most urgent issues of the time in particular the mechanization of human beings, social inequality, extinction of fancy as a consequence of industrialization, and the unjust position of women.

In the first part of my paper, I give a general background of the period and provide information about Dickens's other literary work. Section two focuses on *Hard Times* and the issues it raises, beginning with the description of Dickens's fictional town of Coketown, followed by a depiction of that time's foremost byproduct, human mechanization, with an emphasis on 'Hands.' Hereafter comes the class division where I discuss the prevailing social inequality and its main representative, Stephen Blackpoll. Then I present the clash between the mind and the heart, by giving an insight into the Victorian world of fact. The focus is on the evanescence of fancy, child abuse and the contrast between the circus people and the capitalists. To conclude, I present Dickens's critique of the women's position through his three main female characters, Louisa, Sissy and Rachael.

1. Industrial Expansion in the Victorian Period

The Victorian Age was a long period of prosperity in the English history. Innovation and change were its main features, which largely contributed to the conversion in the structure of English society. The transition from an agricultural to an industrial society led to drastic changes in the lifestyle and the consciousness of the Victorians. Advancement in fields such as technology and science, along with new ideologies and a shift in the religious sphere, causes a formation of a worldview that ultimately turns everything upside down. For the first time Englishmen have the opportunity to improve both themselves and their surroundings by means of these new inventions. However, the changes reflected themselves positively as well as negatively on each aspect of daily life. At first glance, the transformation appears idyllic since much is simplified and somewhat easier. Everyday life no longer boils down only to human labor, but also to machinery, which from then on becomes man's closest collaborator. However, despite bringing numerous advantages, this modernization has a dark side beneath the surface. Everything being industrialized, the world turns into a cold place and its inhabitants into nothing more than a workforce.

2. Dickens as a Social Commentator

In his fiction Dickens casts a light on many issues arising from the Victorian Era. Evidently, he views the literature as a weapon in the fight against world's irregularities. The idea of the novel mirroring reality is well presented in his literary work, particularly in his novels *Hard Times*, *The Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist*, *Christmas Carol* and *Bleak House*. His novels prove that the pen is indeed mighty: "Dickens believed in the ethical and political potential of literature, and the novel in particular, and he treated his fiction as a springboard

for debates about moral and social reform. In his novels of social analysis Dickens became an outspoken critic of unjust economic and social conditions" (Diniejko). His works emphasize mainly the dominant social injustice, which proves itself to go hand in hand with the prosperity's foremost byproduct, capitalism. Being a representative of the lower-class citizens himself, in his work he accentuates the injustice brought upon the laborers: "Dickens's deep social commitment and awareness of social ills are derived from his traumatic childhood experiences when his father was imprisoned in the Marshalsea Debtors' Prison … and he at the age of twelve worked in a shoe-blacking factory" (Diniejko).

The Pickwick Papers is Dickens's earliest writing, where, the social commentary is not as prominent as in his later work. His negative attitude towards industrialization permeates *Hard Times* and *Oliver Twist*, whereas in Pickwick Papers everything is presented in a rather comical way, with a critique that is not as sharp but is always present: "Although the novel was designed to be comic, it is not free of Dickens's characteristic social commentary, which would become more pronounced in his later novels" (Diniejko).

In *Oliver Twist*, however, Dickens's role of a justice enforcer comes more to the fore. While initially engaged with individual's lives, eventually he begins to speak on behalf of the whole society and its structure. *Oliver Twist* is the first to introduce the theme of England's Condition. It exposes several pressing issues of the time, mainly the ones concerning orphans and the Victorian workhouse. The reader witnesses that workhouses have nothing more to offer than mere malice and inhumanity: "Dickens gives the most uncompromising critique of the Victorian workhouse, which was run according to a regime of prolonged hunger, physical punishment, humiliation and hypocrisy" (Diniejko).

The above mentioned theme of child abuse is equally dominant in his *Christmas Carol* as is Dickens's everlasting theme of Capitalism. Dickens criticizes human selfishness and avarice when it comes to money. The more one owns, the less a man they are: "Merry

Christmas! What right have you to be merry? What reason have you to be merry? You're poor enough" (Dickens 8).

