

## **The Muddled State of Education and the Family in *Hard Times***

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Although Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* is considered his "industrial" novel, the state of education and its effect on society is arguably its main focus. Dickens takes to task the prevailing tendency to stress memorization of facts and figures to the detriment of the imagination and warns about the consequences of this kind of education. He stresses the importance of the imagination and the consequences of restraining it. Dickens calls the imagination something that demands "to be brought into healthy existence" and a "craving" that, if not satisfied, will "inevitably go wrong"(24). Thomas Gradgrind, the owner of a school who believes that fact is the sole foundation of education, uses his "model" children, Louisa and Thomas, to prove the validity of his educational theory. However, this experiment leads to tragic consequences that not only affect the Gradgrind family but also the fate of Stephen Blackpool, an innocent factory worker whose sad refrain "It's aw a muddle" echoes throughout the novel. As Dickens' division titles for the three parts of the novel indicate ("Sowing," "Reaping," and "Garnering"), Gradgrind and society will reap and garner what it sows. In this paper, I will examine 1) the kind of education that Gradgrind espouses, and 2) the outcome of this education on the Gradgrind family.

Dickens defines Thomas Gradgrind's educational creed at the beginning of the novel. The language of Gradgrind's opening speech perfectly illustrates the inflexibility and extreme nature of his theory of 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! (7)

The repetition of "nothing" as in "nothing but" and "nothing else" emphasizes Gradgrind's absolute adherence to fact alone. In addition, Dickens' capitalization of the word "Fact" lends the sense of it being almost god-like to Gradgrind. This aspect

is rather shocking, especially if one substitutes other words or principles for “fact.” In addition, Dickens informs the reader that Gradgrind is indoctrinating his own children to believe in the validity of fact alone.

To Gradgrind, children in general are like pots in which he intends to plant facts. He sees children as merely “vessels” or “little pitchers” to be filled and does not recognize them as individuals. Dickens reinforces this sense of objectifying children by having Gradgrind address Sissy Jupe as “Girl number 20” (8). He also looks at his own daughter as “his metallurgical Louisa” and his son as “mathematical Thomas,” viewing his own flesh and blood only in reference to some scientific subject. But the narrator also refers to Gradgrind himself as an object, comparing him to:

a kind of cannon loaded to the muzzle with facts, and prepared to blow them clear out of the regions of childhood at one discharge. He seemed a galvanizing apparatus, too, charged with a grim, mechanical substitute for the tender young imaginations that were to be stormed away. (26)

Gradgrind himself is described as a machine and as a weapon. This violent image of a gun blowing away children comes at the beginning of a chapter called “Murdering the Innocents.” Dickens thus implies that Gradgrind is figuratively killing or robbing his charges of their childhoods.

In addition, the nature of this kind of education is coercive and not conducive to independent thinking. Gradgrind admonishes Sissy Jupe for not being able to give the rote memorization type of definition of a horse that Bitzer can provide:

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. (9)

Bitzer represents Gradgrind’s ideal student who can mindlessly spout out textbook definitions on demand. Gradgrind expects students to regurgitate such facts without regard to whether they have any relevance to their lives or not. He and his cronies do not recognize that the children are human beings with feelings, opinions, and even questions of their own. They are not encouraged to think for themselves and, if they do, they are quickly beaten down as in the case of Sissy. Therefore, when asked questions, the students show more concern about not arousing a negative response rather than trying to figure out an answer on their own:

After a pause, one half of the children cried in chorus, "Yes, sir!" Upon which the other half, seeing in the gentleman's face that Yes was wrong, cried out in chorus, "No, sir!" (10)

Dickens also finds the teachers themselves to be part of the problem. Dickens describes the third gentleman in the classroom scene as a boxer "always in training, always with a system to force down the general throat"(10). With an adversarial, aggressive attitude toward the students, he and Gradgrind repeat their mantra, "Fact, fact, fact!" in a machine-gun like manner. When M'Choakumchild, the teacher Dickens compares to a mass-produced pianoforte leg and whose name almost sums up his teaching style, begins his lesson, his goal is to "fill each jar brim full" and thus "kill outright the robber Fancy lurking within" (12). M'Choakumchild is a product of teacher training schools during this time, an instructor without individuality or skill in teaching whose training consists of having "answered a volumes of head-breaking questions" from such disciplines as orthography, entymology, and syntax, to name a few (12). This is far from the kind of ideal expressed in the *Household Words* article, "School Keeping" where things apart from fact are emphasized:

...each teacher should throw the whole of his individuality into his work; to think out for himself a system that shall be himself; that shall be animated by his heart and brain, naturally and in every part; that shall beat as it were with his own pulse, breathe his own breath, and, in short, be alive." (Morley 500)

As Kenneth J. Fielding points out, Dickens's opinions about education were influenced by his friendship with Miss Burdett Coutts and the ideas published in a pamphlet called "Ashburton Prizes for the Teaching of 'Common Things.'" Dickens believed that loading a child's memory with unconnected, barren facts with no purpose was wrong and that it was more important for a teacher to be able to teach well rather than be particularly learned (Fielding 188). This is clearly the problem with people like M'Choakumchild: he is possessed of a lot of information but little teaching ability. Dickens portrays these educators as rough and demanding, having no human warmth and no concern about developing their students' minds; instead, they simply seek to force fact into each child and by doing so force out fancy.

Gradgrind not only lacks imagination, but also has a morbid fear of it. To him, books represent a threat. After he catches Louisa and Thomas at the circus, he worries about whether they had read something, whether "in spite of all precautions any idle

storybook can have got into the house?” (42). In regard to the library in Coketown, Gradgrind “greatly tormented his mind about what the people read in this library” (70). He teaches Sissy to think that the books she read to her father to comfort him are “wrong” and “destructive nonsense,” things that should not be mentioned— yet for Sissy’s father, Stephen, and the people of Coketown, books represent a way to release stress and a means of escape from their hardships. Gradgrind seeks to control access to books and thus kill the imagination. By doing this, he denies children and people in general an outlet or escape from the stress and worry of everyday life. He forces an unnatural restraint that will have dire consequences.

Fancy or the imagination is of primary importance to Dickens and is central to what he considered important for education. In a speech he gave in London in 1857 for warehousemen and clerks’s schools, he spoke of schools he disliked in the following way:

I don’t like that kind of school... where the bright, childish imagination is utterly discouraged, and where those bright, childish faces, which it is so very good for the wisest among us to remember in after life, when the world is too much with us early and late, are gloomily and grimly scared out of countenance; where I have never seen among the pupils, whether boys or girls, anything but little parrots and small calculating machines. (*Speeches* 241)

These comments describe the situation at the Gradgrind school. In addition, in *Household Words*, Dickens defends fairy literature and shows the importance of fancy in his article called “Fraud of the Fairies”:

We may assume that we are not singular in entertaining a very great tenderness for the fairy literature of our childhood. What 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. 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 the poor and aged, kind treatment of animals, the 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.* It has greatly helped to keep us, in some sense, ever young, by preserving through our worldly ways one slender track not overgrown with weeds,

where we may walk with children, sharing their delights.

... [A] nation without fancy, without some romance, never did, never can, never will, hold a great place under the sun. (184) (my italics)

This passage asserts that imagination allows people to rest after a hard day of work and fulfill their desire to get away from the hard realities of life. In addition, Dickens suggests that feeding the imagination with stories fosters qualities such as forbearance, consideration for others, and kindness and this can be connected to helping children develop a conscience. Dickens even goes as far as to say that a nation needs imagination for it to be great because, without it, people cannot develop a spirit of gentleness and mercy.

Dickens uses the terms “imagination” and “fancy” interchangeably and links them with many synonyms such as “wonder,” “romance,” and “charity.” David Sonstroem in “Fettered Fancy in *Hard Times*,” describes two aspects of imagination in Dickens: 1) imaginative play which is free from reality and connected to childhood and innocence; and 2) fellow feeling which allows people to feel empathy for the plight of others (520). Both aspects can be found in the circus where realities of fact and money-making have little value. Whether one has an imagination or not determines whether a person can understand other people, can believe in intangibles such as those relating to matters of the heart, can interpret what is meant beyond a literal sense. Imagination can bridge the gaps in communication that lead to misunderstanding and is also connected to belief and faith. Because Sissy has an imagination, she can empathize with her father’s troubles, believe in his love, and have faith that he will return in spite of evidence to the contrary. Lack of imagination or a failure to feed it, on the other hand, makes family relations problematic and unnatural as Dickens shows with the dysfunctional Gradgrind family.

