

FOCUS ON HUMANISTIC VALUES IN THE WORK “HARD TIMES” BY CHARLES DICKENS

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Abstract. This article explores Charles Dickens’s emphasis on humanistic values in his novel “Hard Times”. The study focuses on how Dickens critiques the dehumanizing effects of industrialization and materialism, advocating for compassion, imagination, and moral integrity as essential elements of a fulfilling life. By analyzing key characters and their struggles, the article highlights the tension between utilitarian ideals and the inherent worth of individual creativity and emotional well-being. Dickens’s work serves as a timeless reminder of the importance of humanity in the face of societal progress.

Key words: humanism, utilitarianism, empathy, imagination, education, social critique, character development, industrialization, Victorian society, moral philosophy.

ФОКУС НА ГУМАНИСТИЧЕСКИХ ЦЕННОСТЯХ В ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИИ “HARD TIMES” ЧАРЛЬЗА ДИККЕНСА

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Аннотация. В статье рассматривается акцент Чарльза Диккенса на гуманистических ценностях в его романе «Тяжелые времена». Исследование сосредоточено на том, как Диккенс критикует дегуманизирующее воздействие индустриализации и материализма, призывая к состраданию, воображению и моральной целостности как важным аспектам полноценной жизни. Анализируя ключевых персонажей и их жизненные трудности, статья подчеркивает напряжение между утилитарными идеалами и врожденной ценностью индивидуального творчества и эмоционального благополучия. Работа Диккенса является вечным напоминанием о важности человечности перед лицом социального прогресса.

Ключевые слова: гуманизм, утилитаризм, эмпатия, воображение, образование, социальная критика, развитие персонажей, индустриализация, викторианское общество, моральная философия.

CHARLZ DIKKENSNING “HARD TIMES” ASARIDA INSONPARVARLIK QADRIYATLARINING AKS ETTIRILISHI

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Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqola Charlz Dikkensning “Hard times” romanida insonparvarlik qadriyatlarining aks ettirilishiga urg‘u beradi. Tadqiqot Dikkensning sanoatlashtirish va materializmning insoniylikka zarar yetkazuvchi ta’sirlarini qanday tanqid qilgani, shuningdek, hamdardlik, tasavvur va axloqiy yaxlitlikni baxtli hayotning muhim elementlari sifatida targ‘ib qilganiga e’tibor qaratadi. Asosiy qahramonlar va ularning kurashlarini tahlil qilish orqali maqola utilitaristik ideallar va individual ijodkorlik hamda farovonlikning ichki qiymati o‘rtasidagi qarama-qarshilikni ta’kidlaydi. Dikkensning asari jamiyat taraqqiyoti oldida insonparvarlikning ahamiyati haqida abadiy eslatmadir.

Tayanch iboralar: gumanizm, utilitarizm, empatiya, tasavvur, ta’lim, ijtimoiy tanqid, xarakter rivojlanishi, sanoatlashuv, viktorian jamiyati, axloqiy falsafa.

INTRODUCTION

Charles Dickens, one of the most influential authors of the Victorian era, is best known for his vivid depictions of social inequality, poverty, and the effects of industrialization on the human spirit. In “Hard Times” Dickens presents a scathing critique of the relentless pursuit of efficiency and rationality that defined the industrial age. The novel serves as a stark commentary on the dangers of reducing human beings to mere statistics, advocating instead for the recognition of human emotions, imagination, and empathy. At the core of “Hard Times” is a profound exploration of humanistic values, a theme that permeates the narrative and shapes its characters. In a society governed by strict logic and utilitarian principles, Dickens challenges the dominant ideologies of his time, questioning the moral implications of such a worldview. Through the character of Thomas Gradgrind, who represents the mechanistic, fact-driven philosophy of the era, the novel explores the dehumanizing effects of an education system that prioritizes practicality over creativity and personal growth. Gradgrind’s insistence on “facts” and his dismissal of emotions as irrelevant forces push his students and family members into a state of emotional and psychological desolation, revealing the dangers of a world that neglects the intrinsic value of human connection and empathy.