In *Bleak House*, his social commentary concerns mainly the Victorian administrative incompetence. Corruption does not spare any sphere of daily life, not even the judicial one: "*Bleak House* provides not only a satirical look at the legal system in England, which often destroys the lives of innocent people, but also offers a vast panorama of Victorian England" (Diniejko). However, equally to the ones already mentioned, this one is no exception when it comes to naming issues such as class division and dereliction of the poor. Dickens continues to unveil the human misery: "Jo lives — that is to say, Jo has not yet died – in a ruinous place known to the like of him by the name of Tom-all-Alone's … Now, these tumbling tenements contain, by night, a swarm of misery" (Dickens 182-183).

Though always different only in certain segments, all Dickens's novels have one thing in common, a moral message. The one thing that nobody should ever forget is how to be a decent man. People need to turn their backs on materialistic things and concentrate on what really matters in life, namely, love, joy and harmony. *Pickwick Papers, Oliver Twist*, *Christmas Carol*, and *Bleak House* are all means in an attempt to gain justice, and restore balance and humanity among his fellowmen. The aforementioned topics found in the discussed works also stretch throughout Dickens's *Hard Times*, and will be discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

3. Hard Times – Dickens's Critique of the Industrial Society

As already mentioned, in his novel *Hard Times Dickens* criticizes numerous economic, social, and moral aspects of his society. The novel describes Dickens's perception of the English society in this time of great technological advancement and urbanization and the

addressed issues comprise, among others, the loss of humanity in mechanized surroundings, social inequality as a result of a capital driven society, and discrimination of women in this male-dominated world.

3.1. Coketown – a City of Fact

His repulsive attitude towards industrialization is visible in the creation of the soulless town of Coketown. This fictional town is the most striking example of its ruthless reign: “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” (Dickens 19). It is presented as a city of Fact, a city whose residents are monotonous products of a cold, materialistic world. Everything is drab, with days passing by and each the same as the previous. Its main feature is ugliness, deriving from the machinery and numerous factories. The streets are deserted, covered with ashes and black smoke: “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” (Dickens 19). Under the influence of this inhumane system all that is natural vanishes. Every aspect of life is based on rationalism, causing its urban society to lack individuality: “inhabited by people equally like one another, who all went in and out at the same hours, with the same sound upon the same pavements, to do the same work, and to whom every day was the same as yesterday and to-morrow, and every year the counterpart of the last and the next” (Dickens 19). The inhabitants are required to cast away their feelings. There is no room for affection, amusement or imagination, whatsoever: “Fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the material aspect of the town; fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the immaterial” (Dickens 19).

3.2. The Mechanization of Human Beings

Machinery usage disables the development of real human relationships, which is precisely the reason why people behave as though they are robots and not human beings: “Coketown, the city of Fact, foreshadows the emergence of a monstrous mass urban society based on rationalism, anonymity, dehumanisation” (Diniejko). Everything revolves around manufacture and material things, ultimately causing its participants to become the victims of their own greed: “In *Hard Times* human relationships are contaminated by economics.” (Diniejko). Dickens indicates the inevitable connection between money and corruption. The more lucre one holds, the less humanity is left inside of them. As it is the case with manufacturers, who, instead of looking at and treating their employees as decent human beings, equate them with machinery: “Bounderby refuses to acknowledge that the factory workers are people of value, but instead separates them from himself … He calls them “pests of the earth” and “you people” … ” (Jung). Moreover, as individuals, they are of no importance, only as a collective do they serve a purpose. They are simply means by which the ones, who already have it all, can gain even more. Consequently, such a lifestyle causes the victims to lose their self-concept and be deprived of their identities. Furthermore, Dickens points out the fatality of industrialization when talking about the human heart and soul. Life under such circumstances throws the basic human values into obscurity. People no longer know of joy or normal interpersonal relations, but only of hard work and suffering in the struggle for survival: “That exactly in the ratio as they worked long and monotonously, the craving grew within them for some physical relief – some relaxation, encouraging good humour and good spirits, and giving them a vent” (Dickens 21).

The town itself is in some way like an inexorable machine. The factories, together with its manpower, are simply pieces of a system that incessantly circulates from dawn to dusk: “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" (Dickens 19). Dickens's Coketown embodies the 19th Century England situation, when, by means of industrialization, the country becomes a place of alienation, and the folk simply a tool in the endeavor of gaining more material wealth.