The first unnatural and unhealthy relation in the family is between the parents. The Gradgrind marriage is clearly an unequal one. Dickens portrays Gradgrind as an educator capable of getting a seat in Parliament; he is thus a man of some ability and intelligence. However, Mrs. Gradgrind, like other mothers in Dickens, does not even have a first name and Gradgrind chooses to marry her simply because she has “no nonsense” about her. The narrator describes her in the following way:

Mrs. Gradgrind, a little, thin, white, pink-eyed bundle of shawls, of surprising feebleness, mental and bodily; who was always taking physic without any effect

and who, whenever she showed a symptom of coming to life, was *invariably stunned by some weighty piece of fact, tumbling on her*. (38) (my italics)

She resembles a sickly, frightened rabbit, living an oppressive existence dominated by her husband and his philosophy of fact. Whenever she attempts to communicate with her husband, she is subdued by his domineering way and gives up. Caught between her husband and Bounderby, the narrator describes her as looking “like an indifferently executed transparency of a small female figure, without enough light behind it.” She is reduced to a thing and one with little substance. By being constantly pushed down by these men, she, like the students in the classroom, is beaten to submission. Mrs. Gradgrind feels that if she does not give in, she’ll “never hear the end of it” and this is her constant refrain. Her husband’s neglect also influences the attitude of her children towards her. She is a wife and mother, the person who should be instrumental in holding the family together— yet she is very isolated and very alone. At one point she even says that she wishes she did not have a family.

Although Dickens portrays her in an insignificant light, Mrs. Gradgrind serves an important role as the first victim of her husband’s enforced style of education. She can only parrot her husband’s ideas to her children, admonishing them to “go and be somethingological directly” (19). She may appear to be an “absolute idiot” but one wonders whether her marriage to Gradgrind brought this about? Marriage to a man consumed by one ideology rather than raising her has actually crippled her. From the time of her marriage, she admits that her head began to ache. Her sickness seems to come from being treated as a nonentity, as “transparent” and a mere bundle of shawls. Her sad fate serves as a sort of warning to her daughter should she follow the same path.

While in life, Mrs. Gradgrind has no power to play an important role in her children’s lives, at her death, she has a moment of unconscious understanding. She shares her realization with Louisa:

You learnt a great deal, Louisa, and so did your brother. Ologies of all kinds from morning till night.... But there is something— not an ology at all— that your father has missed, or forgotten, Louisa. I don’t know what it is. I have often sat with Sissy near me, and thought about it. I shall never get its name now. But your father may. It makes me restless. I want to write to him, to find out, for God’s sake, what it is. (149-150)

Mrs. Gradgrind recognizes that something is missing from the education of her children, something that even her husband does not realize. Louisa, like her mother, has an inkling about this as well and in this death scene, mother and daughter share a painful awareness about their lives. This scene shows that Mrs. Gradgrind does have an imagination, but like her daughter's, its growth has been stunted by the relentless weight of facts.

The results of the Gradgrindian education can best be appreciated by examining the fates of the Gradgrind children. The narrator describes their educational background in the following passage:

They had been lectured at, from their tenderest years; coursed, like little hares. Almost as soon as they could run alone, they had been made to run to the lecture-room. The first object with which they had an association, or of which they had a remembrance, was a large black board with a dry Ogre chalking ghastly white figures on it.

Not that they knew, by name or nature, anything about an Ogre. Fact forbid! I only use the word to express a monster in a lecturing castle, with Heaven knows how many heads manipulated into one, taking childhood captive, and dragging it into gloomy statistical dens by the hair. (12-13)

Like their mother, they are compared to rabbits and their father is made out to be a lecturing monster, depriving them of childhood in his den. Gradgrind scolds them with "Never wonder!" and he seeks to educate "the reason without stooping to the cultivation of the sentiments and affections" (41). Home for the Gradgrind children is not a comfortable, nurturing place— rather it is one in which the two eldest seek escape. Although Gradgrind has 5 children, Dickens only acquaints the reader in detail with two of them: Louisa and Thomas, Jr. Gradgrind also favors one over the other, admitting on several occasions that Louisa is his favorite child. Dickens himself also develops the character of Louisa with more care, detail and sympathy than he does with Tom whom he treats with open dislike and contempt. In addition, Louisa, as the heroine of the story, is the central victim of Gradgrind's educational theory.