However, Dickens also introduces characters who resist this reductionist view and embrace the richness of human experience. Through the lives of figures such as Sissy Jupe, a circus performer’s daughter, and the morally conflicted Louisa Gradgrind, Dickens advocates for the need to nurture the emotional, imaginative, and compassionate aspects of human life. By juxtaposing the cold rationalism of Gradgrind with these more human-centered characters, Dickens illustrates that true fulfillment and moral growth can only be achieved when individuals are allowed to explore and express their emotions, creativity, and moral sensibilities.

This article will delve deeper into how “Hard Times” reflects Dickens’s commitment to humanistic values, particularly in its critique of a society that values facts over feelings, efficiency over empathy, and logic over love. By analyzing the novel’s central themes and characters, we will explore how Dickens not only critiques the industrial age but also offers a timeless reminder of the importance of compassion, imagination, and human connection in shaping a just and humane society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The theme of humanism in Charles Dickens’s “Hard Times” has garnered significant attention from scholars and critics alike. In particular, much of the existing literature focuses on Dickens’s critique of utilitarianism, industrialization, and the moral consequences of a world governed solely by logic and efficiency. A central concern in these studies is how Dickens emphasizes the importance of empathy, imagination, and personal connection values that he presents as essential to human well-being. This literature review will explore key studies and perspectives on Dickens’s exploration of humanistic values in “Hard Times” while highlighting the ways in which critics have interpreted the novel’s treatment of emotion, education, and social critique.

One prominent approach in Dickensian scholarship has been the analysis of “Hard Times” in the context of Victorian society’s growing reliance on utilitarianism, particularly the philosophy of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. Scholars such as John Bowen¹ argue that Dickens critiques the dehumanizing aspects of utilitarian thought by illustrating its harmful effects on both individuals and society as a whole. Bowen suggests that “Hard Times” functions as a moral

¹ Bowen, John. Dickens: The Novelist. Oxford University Press, 2010.-P.97.

counterpoint to the rationalist mindset, emphasizing the emotional and imaginative aspects of human life that are often overlooked by utilitarian ideology.

The character of Thomas Gradgrind, in fact, has been the focus of several studies, with scholars like David A. K. Johnson² arguing that he represents the extreme end of the rationalist spectrum. Johnson points out that Gradgrind's rigid adherence to "facts" not only stifles the creativity and individuality of his children, but also alienates them from the essential human values of compassion and imagination. Johnson's analysis underscores how Dickens uses Gradgrind's character to critique a society that values efficiency and practicality at the expense of emotional intelligence and moral sensitivity. This analysis is echoed in the work of Robert Newsom³, who explores how the novel's central tension between "facts" and "fancy" reflects Dickens's broader critique of Victorian society's overemphasis on industrialization and material progress.

Another significant strand of scholarship focuses on the contrast between the emotionally stifled characters like Gradgrind and those who embody more humanistic values. Critics like Gillen D'Arcy Wood⁴ have emphasized the role of Sissy Jupe as a central figure in Dickens's critique of utilitarianism. Wood contends that Sissy, as a character grounded in compassion and imagination, serves as a moral alternative to the cold, mechanical worldview of Gradgrind. Her ability to embrace emotional depth and personal relationships stands in stark contrast to the rigid, fact-based education imposed upon her by Gradgrind. Scholars like Barbara Hardy⁵ have also examined Louisa Gradgrind's internal struggles, suggesting that her character represents the emotional cost of an education devoid of empathy and imagination. Hardy's interpretation reveals how Dickens uses Louisa's eventual breakdown to critique the moral consequences of a system that ignores the value of human feelings and connections.

