



International Journal of Humanities and Applied Social Science (IJHASS)  
E-ISSN: 2471-7576  
E-mail: editor@ijhassnet.com  
<http://ijhassnet.com/>

©Center for Promoting Education and Research (CPER) USA, [www.cpernet.org](http://www.cpernet.org)

## The Politics of Cultural Carnivalism in Charles Dickens's *Hard Times*

**Dr. Mahmoud Salami**

Department of English  
College of Arts & Social Sciences  
Sultan Qaboos University  
P. O. Box 42, P. C. 123 Al-Khoud  
Mobile: 00968-72276486  
Extension: 2017  
Office No.: 1213A  
Email: mahmoudsalami58@gmail.com  
Sultanate of Oman

### Abstract

*Charles Dickens's novel Hard Times seems to embody the link of cultural theory with the carnival and with the Marxist argument of how societies, classes and cultures are all colonized, decolonized, centered and de-centered, subverted and liberated for the same cultural, materialist, racial, historical and ideological reasons. Hard Times seems to be saying that we exist and live in social groups and hence our behaviour is related to our society and culture. This article reveals how Dickens succeeds in inverting in a carnivalesque manner most of the Victorian cultural values of the rich cotton lords of Coketown, those of facts and calculations, in favour of the working-class circus riders. Dickens succeeds in such ideological representation of culture as a prison-house which is policed by social and educational hegemonic forces or conscious or unconscious apparatuses. Dickens shows that such forces tried to segregate men and women, wives from husbands, fathers from sons, daughters from mothers, workers from their machines and homes, facts from fancy, and how they are all governed by such materialist culture. Hard Times embodies the carnival with all its sentimentality and dynamism by enacting the idea of culture as a whole way of life.*

**Keywords: Culture; Carnavalesque; Dialogic; Ideology and Hegemony; Facts and Fancy**

Charles Dickens's novel *Hard Times* (1854) seems to embody the link of cultural theory with the carnival and with the Marxist argument of how societies, classes and cultures are colonized, decolonized, centered and de-centered, subverted and liberated, and pushed to the periphery for the same cultural, materialist, racial, historical, ideological and political reasons. The novel is actually saying that we human beings exist and live in social groups, and that all of our behaviour, experiences and responses to daily activities are related to our society and culture. When we understand the interrelatedness of all our actions within society we begin to understand ourselves, our beliefs, values, philosophy, religion, and our entire existence in a certain culture. It is thus our culture, the politics of culture, which actually determines our identity. This article reveals how Dickens inverts in a carnivalesque manner most of Victorian cultural values, not only those of the rich bankers, the cotton lords of Preston/Coketown, men of *facts and calculations*, of Bounderby and the like but also those of the working class lot as those involved in horse-riding circuses or the carnival proper. Indeed Dickens succeeds in such ideological representation of culture as a prison-house which is policed by many social and educational hegemonic forces or conscious/unconscious apparatuses. There are many direct instances in the novel when such hegemony is practiced to segregate men and women, wives from husbands, fathers from sons, daughters from mothers, workers from their machines and homes, facts from fancy, and how they are all regulated and governed by a materialist culture. Ultimately, this novel embodies what most cultural critics argued about the idea of *culture* of being "a whole way of life," a kind of response to 19<sup>th</sup>-century industrialism and to the new political and social developments. *Hard Times* embodies what Terry Castle argues about the importance of the carnival: "By the mid-nineteenth-century ... the culture of the carnival and fair had been fragmented, and its



few vestiges relegated to the sentimental realm of folkloristic 'survivals,'<sup>1</sup> consequently must be qualified since Victorian writers like Dickens persisted in preserving and promoting carnival themes. In *Hard Times* Dickens's celebration of Sleary's circus performers clearly prove more educational than Mr. Gradgrind's and M'Choakumchild's Utilitarian theory. Before going into such analysis of the novel, two main points need to be explored with relative detail: the politics of culture, and the idea of the carnivalesque.

To say that *Hard Times* is a novel about cultural differentiation and segregation is a mere simplification which needs clarification. It is indeed about how workers are imprisoned into a certain system and class that would not allow them to mix with the rest of society according to the ideology of the rich which Dickens works hard to criticize not only in this novel but throughout his fiction. Throughout the novel there is a politics of culture which continually renders the poor class as a subversive and threatening class against the stability of the entire society, and therefore it should be attacked if not eliminated. The whole concept of culture is an interesting category which certainly explains how *Hard Times* is a novel about cultural hegemony and carnivalism. So the concept of culture stems from the fact that what we believe, what we value, and in many ways what we think is a direct result of our culture and our society.