From the beginning, Louisa, like her mother, senses there is something missing from her life and she suffers from a lethargy that she cannot explain. As with her mother, her mental state comes out as a physical symptom. Dickens introduces her when she is at the circus, having stolen away from her studies to see something that

her father has forbidden. When she is discovered by her father, she admits her curiosity and Dickens describes her in the following way:

... struggling through the dissatisfaction of her face, there was a light with nothing to rest upon, a fire with nothing to burn, a starved imagination keeping life in itself somehow, which brightened its expression. Not with the brightness natural to cheerful youth, but with uncertain, eager, doubtful flashes, which had something painful in them, analogous to the changes on a blind face groping its way. (15)

Dickens here refers to a fire, which is an image that he closely associates with Louisa. She is always looking into a fire, searching for something. This also shows that she has a passionate nature that is being warped by the upbringing that is starving her imagination. She feels like a blind person, looking for something to believe in, uncertain about life and unable to be optimistic about it. When her father scolds her for “degrading” herself by such conduct, she tells him, “I was tired, Father. I have been tired a long time” (16). This is a rather odd statement for a child of 15 or 16 and the literal-minded Gradgrind cannot comprehend it. When she cannot explain the reason for her tiredness in clear, factual terms, only saying that she is tired of everything, her father refuses to hear anymore, accusing her of being “childish.” Amazingly, he is criticizing her for being a child! From the beginning, Dickens shows Gradgrind’s inability to talk with or understand his children, even his favorite child.

Gradgrind’s attempt to keep out any vestige of fancy naturally makes Louisa thirst to explore the unknown territory of the heart. Louisa’s curiosity about love, marriage, and father-daughter relationships comes out when she speaks with Sissy Jupe. She asks Sissy if her father loved her mother and is surprised to hear Sissy’s completely confident response about her father’s love for her mother and herself:

“Oh yes! As dearly as he loves me. Father loved me first, for her sake. He carried me about with him when I was quite a baby. We have never been asunder from that time.”

“Yet he leaves you now, Sissy?”

“Only for my good. Nobody understands him as I do; nobody knows him as I do....” (48)

Louisa’s experience with her parents is quite different and it is hard for her to understand Sissy’s complete faith in her father’s love despite the fact that he appears



to have abandoned her. Sissy also tells Louisa of reading stories to comfort her father. Louisa thus discovers a supportive kind of father-daughter relationship that she has never had. Despite the physical distance, Sissy is still close to her father emotionally while, ironically, despite a close physical proximity, Louisa remains emotionally distant from her father. Sissy gives Louisa a glimpse of a parent-child relationship where there is true communication and understanding, made possible by the imagination.

The scene which most emphasizes how the lack of imagination makes communication and understanding impossible is when Louisa and Gradgrind discuss Bounderby's proposal. At her moment of need, Louisa realizes that her father has no idea about her true feelings. Gradgrind prefaces his discussion by expressing his confidence in her education and "good sense." When he informs her of Bounderby's proposal, he is surprised at her silence and lack of emotion. Louisa then surprises him even more when she asks her father the following three questions: 1) "Father, do you think I love Mr. Bounderby?"; 2) "Father, do you ask me to love Mr. Bounderby?"; 3) "Father, does Mr. Bounderby ask me to love him?" (76). These direct questions which all deal with the intangible idea of love make Gradgrind uneasy and he evasively answers in the negative for all three questions: 1) "I cannot take upon myself to say."; 2) "No. I ask nothing."; 3) "It's difficult to answer your question" (76). His first response shows that he is either oblivious of his daughter's feelings toward Bounderby or refuses to recognize them. In his second response, he refuses to tell her his feelings about the match and, in the third one, he cannot even bring himself to use the word "love" because it is something that he refuses to recognize. When Louisa demands either a "yes" or a "no," he says it's difficult to answer "because the reply depends so materially...on the sense in which we use the expression." He appears to be indulging in a kind of word game because he does not know what to say or how to communicate. When forced to provide an alternate expression, he retreats back into his abstract world of facts:

I would advise you...to consider this question, as you have been accustomed to consider every other question, simply as one of tangible Fact. The ignorant and the giddy may embarrass such subjects with irrelevant fancies, and other absurdities that have no existence, properly viewed — really no existence — but it is no compliment to you to say, that you know better. Now, what are the Facts of this case? You are, we will say in round numbers, twenty years of age;

