

Charles Dickens's *Hard Times*: Critical Analysis

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المستخلص

تدرس هذه الورقة البحثية نقدا وتحليلا لحالات وأوضاع اجتماعية صعبة جدا في رواية الأوقات الصعبة للكاتب شاركنز ديكنز في طريقة التحليل النقدي والتحقيق من موضوعة الأوقات الصعبة وما لها رمزية عالية الدلالة عند الناس الانكليز والأخرين في عصر صناعي ومادي انعدمت فيه الروح الإنسانية وتفشت حالات الفقر والمعاناة من عدم العدالة والأطهار وكذلك عرضت الرواية حالة المذهب الفردي في حياة الناس وتسخير قوتهم وسيطرتهم نحو خرق الحقوق والاعتصاب وانتهاك للحريات والاستقلال مع كل هذا الرواية ساعدت على كشف الصورة الجلية حول الاختلاف بين الحقيقة والوهم.

Abstract

This paper studies the novel *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens. It investigates how English people and society suffered poverty, persecution, and injustice of the industrial era. It shows also how individualism plays a very crucial role in people' life in gathering its power and dominance by rape and violating rights, independence and freedom. The paper gives us a very clear picture about the difference between fact and fancy.

Key words: fact, fancy and dystopia.

Introduction

Hard Times is a novel written in the Victorian Age by Charles Dickens. This fiction shows tyranny and oppression of manufacturers and owners of factories during the 19th century. Dickens explores how drastically the Industrial Revolution changed lives of people particularly farmers. This literary work does not merely inspire readers and students but it also proves that Dickens is interested in politics and social affairs of people especially England. The novel covers the lives of both lower and middle class who suffered oppression and poverty. One of the most important purposes of Dickens in writing his novel *Hard Times* is to comment on the faults and mistakes of inventing machines; in addition to that it brought pollution and malformation for nature. It also discusses violating and exploitation by the manufacturers.

The negative view point of Dickens concerning the Industrial Revolution which he relied on in the history of England in the 19th century made lots of politicians and socialists hate him. However, "Dickens's main intention, as Leavis says, was to comment on certain key characteristics of Victorian civilization. He was concerned about the difference... between Fact and Fancy. The purpose of the novel was to emphasize... that... any method of ruling product or affairs that lacks sympathy, love and understanding between human being -, is in the end... bitterly destructive" (Fielding, ١٣٢).

In this fiction, Dickens gives us a general idea about the lives of farmers and how the life of city influenced them. For example, children of peasants enrolled in schools or educational institutes and educated on facts and nothing else. Their journey to classes became boring. They believed that their lives were just like machines at factories. Coketown is the fictional city in which Dickens describes not only the poor people and their suffering, misery and oppression, but also how prosperous individuals lived at exploiting and limiting freedom and independence of the lower social class. In fact, *Hard Times* is a realistic novel that depicts how the industrialization in England drastically changed the lives of people. The poor people work ٢٤ hours as machines without getting their independence and rights, and they do not have enough time to care for their children and this of course would leave very negative impact on their lives. We can say that a lot of families suffered psychological problems because of work pressure at factories. On the other hand, the owners of those mills and manufactures live wealthily and peacefully depending on violating the rights of other. The novel also discusses the disadvantages of smoke which extends all over the cities and would eventually pollute and deform nature. *Hard Times* is a novel that describes the educational system of schools at the Victorian Age. It explains how teachers teach pupils merely facts and do not give their pupils any opportunity to express their ideas and thoughts. They do not teach them about imagination. The attitude of teachers is very strict and tough. This would influence their lives and they would believe that all educational places are just for learning facts like mathematics. Dickens in his novel *Hard Times* comments on the difference between

facts and fancy. Teachers have to teach pupils literature and the important role of literary works in the lives of people due to its great impact. Dickens relates the life of undervalued workers and their children at school for instance the owners of mills and factories always try to apply their utilitarian principles at both schools and factories to control the lives of people and want to tell citizens of England that it is very hard and complex to break-up or resolve this crisis. The owners are the controllers of the English life. They think that they would transfer authority and become the makers of rules to legislate new laws that suit their lives.

Dystopia in Hard Times

For more than one century, dystopian narrative has been a literary genre. Some writers of written dystopian novels believe that this genre of literature can amuse its readers, and also has the ability to cultivate them to make them understand the meaning of the world where they live. The periods of great black looks or the lack of hopes to see the aspects of things far worse which are abridged by wars, arrogance, tyranny and many other happenings have been written by the dystopian novelists.