3.2.1. 'Hands' Rather than Individuals

Industrialization causes the emergence of a special kind of a race, whose main feature are ironically the shackles, that simultaneously kill and feed them: "The raise of industrialization ruined the traditional way of life of the labouring poor and turned them into a working class or proletariat. Those poor were breadwinners, who work with their hands for a cash wage" (Meddouri). The workers, shaped by their time's convictions, fail to consider themselves as individuals worthy of happiness, but rather as a device: "People's living is crippled; they work continually without rest, with less wages and condemned to live in miserable and oppressed conditions. They are treated by their employers like items but not humans" (Meddouri). Laborers are required to dispose emotions and cede place to reason, to be perfect machines. Dickens indicates that spending your life in front of a machine eventually makes you one: "their movements are conditioned by 'the tyranny of the clock' each morning and evening, and by their working side by side with the machine, clearly displays the mechanization of the workers physical side of their lives" (Meddouri). Furthermore, if the underprivileged show any sign of 'ingratitude,' the manufacturers have the power to replace them and thereby deprive them of their only bread and butter. However, aware of the hopeless situation, they nevertheless find a way to provide resistance, even if it is just a whatnot like the refusal of

taking a bow: "'Now, Stephen,' said Mr. Bounderby, 'what's the matter with you?' Stephen made a bow. Not a servile one — these Hands will never do that!" (Dickens 63).

The 'Hands' adorns their greatest virtue and that is solidarity. It is by means of working class that Dickens stresses the importance of sticking together in both good and bad times. Brotherhood and unity come to light especially in their intention to rebel against their oppressors: "Oh, my friends and fellow-sufferers, and fellow-workmen, and fellow-men! I tell you that the hour is come, when we must rally round one another as One united power" (Dickens 123). This nation knows of no better than hard work. Working incessantly in factories, under impossible conditions, day after day, causes them to practically leave their bones behind on these ruthless machines: "Their working and living conditions were extremely bad; they worked for unbroken and long hours, up to sixteen hours a day" (Meddouri). Even when the work finally finishes for the day, going home is not particularly a thing to look forward to. Placed lowest on the social ladder, these people do not have much of a right to choose when it comes to home: "They live in narrow, unsanitary hoses, and their lives never change. There is also a strict uniformity in everything, and the workers do not have even time to relax and enjoy themselves" (Meddouri).

Lastly, Dickens makes it clear to the reader that all the money in the world is worth nothing, if a man is hollow inside. Each and every laborer illiterate and poor as he may be will always be a better person than all the rich put together. It is clearly visible that the message Dickens tries to convey is one of freedom and equality. With *Hard Times,* he demands that every person, regardless of their social background and class affiliation, receives basic human rights and leads a decent life under the motto 'live and let live.'

3.3. Social Inequality – Class Division

Hard Times mirrors the evanescence of humanity in the Victorian Age. People are not evaluated according to their personality, but rather by the number of their possessions. Throughout the novel, Dickens places in the center the most obvious example of injustice regarding the Victorian Age, inequality in the social structure. Industrialization causes the emergence of class division, whereby through the painstaking work of the poor, the rich are becoming richer, and the paupers keep getting poorer in an attempt to stay alive. Dickens, a devoted humanist, puts an emphasis on the living situation of the lower class, intending to spread awareness within people in terms of injustice surrounding them: "He exposes the exploitation of the working class by unfeeling industrialists and the damaging consequences of propagating factual knowledge (statistics) at the expense of feeling and imagination" (Diniejko). On the one hand, Dickens places the capitalists, the moral monsters with their comfortable extravagant lives, who are recognizable by their careless tea drinking. Dickens clearly embodies this idea in his two greed and reason driven gentleman, Mr Bounderby and Mr Gradgrind: "that they never knew what they wanted; that they lived upon the best, and bought fresh butter; and insisted on Mocha coffee, and rejected all but prime parts of meat, and yet were eternally dissatisfied and unmanageable" (Dickens 21).

In the eyes of these men, people are merely objects, whose only function is labor. Under the rule of bankers and manufacturers, the folk is purely a mean in the achievement of wealth. This is evident in the way the capitalists treat their workforce, looking at them not as fellow men, but rather as 'Hands.'