Mr Bounderby is, we will say in round numbers, fifty. There is some disparity in your respective years, but in your means and positions there is none....(76-77)

Love is an absurdity that does not exist to Gradgrind and the only disparity he sees between Louisa and Bounderby is the age difference. Gradgrind then proceeds to reel off statistics to show that the age difference is irrelevant. When Louisa asks him for his advice, he counsels her to confine herself “rigidly to Fact,” to the questions of “Does Mr. Bounderby ask me to marry him? and “Shall I marry him?” Louisa is asking for fatherly guidance, almost imploring him to ask her if she loves Bounderby and looking to her father to connect the idea of “love” with “marriage.” Louisa wants to tell her father everything but finds the situation hopeless:

...(S)he was impelled to throw herself upon his breast, and give him the pent-up confidences of her heart. But, to see it, he must have overleaped at a bound the artificial barriers he had for many years been erecting, between himself and all those subtle essences of humanity which will elude the utmost cunning of algebra until the last trumpet ever to be sounded shall blow even algebra to wreck. The barriers were too many and too high for such a leap. With his unbending, utilitarian, matter-of-fact face, he hardened her again; and the moment shot away into the plumbless depths of the past, to mingle with all the lost opportunities that are drowned there. (77-78)

Louisa realizes that she can find no aid from her father and unconsciously looks toward the Coketown chimneys for assistance. She senses the similarity of her position with the workers in Coketown and using metaphoric language, tells her father, “There seems to be nothing there but languid and monotonous smoke. Yet when the night comes, Fire bursts out, father!” Since he lacks an imagination, Gradgrind cannot comprehend this language and thus cannot see the potential for danger in these remarks.

Louisa feels that her life is meaningless and her attempts to communicate her true feelings to her father have failed. She, like her brow-beaten mother and like the brow-beaten students, does what she has been trained to do— to “strive against every natural prompting” in her heart and behave like an obedient daughter. She comes to the conclusion of “What does it matter?” and resigns herself to the fate she believes her father desires for her. But she also reproaches her father for what he has done to her:

...What do I know, father, ...of tastes and fancies; of aspirations and affections; of

all that part of my nature in which such light things might have been nourished? What escape have I had from problems that could be demonstrated, and realities that could be grasped?...

You have been so careful of me, that I never had a child's heart. You have trained me so well, that I never dreamed a child's dream. You have dealt so wisely with me, father, from my cradle to this hour, that I never had a child's belief or a child's fear. (79)

Louisa has been trapped her whole life by facts, by her father's stifling attentions, and she has been without any kind of escape that imagination could have provided. Ironically, Gradgrind responds with satisfaction to her comments, not even realizing that Louisa is upbraiding him for his failures, not complimenting him on his success. He proudly tells her, "It has always been my object so to educate you, as that you might, while still in your early youth, be...almost any age." He seems to be bragging to her about robbing her of her childhood! Gradgrind continues to believe in his success with Louisa and the success of his system until the fateful night when she returns home to escape the clutches of Harthouse.

Gradgrind only learns of what his system has done to his favorite child when she turns to him one more time for help. Here her accusations are clear even to Gradgrind and he is forced to face the unfortunate results of his misguided teaching:

How could you give me life, and take from me all the inappreciable things that raise it from the state of conscious death?...

Would you have robbed me — for no one's enrichment— only for the greater desolation of this world — of the immaterial part of my life, the spring and summer of my belief, my refuge from what is sordid and bad in the real things around me, my school in which I should have learned to be more humble and more trusting with them, and to hope in my little sphere to make them better? (161)

Louisa's speech shows Gradgrind the importance of imagination in forming a person's character, in allowing a person to believe in something and in providing a refuge from the realities of life. Miraculously, Louisa is able to believe in her father enough to seek his help despite his earlier failure to help her; this is proof that although her imagination has been stunted, it had not died for she has, to some extent, Sissy's kind of blind faith. She tells him that his philosophy and teaching will not save her

and implores him to save her by “some other means.” It is this faith and belief that allows Gradgrind to realize the error of his ways and attempt to make amends for his mistakes. The only other means in which he can help her is the recognition of the importance of imagination and such intangibles as love. He later comes to admit that the “wisdom of the Head” is not “all-sufficient” and that the “wisdom of the Heart” is more important (166). Thus, through her faith, Louisa can help awaken his dormant imagination.