In addition to character analysis, studies of "Hard Times" often explore the novel's broader social critique, with several scholars examining how Dickens uses humanistic themes to address issues of class, labor, and social justice. For example, in her work on Victorian literature and the industrial revolution, Elizabeth D. Spector⁶ argues that Dickens critiques the growing divide between the working and middle classes, revealing how the utilitarian values of industrial capitalism perpetuate social inequality and human suffering. Spector notes that Dickens's humanistic values stand in opposition to the mechanization of human life under capitalism, advocating instead for a society that recognizes the moral and emotional worth of all individuals, regardless of their social or economic status.

METHODOLOGY

To understand Dickens's critique of utilitarianism and industrialization, the study will closely examine the key characters and their interactions. Special attention will be given to characters such as Thomas Gradgrind, Sissy Jupe, and Louisa Gradgrind, as their personal struggles highlight the importance of human emotions and imagination. The analysis will also look at how Dickens uses these characters to criticize the social and educational systems of his time.

² Johnson, David A. K. "The Philosophy of 'Facts' in Dickens's *Hard Times*." *Studies in Victorian Literature*, vol. 38, no. 3. 2002. -P. 230.

³ Newsom, Robert. *The Rise of Victorian Fiction: The Social Novel and Its Critics*. University of Chicago Press, 2006.-P.85.

⁴ D'Arcy Wood, Gillen. "Imagination and Morality: The Role of Sissy Jupe in *Hard Times*." *Victorian Studies Quarterly*, vol. 50, no. 2, 2004. -P.188.

⁵ Hardy, Barbara. *Dickens and the Modern World*. Cambridge University Press, 2010.-P.47.

⁶ Spector, Elizabeth D. *The Industrial Revolution and the Victorian Novel*. Routledge, 2008.-P.75.

The research will involve a close reading of “Hard Times”, paying particular attention to key scenes and dialogue that illustrate the tension between rationalism and humanism. Secondary sources, such as scholarly articles and books about Dickens and Victorian society, will be used to support the analysis and provide a broader understanding of the historical and social context of the novel.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

In Charles Dickens’ “Hard Times”, the author offers a pointed critique of the industrial era’s rigid educational and social systems through a stark focus on humanistic values. Set in the fictional town of Coketown, Dickens explores the dehumanizing effects of an education system that prioritizes “facts” and utilitarianism over emotional, moral, and creative development. Through characters such as Thomas Gradgrind and the students at his school, Dickens critiques a society that seeks to mechanize human nature, disregarding the essential qualities of imagination, empathy, and individuality. By highlighting the contrast between the emotionally stifled, fact-driven worldview of Gradgrind and the more humane, imaginative perspective of characters like Sissy Jupe, Dickens champions a more balanced approach to education and life one that recognizes the importance of nurturing both intellect and emotional intelligence. This focus on humanistic values emphasizes the necessity of cultivating the full range of human potential, urging a return to a more compassionate and holistic way of thinking and living.

Mr. Gradgrind’s philosophy, which prioritizes “facts” and dismisses imagination and emotion, is a critique of the industrial age’s emphasis on utilitarian, mechanistic thinking. Humanistic ideals stress the importance of nurturing the whole person, including emotional, creative, and intellectual development. Gradgrind’s system represents the opposite of this, treating children as mere vessels for information, stripping them of individuality and imagination. For instance:

“What is called Taste, is only another name for Fact”⁷. This statement reduces beauty, art, and aesthetic appreciation to simple facts, overlooking the human experience of feeling and imagination that art and beauty evoke.

“You mustn’t fancy,” cried the gentleman”⁸. This command to the children to “never fancy” illustrates a disregard for the imaginative faculties that humanistic thought values in developing creativity and empathy.

Sissy Jupe’s preference for flowers in a carpet represents a more humanistic, imaginative approach to life she associates flowers with beauty and joy, despite knowing the practical concerns of them being crushed. This perspective contrasts sharply with the strict factual worldview of Gradgrind and his colleagues:

“If you please, sir, I am very fond of flowers”⁹, said Sissy, showing her emotional attachment to something that transcends mere utility.