Conversely, the reader is presented with the perspective of the ones, whom life did nothing to spare in any respect. Knowing of no better than hard work, the working class serves as a

mirror reflecting the 19th Century England situation. Probably the best representative of the underprivileged is no other than the character of Stephen Blackpool.

3.3.1. Blackpool – Dickens's Symbol for the Oppressed

Industrialization is the cause for schism within the society. Unlike the upper-class representatives, the lower class representative is a rather miserable man: "In the hardest working part of Coketown … lived a certain Stephen Blackpool, forty years of age. Stephen looked older, but he had had a hard life" (Dickens 56). Years of very little of anything other than factory work, make it pretty difficult for this man to find any pleasure in life. As if the non-ending work in the factory is not enough, when he comes home, he has to cope with his alcoholic wife. Here again the desperate living conditions of the laborers come to the fore, since it appears that the only way to escape reality is to drink yourself into oblivion: "A creature so foul to look at, in her tatters, stains and splashes, but so much fouler than that in her moral infamy, that it was a shameful thing even to see her" (Dickens 60). Although Stephen expresses his desire for a divorce, in order to experience joy at least in terms of love, his request is rejected. On the other hand, Mr. Bounderby, as a representative of the upper-class, has a full right to terminate a marriage anytime he wants. Once again, the hypocrisy of the rich is most prominent. Although they profess to be 'virtuous' people, who believe in the concept and purity of marriage: "You didn't take your wife for fast and for loose; but for better or worse" (Dickens 67), they can afford to simply pay for ending a marriage, as it is evident in Bounderby's statement: "But it's not for you at all. It costs money. It costs a mint of money" (Dickens 67).

Dickens criticizes the capitalistic stance that a man is worth only as much as he owns. Precisely this is visible in Bounderby's mockery of Blackpool's affiliation to the working

class: “You don’t expect to be set up in a coach and six, and to be fed on turtle soup and venison, with a gold spoon, as a good many of ‘em do! Mr. Bounderby always represented this to be the sole, immediate, and direct object of any Hand who was not entirely satisfied” (Dickens 63). Furthermore, what makes the character of Stephen Blackpool so special is his determination to be an individual for once and not viewed only as machinery. When the ‘Hands’ raise rebellion against their lifestyle, Stephen deviates, consequently being expelled and turning into a lone wolf. Once sharing same heart and soul, from this point on, he and the laborers now are no better than strangers: “The stranger in the land who looks into ten thousand faces for some answering look and never finds it, is in cheering society as compared with him who passes ten averted faces daily, that were once the countenances of friends” (Dickens 129). Though from that point on a loner, it appears to be a small price to pay for heroism, for he may be on his own, but, by the end of the day, Stephen is the only one with a true identity. He is true proof of how one does not necessarily need money to be a decent person. Even though he lives in just one poor little room, it is nevertheless always tidy and in order: “A few books and writings were on an old bureau in a corner, the furniture was decent and sufficient, and, though the atmosphere was tainted, the room was clean” (Dickens 60). Blackpool may be illiterate and materially deficient, but he will, nonetheless, always be a better person than any of the rich people. However, Stephen Blackpool has one flaw that ultimately costs him everything, his naivety. Apparently a good person tends to see good in others which is a fatal mistake. When Tom makes his proposal, Stephen blindly follows the instructions, only to find himself being framed for robbery: “What should you say to;’ here he violently exploded: ‘to a Hand being in it?’ ‘I hope,’ said Harthouse, lazily, ‘not our friend Blackpot?’’Say Pool instead of Pot, sir,’ returned Bounderby, ‘and that’s the man’” (Dickens 164-165). Being a part of a mechanized world, he is a victim of the rich people’s greed. He stands for the ruthless life forced upon them, depriving them of their humanity and ultimately

turning them into slaves: “Blackpool is used throughout the book as a metonym for the factory; he is internal to the factory” (Jung). Dickens embodies the character of Stephen in such a way that his fate is from the outset predetermined. Once a ‘hand’ always a ‘hand’: “Dickens uses Blackpool to make it clear that there is no way out for the factory workers” (Jung). In the end, it becomes obvious that there is no escape from this prison, called life.