Many critics and writers defined the word dystopia in various ways. This word is associated with the notion of "badness". It is difficult to define dystopia because every definer has his/her point of view; therefore, it becomes a subjective term in literature. Actually, dystopia becomes complex and it is associated with fictional works where its definition is narrowed down.

In ١٨٦٨ J. S. Mills used the word dystopia in his political speech in the state of Ireland where he used the word in contrast with the term utopia. In his speech, he roughly criticizes the policy of government on Irish property stating that "What is commonly called Utopian is something too good to be practicable; but what they [the government] appear to favour is too bad to be practicable."

Jan Pospíšil says "by merely coining the word to contrast what had been thus far called Utopia, he delimited its basic concept. On the basis of this speech, the Oxford English Dictionary describes dystopia as "an imaginary place or condition in which everything is as bad as possible." It will be argued that despite the fairly wide development of dystopian literature, the definition of the term does not necessarily need to be more complex than the one proposed by this entry. As dystopia is defined as being the reverse of utopia, the latter term must be elaborated on prior to attempting to define the former. Utopia is a fictional village created by Thomas More in his eponymous book. It represents his concept of an ideal society. More thus created the framework for future "utopian" novels".

Dystopia is a combined word which means a bad place. It denotes an imperfect or incomplete thing. Some writers in literature have used this meaning as an imagined society where everything is gloomy and wistful. Dystopia is the corruption of government that does not give its people what they need, require and aspire. It awards its followers what they want just to gain their utilities depending poor or uneducated citizens who do not understand and know laws and political rules that run and organize the lives of people.

In literature, the effective and open device to criticize the sociopolitical conditions mirroring on defects, distorting and bad management of the imagined and ideal societies could be done by dystopian literature. The representation of bad and weak places expanding the potential of the future social order is offered by literary dystopia. The hero or heroine in dystopian literature often feels the struggle to liberate or award freedom. Existing inquires about the sociopolitical systems of society are awfully wrong and inaccurate.

Swift's Gulliver's Travels(١٧٢٦), Voltaire's Candide(١٧٥٩), Orwell's Nineteen Eighty Four(١٩٤٩) and others are the most prominent dystopian literature writers. The writers of dystopian literature believe that destructive and negative visibility of the future or near-future society can be offered by dystopia. It is argued that technology might be one of the main reasons behind dividing people into social classes. This would effect the creation of nature that makes it unproductive. Ignorance, insufficiency, overpopulation and capitalism are the most important evils of dystopia.

Dickens is the founder of dystopian fantasy in English literature(Gardner, ١٩٤١). His novel *Hard Times* is a dystopian reflection of the insufficiency of society in Victorian Age. He gives us a look about how the rich and poor people live in one place and might embrace the same religion but unfortunately they are unequal in rights and freedom. "The life of a population with a rich variety of qualitative distinctions and complex individual descriptions of functioning and impediments to functioning, using a general notion of human need

and human functioning in a highly concrete context, it provides the sort of information required to assess quality of life and involves the reader in the task of making the assessment"(Nussbaum,^{١٥}). Coketown is a fictional city where Dickens discusses the rules and traditions of capitalism and their utilities in north England. He depicts the very wide gap between social policies and the applied rules in factories. He also challenges those who claim that the increase of technology and the development of production would change lives of England.

Hard Times is a "direct indictment on Utilitarianism"(Narita,^{١٨٦}). Dickens strongly criticizes the utilitarian system of education and the different types of school, he describes teachers and their relationships with the owners of manufactures and how they always try to confirm negatively that the system which have been applied by the capitalism and utilitarianism is the only method that could increase and improve the lives of people of the English nation in particular. Utilitarianism in educational system refuses to teach and cultivate pupils and students the imagination or any imagined subject that deals with fancy and supernatural elements. What they believe is just facts. They argue that life depends on truth and there is no existence to imagination. Some critics think that imagination would destruct and limit the advantage of both utilitarian and capitalist system because they believe that this would fail their plans, ambition, arrogance and pretension.

Although the main concern of Dickens' Victorian era was the Enlightenment-era schism between reason and emotion, disconnection between fact and fancy in the anthology of dystopian literature as well as in Dickens' works plays a very important role. Fixation facts and exclusion imagination are the central theme in *Hard Times* which demonstrates the misery that results when children are completely cut off from imagination and fancy and subjected to a utilitarian and facts-only education. "Lack of imagination, fancy, and emotion in Dickens' works leads to standardization and loss of identity"(Micaela,^٧).