The term *culture* refers to certain patterns of human activity and how such activities are given attention and significance within society. *Culture* is most commonly used to refer to the universal human capacity to classify, codify and communicate their experiences symbolically, materially, and socially. Material culture refers to human activity, whereas social culture focuses on social interactions, statutes, institutions, and social norms and values. The best, but certainly not the first, to give a good definition of *culture* and cultural studies is Terry Eagleton, in many of his books, particularly in his *The Idea of Culture* (2000) and *After Theory* (2003), where he strongly declares that culture "is what we live by, the act of sense-making itself, the very social air we breathe; in another sense it is far from what most profoundly shapes our lives."<sup>2</sup> For Eagleton, "'culture' is a slippery term;" it "can mean what you are prepared to kill for. Or ... die for." Culture "is the foundation of the world."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, this foundation was laid well ahead of Eagleton by his mentor Raymond Williams in his pivotal work *Culture and Society* (1958), where he argued that culture means "a whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual."<sup>4</sup>

This way of life is reflected so dramatically, as it were, in *Hard Times* through Sissy Jupe's rejection of her villainous teacher Mr. M'Choakumchild, who has been trained in a school teacher-factory of facts, and to the hard educator of facts Mr. Thomas Gradgrind, the "man of realities," who grinds his pupils through a factory-like process, hoping to produce graduates (grads) in his burgeoning school system funded by rich men like Mr. Josiah Bounderby. Bounderby is Gradgrind's closest friend, and just like him he is a man "perfectly devoid of sentiment," who belongs to the culture of "facts and calculations." Very early in the novel Sissy, "Girl number twenty," defends the culture of her father in the circus against Gradgrind's negative naming of Mr. Jupe as a "horse-breaker," a "farrier," or a "veterinary surgeon." Sissy is constructed as a slow learner, among the group of "little pitchers" or "feeble stragglers," who admits that she would carpet a room with representations of flowers. Sissy is taught that she must not "fancy" and that she is "to be in all things regulated and governed ... by fact."<sup>5</sup> Gradgrind's teachers are always endeavouring to remove "fancy" and "imagination" from the minds of the children. He tells the children that it is nonsense to decorate a room with representations of horses because horses do not walk up and down the sides of rooms in reality. Indeed he reflects what Eagleton has argued about culture that "you are prepared to kill for" when Gradgrind admits that he is "ready to fight all England" for his

<sup>1</sup> Terry Castle, *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 100.

<sup>2</sup> Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (New York: Basic Books, 2003), 48.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>4</sup> Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society: Coleridge to Orwell* (1958; rpt. London: The Hogarth Press, 1987), iii, 87.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (Beirut: York Press, 2002), 2-6. Further references to this edition will be quoted within parenthesis in the body of this essay.



materialist and factual ideals and that he thinks that "Commissioners should reign upon earth" (4) and fight any change possible against his rigid system.

This embodies how Williams gave his most sustained and persuasive account of the term *culture*: it "is a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour."<sup>6</sup> This definition embodies what Dickens is saying in *Hard Times* and in many of his other novels. "The meanings and values implicit and explicit in a particular way of life," or "a particular culture," as it is shown in the culture of the horse riders and factory workers, are certainly different from and contrary to those of the cotton lords of Preston and the rich Commissioners of the earth of *Hard Times*. Williams suggests that there is an identical, a dialectical, or a coextensive relationship between culture and the way of life; culture includes "the organization of production, the structure of the family, the structure of institutions which express or govern social relationships, the characteristic forms through which members of the society communicate."<sup>7</sup> Culture for Williams rests on the notion of community, the nation, the common culture which includes the cultures of all social groups. Williams goes on to suggest that there is always one community which dominates the other. It is the inequality that "depersonalizes, degrades in grading, other human beings."<sup>8</sup> This denigrating and degrading culture of the Rich is what Dickens is attacking in *Hard Times*. The cotton lords of Preston, the novel suggests, prosper on such inequality among people and on denying them the least possible form of life, as the York Classic edition of the novel quoted a revealing ballad by Brian Peters criticizing those lords of Preston and from which I quote the following stanzas:

*The working people such as we  
Pass their time in misery,  
While they live in luxury,  
The cotton lords of Preston*

*They're making money every way,  
And building factories every day,  
Yet when we ask them for more pay,  
They have the impudence to say,*

*"To your demands we'll not consent,  
You get enough so be content,"  
But we will have the Ten per Cent,  
From the cotton lords of Preston*

For Dickens culture means community, society, and solidarity among its own members, as do the horse riders or the traveling circus of Mr. Sleary and Signor Jupe, or Stephen Blackpool, the poor labourer in one of Bounderby's factories, and Rachael, his unmarried companion who keeps his spirits up in his suffering moments and who takes it as her responsibility to defend his honour after he has left Coketown. Indeed, the sense of class-culturation is vividly enacted by characters such as Sleary, Jupe, or Stephen and that working-class people should unite to achieve their independent culture.

Dickens seems to be echoing the new modern and sophisticated culture which is set by the state through its education system, and by what Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer called the "culture industry."<sup>9</sup> They argue that in such culture industry "the individual is an illusion" and everything seems to be stamped by the

<sup>6</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution* (1961; rpt. New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 41.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 317.

<sup>9</sup> Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "The culture industry: enlightenment as mass deception," in Simon Doring, ed. *The Cultural Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1993), 29-43.



monopoly of society, by "the power of the generality."<sup>10</sup> Thus as if reflecting Dickens's annulled and illusive poor characters, "the individual who supported society bore its disfiguring mark; seemingly free, he was actually the product of its economic and social apparatus."<sup>11</sup> As the historian E. P. Thompson, in his seminal book *The Making of the English Working Class* (1968) and elsewhere, had pointed out, as if also reflecting Dickens's novel, that the identity of the working class as working class had always had a strong political feeling about it that identity was politically made and not just a matter of particular cultural interests and values. Indeed, this politicization is dramatically enacted by Bounderby and his lot not just through culture but through its cannibalization.

Furthermore, culture reflects ideology and ideology embodies those particular relations that are "fixed," "yoked together" as natural.<sup>12</sup> Ideology is the naturalization of a particular historical cultural articulation. This reflects to a great extent the Rich ideology of the bourgeois in *Hard Times* as embodied in Bounderby and his workers. What is natural is taken for granted; it is the "common sense." Again as if reflecting on Dickens, Hall argues for a middle ground about the ongoing struggles of domination in which people constantly try to bend what they are given to their own needs and desires, to win a bit of space for themselves, a bit of power over their own lives and society's future. For Hall the meaning and politics of any practice is the product of a particular structuring of the complex relations and contradictions within which it exists. Identity or even society is seen as a network of differences within which power operates "microphysically;" that is, "nonhierarchically. Society is a complex unity, always having multiple and contradictory determinations, always historically specific, and always culturally ideological and hegemonic."<sup>13</sup> This illustrates again that ideology is the naturalization of the unnatural. Ideology constructs our social identities as handicapped subjects who have no power but to submit to it. Ideology is *cultural hegemony* as advanced by Antonio Gramsci. *Hegemony* encompasses the illusion of consensus among the masses; it involves not *coercion* but *consent* on the part of the dominated.<sup>14</sup> This reflects what later Michel Foucault argues, that culture could be seen as a form of "governmentality," that is, "a means to produce conforming or *docile* citizens, most of all through the education system."<sup>15</sup> This is, for example, how Bounderby's system operates such hegemony not only in depending upon consensus or consent to particular ideological constructions but also in containing and incorporating such social structures. Stephen Blackpool also represents how life is lived, how they assert their struggle over necessity, to produce their own social structures, meanings, signs and discourses, and to define the ways they make sense of them, and how to resist domination. All this for them means to preserve their own culture.

Indeed, hegemony leads to a kind of subculture which negotiates with and hybridizes certain hegemonic cultural forms as modes of expression and opposition, which is often exhibited through the life-practice of the worker. Such subcultures, as the horse riders of *Hard Times*, seem in fact creative in their use of commodities, the primary products of the system that disadvantages them, as forms of resistance and grounds on which to construct a certain communal identity. As Foucault argues in a similar context, it is how individuals can work out strategies by which to advance in a field or to reconcile themselves to their current position. How poor

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>12</sup> This is connected to Stuart Hall's arguments concerning culture and class-culturation through his fresh evocation of issues as linguistics, race, gender, media studies, and colonial theory. Hall's new Marxism encompasses his definition and institutionalization of 'cultural studies,' where he observes that the working-class will go on struggling to gain positions in contemporary social life and equality in society. He simply calls for a structuring principle of struggle, not as an abstract possibility, but as a recognition that human activity at all levels always takes place within and over concretely "contested terrain." See *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996); also in the same volume, Lawrence Grossberg, "History, politics and postmodernism: Stuart Hall and Cultural Studies", 157.