3.4. A World of Fact

Victorian England is a place of not only natural, but also human extinction. All this life’s beauty touched by such a ruthless lifestyle gradually fades away, leaving devastating consequences for mankind behind. In order to keep fighting it needs human happiness and love, which are almost impossible to reach under the industrial regime. This regime dictates the reign of reason over heart resulting in a world filled with nothing but pure facts. Dickens provides a detailed insight into the extinction of fancy, with examples of child labor and the confrontation between the representatives of fact, capitalists and the ones embodying fancy, circus people.

3.4.1. Extinction of Fancy

As the basis for *Hard Times,* Dickens places the theme of confrontation between Fancy and Fact. This theme permeates his entire novel, looming in every segment of the plot. Dickens stresses precisely this struggle as to depict the outcome of a long-term exposure to a mechanical and rational world. The brains behind a functional industrial society is the mind, whereas the impact of the human heart, being constantly in the mind’s shadow, gradually fades away. Facts solely are wanted in life: “You can only form the minds of reasoning

animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them" (Dickens 1). The basic human values simply disappear, leaving just a bunch of soulless bodies behind. Emotions, imagination and reverie are sacrificed for the progress of reason and logic: "Herein lay the spring of the mechanical art and mystery of educating the reason without stooping to the cultivation of the sentiments and affections. Never wonder" (Dickens 43). Dickens, working in favor of the human heart, uses this theme to show his fellowmen the right path and put an end to this mechanical lifestyle in the preservation of our humanity. This rivalry between mind and heart comes especially to the fore when talking about Dickens's depiction of children's education and the contrast among the circus people and the capitalists.

3.4.2. Child Labor

The exploitation of children is probably the most acute issue in Dickens's works. In the industrial time even the youngest ones were not spared when it came to painstaking work in factories. The children were divided into two basic groups, the 'parish apprentice' and the 'free labor' depending on whether they were lucky enough to have parents or not. The first belong to the lucky ones who, although forced to work, at least had a family. They were under parental supervision and free to leave any time they want, without the government's interfering: "Private factory owners could not forcibly subjugate "free labour" children; they could not compel them to work in conditions their parents found unacceptable" (McElroy). The second group consists, of course, of orphans with no one to care for their wellbeing, except for the ones who could not care less, the government officials. The orphans were exploited to the extreme, and as if it is not enough that they work for free, they do not get as much as decent food for a reward: "These children were destitute and starving. Their only refuge was the factory. It saved them, in the strict sense of the term, from death by

starvation" (Reed). They were viewed as some kind of rubbish that was constantly in the way and needed to be disposed of. The perverted mindset of the 19th Century England population is in this aspect best visible, for instead of investing effort in finding a suitable home for the poor children, the government simply cannot wait to get rid of them: "since the passing of Hanway's Act in 1767 the child population in the workhouse had enormously increased, and the parish authorities were anxious to find relief from the burden of their maintenance" (Lawrence).

Dickens criticizes such a twisted society, where a child never gets to experience the real meaning of the word happy childhood. Laughter, game or joy, remain a mystery for the orphans. With the position of these children in mind, Dickens draws a parallel with his own life experience and the things he has been through in the youth. Besides the factory work, he goes into the problem of children's education and upbringing that will be discussed hereinafter.

3.4.2.1. Emotional vs. Intellectual Growth of Children

The industrial world revolves solely around reason. Such a mentality is instilled into the inhabitants starting from the earliest age, when instead of developing a healthy imagination, children learn exclusively facts: "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" (Dickens 1). With no exit in sight, as a result, they are brainwashed, permanently parroting just what their surroundings dictates: "In this life, we want nothing but Facts, sir; nothing but Facts" (Dickens 2)! Dickens points out the disastrous side effects of mechanization not only in the physical, but also in the mental sense - the body and the mind rot at the same time. He begins unveiling the distorted educational system of his time, with

the representation of an ordinary school day. The classroom resembles more a factory than an educational institution: “For, the boys and the girls sat on the face of the inclined plane in two compact bodies, divided up the centre by a narrow interval” (Dickens 5). The reason behind this apparent similarity is, of course, the attempt to make of the children a good future workforce. The disciples are required to observe each and every term purely logically and factually. In case they happen to forget this basic rule, they will be reminded over and over again until the teachers reach the desired outcome: “Why, then, you are not to see anywhere, what you don’t see in fact; you are not to have anywhere, what you don’t have in fact. What is called Taste, is only another name for Fact” (Dickens 5).