It is noticeable in all concerns of the genre of dystopian literature the issue of injustice and corruption in structures of government and it is perhaps the most pronounced. In many cases, the plot of dystopian novels revolves around the corruption of government and the weakness of the educational system applied in schools. It depicts the suffering of the people and how the flaws and deterioration of the economic system in Victorian Era had murdered the innocence of children. "George Orwell imagines a society in which the citizens are constantly monitored and controlled by their government which employs propaganda, manipulation, and brainwashing in order to control individual thought and produce desired behavior" (Micaela,^٨). Dickens, in his two novels(*Great Expectations* & *Hard Times*)deals with the legal and economic systems. He thinks that lawyers take bribes instead of exposing truth and achieving it. They are concerned with their private properties and desires.

The inequality of social class and the wide gap between the destitution of the poor and the luxury of the rich are the other concern of Dickens. What is meant in this concern is to reflect the realistic facts of his society and to resolve these crises by building new society relying on justice, helping each other, rights and independence. Dickens illustrates the symbols of ash and fire in *Hard Times*. He always tries to bridge the wide gap between luxury rich and indigence of poor people in which they are unequal. Undoubtedly, Dickens refuses the ideas of bourgeois or the beneficiaries of applying these economic systems and rules. Some scientists and critics believe that laws and ideas of bourgeois might consist of virtues according to the religion they embrace and the religious men they follow.

Fact and Fancy in Hard Times

By writing the novel *Hard Times* for the ordinary people, Dickens discusses in a way abasement, indignity, maltreatment and negative effects of the Industrial Revolution, generally in Europe and England in particular. He recognizes that his society needs to read books, stories, and essays which include imagination and fancy and not only relying on facts. Theatre and circus are the two places which supply people with imaginative and fantastic pictures. Dickens thinks that life is not just about facts but there is more in life.

Society, in *Hard Times*, is classified into two different distinctions: the owners of factories and the undervalued workers in the Victorian Age. The novel is about three parts, the first part is concerned with sowing. The second is about reaping and the last one is about gathering or garnering. These names are

refereeing to the Bible. "What you sow you reap and then you harvest. *Hard Times* is about what you harvest when using only facts. Facts are a symbol of something that is unchangeable and fancy is something that is changeable in people's imagination and mind. Dickens maintain in his novel that fact and fancy must work together, so the individual can succeed in life, and become a healthy human being"(Anna,٣).

The events of *Hard Times* take their place in a fictional city(Coketown). This city is jail for the ordinary and poor people who were treated as animals. The meaning of the city refers to coal that was used to power factories during the Industrial Revolution. Coketown is a city of pollution. It can be described as follows: "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"(٢٨). Workers do not get their true wages. They are obliged to work for long hours to cover their basic needs in order to live. This is the fact that Dickens always displays in his writings. He concentrates on one thing that all human beings are equal in their rights and responsibilities. He describes this fact in *Hard Times*:" the measured motion of their shadows on the walls, was the substitute Coketown had to show for the shadows of rustling woods; while, for summer hum of insects, it could offer, all the year around, from the dawn of Monday to the night of Saturday, the whirr of shafts and wheels"(١٤٨).

Conclusion

Hard Times is a novel concerning the difference between fact and fancy. It is about decay and abasement of undervalued workers and their families who work ١٤ hours without taking their rights and independence. *Hard Times* is a revolt against the Industrial Revolution in the Victorian Age. Dickens in his writings especially *Hard Times*, studies the social, economic and political issues of people and their government. He realizes that life is not just a fact running society relying on the economic processes as Mr. Gradgrind did with his pupils and his family. He always relates his teaching with what the capitalistic owners of mills and factories wish merely to build very big wealth and flourish.

Dickens explores how drastically the Industrial Revolution changed lives of people particularly farmers. This literary work does not merely inspire readers and students but it also presents and proves that Dickens is interested in politics and social affairs of people especially in England. The novel covers the lives of both lower and middle classes who suffered oppression and poverty. One of the most important purposes of Dickens in writing his novel *Hard Times* is to comment on the faults and mistakes of inventing machines which pollute and decrease the quality of the natural and mineral sources. Also, it aims at discussing the violating and exploiting by the manufacturers.

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