In addition to her father, Louisa also believes in her brother, Thomas. This belief, however, is misplaced as her brother has been more negatively affected by their father’s teaching than she has been. Tom’s experiences with the Gradgrind system also merit inspection.

Unlike Louisa, Tom is clearly not Gradgrind’s favorite. When Louisa and Tom are caught at the circus, their father immediately blames Tom for being a bad influence on his sister. However, Louisa was the real instigator of this misadventure and Tom, the one who passively followed her. After being discovered, he gives himself up to his father “to be taken home like a machine” (15). Tom is “machine”-like and exhibits the mindlessness and passivity resulting from Gradgrind’s teachings. He also suffers from the same negative feelings as Louisa. Tom tells her, “I am sick of my life.... I hate it altogether and I hate everybody except you” (42).

Like Louisa and his mother, Dickens portrays him as lifeless and tired. Tom describes himself as a stubborn, stupid donkey who simply wants to kick someone (43). He also has rebellious thoughts in regard to his father and his teachings. Reminiscent of Gradgrind and the description of him blowing the children away, Tom confides to his sister:

I wish I could collect all the Facts we hear so much about ... and all the Figures, and all the people who found them out—and I wish I could put a thousand barrels of gunpowder under them and blow them up together. (43-44)

Tom vows to get revenge for his education, planning to enjoy himself and “recompense [himself] for the way in which [he] was brought up” (44). His reaction to Facts is a violent one just as his father’s is toward childhood and imagination. His wish to kill those responsible for facts would include his father, thus indicating a desire for patricide. His destructive tendencies are also demonstrated when the narrator refers to his beating of branches and ripping moss off from trees as his secret “past time.” Later

when Tom complains about Louisa to Harthouse, he bites rose buds and tears them away with his teeth. These nervous, rather violent ticks also reveal Tom's troubled mental state.

The relationship between Tom and Louisa also shows to what extent family relations are warped by the Gradgrind-style of education. Dickens portrays them as having a very close relationship, perhaps unnaturally so. Louisa feels regret that she cannot "reconcile him to home" or "lighten" his mind with "amusing books" that would be "a pleasure or relief... to talk about" when he is tired (43). She feels that it is her role to offer comfort to him just as Sissy does to her father. In this way, Louisa seems to be transferring some of her daughterly affection to her brother and, in the absence of lovers, her deep affection for her brother makes him almost a stand-in for a lover. Yet, on the other hand, she is extremely protective of him, almost like a mother, as she goes about trying to pay off his debts and keep him out of trouble. Tom greedily accepts her loving attentions and then proceeds to ask for more.

In the Gradgrind world, love which should be a positive force is used like a bargaining chip. Tom, like Bitzer, is a product of the Gradgrind philosophy:

It was a fundamental principle of the Gradgrind philosophy that everything was to be paid for. Nobody was ever on any account to give anybody anything or render anybody help without purchase. Gratitude was to be abolished, and the virtues springing from it were not to be. Every inch of the existence of mankind, from birth to death, was to be a bargain across a counter. And if we didn't get to Heaven that way, it was not a politico-economical place, and we had no business there. (212)

Tom takes advantage of his sister's affections, convincing her to marry Bounderby in order to make his own life easier. Recognizing Bounderby's feelings for Louisa, he uses Louisa as a means to control Bounderby. He supplies her with a good reason for the marriage by telling her that they can be together more. He compliments her for being a "first rate sister" when she does what he wishes. He has no scruples about using Louisa to further his own interests. The education Tom received at his father's hands makes him entirely self-interested. Harthouse recognizes the sort of person Tom is and he, as well as the narrator, thinks of Tom as "the whelp," a very demeaning word for a dog and yet another dehumanizing term for Tom.

This term, however, turns out to be quite appropriate. In the chapter titled "The

Whelp,” Dickens describes Tom in the following way:

It was very remarkable that a young gentleman who had been brought up under one continuous system of unnatural restraint, should be a hypocrite; but it was certainly the case with Tom. It was very strange that a young gentleman who had never been left to his own guidance for five consecutive minutes, should be incapable at last of governing himself; but so it was with Tom. It was altogether unaccountable that a young gentleman whose imagination had been strangled in his cradle, should be still inconvenienced by its ghost in the form of grovelling sensualities; but such a monster, beyond all doubt, was Tom. (101)

This passage sums up the results of Gradgrind’s teaching. Tom has no conscience and cannot think for himself. In order to save himself, he does not hesitate to throw suspicion for the bank robbery on Stephen. He cannot feel for others and he can only use his distorted kind of imagination to serve himself. The little boy held captive in the lecturing den by an ogre has become a monster himself!