When asked to define something natural, the answer is to be the complete opposite; for a child’s emotional perception must never come to the fore. This is evident in Bitzer’s definition of a living being, such as the horse: “Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive” (Dickens 4). The natural extinction is in this part best evident, since instead of observing the horse as part of the nature, it is rather perceived as an object. Dickens is highly critical of such an educational system, for, having experienced it on his own skin, he is familiar with the scars it leaves behind. He equates the Victorian educational system with the children’s exploitation in the workhouses. They are prisoners of their reason shaped environment. Furthermore, regarding education, Dickens depicts best the aversion for the emotional, through his imagination prone character, Sissy Jupe. When she expresses her fondness of flowers, she gets rebuked: “If you please, sir, I am very fond of flowers,’ returned the girl. ‘Ay, ay, ay! But you mustn’t fancy,’ cried the gentleman… ‘You are not, Cecilia Jupe,’ Thomas Gradgrind solemnly repeated, ‘to do anything of that kind” (Dickens 6). The fact representatives regard reverie as no more than pure nonsense. Their viewpoint dictates the necessity of destroying fancy, for it distracts children from what really matters in life, intellectual improvement: “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" (Dickens 6). Moreover, the factual education reaches its peak when, driven by exclusively rational, one eventually destroys the lives of their own children. Tom and Louisa Gradgrind are brought up under the discipline of an "eminently practical father" (Dickens 149). Unlike Sissy who is surrounded by fancy, these two have not, a day in their lives, been given a chance to be children, since their father raised them strictly upon facts. Dickens deliberately introduces the circus scene, as to show the children's innate curiosity. Such an extensive education, and yet the desire for freedom prevails: "Thomas and you, to whom the circle of the sciences is open; Thomas and you, who may be said to be replete with facts; Thomas and you, here!' cried Mr. Gradgrind. 'In this degraded position! I am amazed" (Dickens 11). As though rationality in every segment of life was not enough: "Louisa, never wonder!" (Dickens 43), the children are named after the founders of capitalistic mindset and practicality: "Adam Smith and Malthus, two younger Gradgrinds, were out at lecture in custody" (Dickens 18). Consequently, the Tom and Louisa will never experience true happiness in life, for what is all this factual knowledge worth, if the children are dead inside: "I am sick of my life, Loo. I, hate it altogether, and I hate everybody except you,' said the unnatural young Thomas Gradgrind in the hair-cutting chamber at twilight" (Dickens 44). In other words, the more intellectual progress the children make, the rustier the emotional sphere will be.

3.4.3. Opposition between the Capitalists and the Circus People

In the novel, Dickens introduces a contrast, which appears to be the most prominent between two entirely different groups of people, the capitalists and the circus people.

On the one hand, he introduces the reader to a group of people, known particularly for adorning their lives at the cost of others. The representatives are two extremely materialistically minded gentlemen, whose heart is nothing more than a mere muscle: “Then came Mr. Gradgrind and Mr. Bounderby… both eminently practical, who could, on occasion, furnish more tabular statements derived from their own personal experience ... — that these same people were a bad lot altogether... ” (Dickens 21).Their world is a one of fact. For Mr. Gradgrind in particular, facts make up each and every part of daily life: “THOMAS GRADGRIND, sir. A man of realities. A man of facts and calculations” (Dickens 2). His school provides the knowledge of the type of things that really matter and not the ones obtained in a circus tent. The belief in the power of mind is the thing that keeps them going in life. For them time is money: 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” (Dickens 26). Their world revolves around lucre. The more of it one holds, the greedier they become with no moral boundaries in sight whatsoever. Mr. Bounderby’s treatment of his workers is a perfect example of this cognition: “The factory workers were treated like animals, they got just enough wages so they could keep themselves alive, and their working hours were stretched to the extremes” (Thoroddsen). As long as Bounderby profits from it, such a mode is considered all right, for in the eyes of manufacturers, the end justifies the means. This insensitivity is clearly visible in the words directed toward Sissy when she loses her father: “Your father has absconded — deserted you — and you mustn’t expect to see him again as long as you live” (Dickens 33). Moreover, Dickens plays with the comprehension that, ironically, those who have the most are actually the stingiest ones. He displays it to the reader in Reaping, when Tom steals a hundred and fifty pounds: “Of course, they will be punished with the utmost rigour of the law, as notice-boards observe,’ replied James Harthouse, ‘and serve them right. Fellows who go in for Banks must take the consequences” (Dickens 166). Ultimately, the corruption of human