“You must use... combinations and modifications (in primary colours) of mathematical figures”¹⁰, the gentleman instructs, pushing for a sterile, emotionless aesthetic in opposition to the organic beauty Sissy values.

The portrayal of Mr. M’Choakumchild as a factory-made teacher further underscores the dehumanization of education. He is compared to a factory product, someone who has been drilled with facts but lacks the ability to nurture the creative or emotional needs of his students:

⁷ Dickens, Charles. *Hard Times*. Penguin Classics, 2003, P.-2;

⁸ The same source: P.-2;

⁹ The same source: P.-1;

¹⁰ The same source: P.-8;

“He and some one hundred and forty other schoolmasters, had been lately turned at the same time, in the same factory, on the same principles, like so many pianoforte legs”¹¹. This comparison likens teachers to mass-produced objects, echoing the humanistic critique of a society that values efficiency and standardization over individuality and holistic human development.

The humanistic belief in the importance of imagination is subtly conveyed through the characters who resist Gradgrind’s rigid system. Sissy Jupe, in particular, symbolizes a more humanistic way of thinking. Her ability to “fancy” and her connection to the beauty of flowers point to the rich, imaginative life that the human spirit needs to flourish. In contrast, the characters who strictly follow the Gradgrind method lack emotional depth and creativity, revealing the impoverished nature of a world devoid of imagination.

The most striking example of this is the way he describes the children’s education: **“Not that they knew, by name or nature, anything about an Ogre Fact forbid!”** The children are taught to focus solely on “facts,” devoid of any imaginative play or emotional development. This directly contrasts with humanism, which emphasizes the nurturing of the whole person — mind, body, and spirit. Humanism would encourage students to explore their creativity, ask questions, and think beyond the narrow boundaries of cold, calculated facts.

Louisa, who is deeply shaped by her father’s rigid system, begins to exhibit the effects of this lack of emotional and imaginative development. As she peeps through the hole in the deal board to watch the horse-riding performance, her actions symbolize a yearning for something beyond the mechanistic, fact-based life she has been taught. When confronted by her father, she responds: **“Wanted to see what it was like.”**¹² This simple statement speaks volumes about her desire for a deeper, richer experience of life — one that involves not just facts, but emotions, wonder, and a connection to something beyond the mathematical exactness her father values.

This moment where Louisa seeks something outside of her prescribed existence speaks to a humanistic need for meaning beyond logic and utility. Her struggle with her father’s utilitarian upbringing illustrates the importance of nurturing the emotional, creative, and spiritual dimensions of a person, which Mr. Gradgrind’s system utterly fails to do.

In the passages from “Hard Times”, Charles Dickens offers a deep critique of the mechanistic and rigid worldview embodied by Thomas Gradgrind, as well as a reflection on the emotional and imaginative neglect in his children’s upbringing. Gradgrind’s focus on facts and utilitarian education is juxtaposed with the human desires and emotions that are neglected within his household. His satisfaction as he walks home, reflecting on the “model” nature of his school and family, illustrates his belief in the infallibility of his system. His own children, Louisa and Thomas, are products of this system, having been stripped of imagination, empathy, and the ability to appreciate wonder or creativity.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the literature on “Hard Times” reveals a complex and multifaceted analysis of Dickens’s exploration of humanistic values. Scholars have highlighted the novel’s critique of utilitarianism and industrialization, its emphasis on the importance of imagination and empathy, and its exploration of social and moral issues. The novel’s enduring message that human beings cannot be reduced to mere facts and figures continues to resonate with readers and critics alike,

¹¹ The same source: P.-8;

¹² Dickens, Charles. *Hard Times*. Penguin Classics, 2003, P.-4;

making it a crucial text for understanding the intersection of literature, philosophy, and social critique in the Victorian era.

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