Tom shows his inability to understand people in his blind trust of Harthouse. He hardly knows the man but when plied with a drink and tobacco, he readily reveals private family matters. Without much prompting from Harthouse, Tom brags about how Louisa married Bounderby for his sake and how she would do anything for him. He also reveals his self-centered nature by interpreting everything according to his own convenience: he tells Harthouse that Louisa does not mind doing things like marrying Bounderby and that “girls can get on anywhere” (103). He says this phrase several times in the novel which seems to imply that he envies a woman’s sexual power over men because it can be used in exchange for money. Tom ends up giving Harthouse information that will allow him to seduce Louisa and he has no awareness or remorse about what he has done.

However, for Louisa, the most painful episode with Tom is when she is waiting for him to return home after Bounderby’s bank has been robbed. Despite her great love for Tom, she finds that he does not trust her. Louisa asks him to confide in her, to tell her about his involvement in the robbery but he first pretends to not understand her. Louisa then implores him to confess:

“You may be certain...that I will not reproach you. You may be certain that I will be compassionate and true to you. You may be certain that I will save you at whatever cost. Oh Tom, have you nothing to tell me? Whisper very softly. Say

only “yes,” and I shall understand you!”

...

“How can I say, Yes, or how can I say, No, when I don’t know what you mean? Loo, you are a brave, kind, worthy, I begin to think, of a better brother than I am. But I have nothing more to say. Go to bed, go to bed.” (142)

Again, Tom reveals that he cannot distinguish between those who really care about him and those who do not care for him at all. He, like his father, is evasive and he cannot give a straight “yes” or “no” answer. He refuses to tell the truth to his own sister, even though she begs him over and over and vows to do anything to protect him. However, Tom refuses to communicate with the person who wants to help him the most. Despite her love for him, he has no faith in her. In the end, Tom cannot be saved by his sister and, instead, he actually spurns her. He shows his ingratitude by blaming her for his predicament and denying that she ever really loved him.

Even though Gradgrind has learned the error of his ways, he cannot save his own son. In the end, a horse and a faithful dog save Tom, from the self-interested clutches of Bitzer. Gradgrind at this time again sees the results of his brand of schooling: it has disgraced and made a thief of his son whose appearance is that of a clown’s and made Bitzer into a heartless person whose only interest is in himself. The only thing Gradgrind can do is have his son taken out of the country; he must give up his son and heir and actually go against the laws that he loved in order to follow the “law” of his heart. In the end, he finally makes “his facts and figures subservient to Faith, Hope and Charity” (218). This understanding brings about a reconciliation between Gradgrind and his son albeit a short one as Tom will die abroad and never see his family again. Louisa can finally have a close relationship with her father but she will never marry again and have her own family. Both Louisa and Tom must pay a heavy price for their father’s well-meaning but misguided education. Gradgrind himself suffers for he must live with what he has done.

In *Hard Times*, Dickens shows the dangers of an educational system which emphasizes the learning of facts and attempts to restrain or kill the imagination. Imagination enables people to have empathy towards others and also provides a means of relief from the harsh realities of everyday life. Dickens shows that when the fancy is unnaturally restrained, gaps in communication and understanding occur and children cannot think independently or develop a sense of right and wrong. Gradgrind’s

misguided, muddled teachings bring about sickness and discord in his family. Since their imaginations and spirits are crushed by facts, they are tired of living and have trouble finding meaning in their lives. Mrs. Gradgrind can barely exist and never hears the end of it until she dies; Louisa, thinking “What does it matter?” of her own life, sacrifices herself for her brother’s sake, and Tom, in search of an easy life and without a conscience, sells his sister, robs a bank, and implicates an innocent man for the crime. In examining the fragmented, sick state of the Gradgrind family, we can also understand the state of society as well. Dickens’ warning against the dangers of an education that stifles the imagination and does not encourage independent thought is as relevant today as it was then.

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