nature, when it comes to money, is evident in Bounderby's rejection of his own flesh and blood. While continuously informing everyone of his sad destiny as an abandoned child, in reality he is the one to walk out on his own mother just because she comes from a lower social rank: "She was a woman of family, and wanted to stick to me, but I wouldn't have it, and got rid of her" (Dickens 263). Conversely, Dickens introduces a group led exclusively by emotions. These people may not be a mirror of intellectuals or even beauty for that matter, and yet their value for the industrial world is priceless: "Yet there was a remarkable gentleness and childishness about these people, a special inaptitude for any kind of sharp practice, and an untiring readiness to help and pity one another" (Dickens 31). Dickens presents the circus as the only leftover of humanity in this dehumanized world: "The circus, in depositing its best qualities into the industrial world, has made the place human" (Young). Fancy is, unlike the capitalistic stance towards it, the essence of these people's existence: "They cared so little for plain Fact, these people" (Dickens 33). The benefit of their presence is primarily evident in their general purpose of entertainment. They amuse people and thus embellish their lives. However, the basic role of the circus in this novel is irrefutably to show that compassion in such a society has not yet completely vanished. This role is evident in several parts of the novel. The first one concerns the circus people's reaction to Bounderby's insensitivity when discovered of Sissy's father's disappearance: "The men muttered 'Shame!' and the women 'Brute!' and Sleary, in some haste, communicated the following hint, apart to Mr. Bounderby" (Dickens 33). Moreover, precisely Sleary is the one who, sympathizing with Sissy saves Tom in the end. Finally, if it were not for Sissy, Louisa would never realize the true values of life: "It is Sissy's compassion and love for Louisa that makes her so effective in the second half" (Young). Though their world is in many aspects somewhat different from the one led by an ordinary person, they are good natured, honest and moral people: "there ith a love in the world, not all Thelf-intereth after all, but thomething very different" (Dickens

262). In the eyes of capitalists they are only: “wonder, idleness, and folly” (Dickens 11), but they do not know that those three provide the circus people with an internal satisfaction, they will never get to experience. Nonetheless, its message of “Faith, Hope, and Charity” (Dickens 266) remains a guide in a mechanized world, for as long as they exist our humanity will never fully be lost.

3.5. The Position of Women

Dickens raises the issue of the women’s position during the industrialization period and in *Hard Times* we can clearly see his concern with their situation. In order to reveal the lifestyle of women and their rights in a male dominated world, such as it was the Victorian age, he introduces three main female characters, Louisa, Sissy and Rachael, whose fates happen to be so alike, and yet so different.

3.5.1. Louisa

Dickens’s first character is a member of the ruling, wealthy social stratum of Coketown. In the novel, precisely Louisa’s social background is the one thing responsible for shaping her as a person and ultimately determining her destiny. Under the pressure and the supervision of her highly practical father, she is raised upon bare facts in life. Such upbringing is the cause for failure in Louisa’s life when it comes to love and happiness. She is incapable of feeling, for prohibited from using her heart; human emotions remain a mystery to her. The apathy emerging from such a lifestyle is evident in her response when asked to marry her father’s friend: “There seems to be nothing there but languid and monotonous smoke. Yet when the night comes, Fire bursts out” (Dickens 89). As she never had a chance to experience true love,

Louisa agrees without a moment of hesitation whatsoever. Through her character the traditional role of women comes best to the fore. She is not expected to have an opinion or think about her own needs for that matter, but rather she should be a Stepford wife and do as ordered. God forbid she should do anything except for sitting quietly, looking pretty: "Her father thought so as he looked at her. She was pretty. Would have been self-willed (he thought in his eminently practical way) but for her bringing-up" (Dickens 11). During the reign of Queen Victoria their task was simple, which is reflected also in *Hard Times*. Being a woman, she is supposed to let the men do the thinking and be satisfied with her place in the house. Louisa, however, becomes in the course of the novel a perfect example of the desolation triggered by such mindset. A life of doing nothing else, but fulfilling other people's wishes causes her to decay inside. When she meets James Harthouse, she becomes aware of her unhappiness and for the first time realizes what she has been missing all along. This realization symbolizes the turning point of Louisa's character, for it gives her strength to ultimately confront her father and speak her mind: "How could you give me life, and take from me all the inappreciable things that raise it from the state of conscious death? Where are the graces of my soul? Where are the sentiments of my heart" (Dickens 193)? With her act, Louisa makes the first step towards women's equality and a time of change.

3.5.2. Sissy

Dickens's second female character embodies all that is good in human nature. Sissy Jupe, symbolically a member of the circus, possesses indeed the ability to bring joy into other people's lives. Unlike Louisa, Sissy spent her entire life surrounded by fancy. This emotional freedom, she is brought up upon is the reason behind her incapability to fit in the world of facts and reason. Due to her sensitivity, in the eyes of the capitalists she is only a number.

Since she is not ‘their kind of people’, coming from a lower social class, she is ultimately rejected. Convinced that she is no good, consequently she gets inflicted with low self-esteem: “But, if you please, Miss Louisa,’ Sissy pleaded, ‘I am — O so stupid” (Dickens 50)! However, what the wealthy do not understand, is that no matter how poor this girl may be from the outside, she will always be extremely rich in the inside. As opposed to every other female character in the novel, life in a circus enables her to have a mind of her own. Precisely this straightforwardness is what makes Sissy so special, for, unlike Louisa, who raises her voice at the very end, Sissy’s is heard all along. With her character, Dickens gives as example of a woman as she should be during the Victorian age. Her possession of free will makes her unique. Introducing her character into the novel, he breaks the monotony of Coketown and its inhabitants.

3.5.3. Rachael

Dickens’s third female character is a poor woman, lacking everything in life except for a big heart and a beautiful soul. Rachael is a part of a ‘race’, located lowest on the social ladder. This is why she is not considered even to be a woman, but rather a part of the factory. Rachael is the real proof of how material things are meaningless in a person’s life when it comes to being a decent human being. She is in love with her friend’s husband, and though fully aware of that friend being the only thing standing between her and a true happiness, she nonetheless, nurtures her till the very end: “I came to do what little I could, Stephen; first, for that she worked with me when we were girls both, and for that you courted her and married her when I was her friend” (Dickens 74). No matter how badly it hurts inside, it is important to do the right thing in life. The sacrifice she is willing to endure for others is the greatest virtue this woman possesses. She has the ability to see the good in a person and bring out the best in

them. As Blackpool states: “Thou changest me from bad to good…Thou’rt an Angel; it may be, thou hast saved my soul alive” (Dickens 79)! When he compares her to a heavenly creature, she dismisses it, for a poor person cannot possibly be something so pure and perfect. Being a laborer does not even make her a person let alone an angel: “Angels are not like me. Between them, and a working woman fu’ of faults, there is a deep gulf set” (Dickens 79). However, it is very likely that Dickens intended to depict the character of Rachael as nothing less than a saint. Aside from her humanity, the goodness of her nature is visible in her faith. Despite her hard life she never rejects God, but rather encourages others to follow the basic values of Christianity. No one is immaculate, so learn to forgive and forget. Dickens uses this character not only to provide an example to all the women out there, but to all men. Regardless of the things life brings upon each and every of us, one must never forget about importance of giving a hand to your fellowmen in need.

Conclusion

The emergence of the industrial age brought many changes upon the English society. Although technological advancement brought about numerous advantages, it also brought many disadvantages. Charles Dickens uses fiction to indicate the numerous social and economic issues derived from it and criticizes the social and economic injustice. His novel *Hard Times* calls for an awakening of the 19th-Century Englishmen. As a social commentator, Dickens speaks out of problems brought to light with major industrial progress, such as bad position of women and the chase for money which results in social inequality. Mechanization in borderline cases can lead to dehumanization that is, losing our true self. Just because machines can contribute to the rise of the economy, people should not allow them to govern their lives. Dickens urges his fellowmen to unite forces and provide resistance in the struggle against machinery. In *Hard Times*, he proves that imagination and affection are essential in the preservation of our humanity, since the children had to thoroughly study the Facts, while they were born as emotional creatures. Therefore, it is the combination of the intellect and emotions, which constitutes us as human beings and the absence of either one results in a failure of our true nature.

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