<sup>13</sup> Grossberg, 157.

<sup>14</sup> Stuart Hall, "Encoding, decoding," In *During*, 91-103.

<sup>15</sup> *During*, 5.



working class people, unable to afford certain goods in society, may make a virtue of necessity by saying they do not like them anyway. But there are cases when this scarcity is rejected through "transgressive" undermining or "carnavalesque" overturning of routines and hierarchies through passive resistance, ironical mimicry, "symbolic inversion," "orgiastic" letting go, and even day-dreaming.<sup>16</sup>

As Antony Easthope argues, though in a different context, identity is always "shaped" by and for ideology; it is always "itself ideological.... Discourses and their means of representation live and die within history," within their own "materiality."<sup>17</sup> It seems then that "discourse produces readers as much as readers produce discourse.... There is no discourse without subjectivity and no subjectivity without discourse."<sup>18</sup> Michel Foucault's notions of discourse and discursive practices in relation to power, knowledge, control, domination, and imprisonment of the individual, especially for the purpose of this paper, stripping the workers of their culture and identity are all important here.<sup>19</sup> Indeed many of Dickens's novels, conceived within such irreducibly dialogic gamut of materialist discursive practices, present the poor as trying to achieve self-identity and struggle for equality and even for life. The circus horse riders posed a strong challenge to the dominant ideology and their irrepressible presence signified that their discourses or meanings are always sites of ideological struggles. In their own carnivalesque fashion and discourse, the circus horse riders tried to resist domestication, directing us back again to where meanings are always produced: the "generative process of society."<sup>20</sup> This is exactly how Foucault relates ideology, power and self-identity into this site of struggle. He does this through a multiplicity of scientific, political, religio-social, psychological, colonialist and often feminist discourses to reject how people should struggle to achieve their freedom as a whole. Of course Foucault was not exactly talking about Dickens but generally reflecting upon 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe as a whole, as shown in many of his books, especially in his famous two-volume book *The History of Sexuality*, his *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *Discipline and Punish* where he connects the exercises of power and control over people, "subjects" who refuse to be intimidated even by death or extermination, who resist domination, coercion and "governmentality."<sup>21</sup> This is exactly what happens in *Hard Times*, how Dickens overturns the workers' routines and hierarchies through their circus passive resistance and rejection of the Bounderby's and Gradgrind's *laws of facts*, which nearly dominated the entire scene of Victorian industrial England. The old traditional, Victorian, extraordinary value and aura given to the national culture, to the family, to the industrial society, is particularly criticized and made insecure by the image of the monoculture of the hard-working working-class family life of the travelling circus of *Hard Times*. This carnivalesque overturning or inversion is what Dickens is doing in *Hard Times*, the second main point to which I shall now turn.

<sup>16</sup> See Peter Stallybrass, "Bourgeois hysteria and the carnivalesque," in *During*, 284-292. See also Richard Dyer, "Entertainment and Utopia," in *During*, 271-283.

<sup>17</sup> Anthony Easthope, *Poetry as Discourse* (London: Methuen, 1983), 23.

<sup>18</sup> <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-32.

<sup>19</sup> Michel Foucault focuses on the complex system of "discourse formation" which reveals the close engagement of discourse with the world, the *materiality* of discourse, the world as always mediated to us by discourse, and discourse as always constituted by "relations" that "are established between institutions, economic and social processes, behavioural patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of classification, modes of characterization." Quoted in, Mark Olssen, *Michel Foucault: Materialism and Education* (Westport and London: Bergin & Garvey, 1999), 42. Even Derrida, the later founder of deconstruction who prioritizes the linguistic over the referent, treats all forms of discourse, including science, as literary genres. Indeed he privileges discourse over the world and denies the possibility of ever escaping the discursive and ever knowing reality independent of discourse. Derrida believes that there is no escape from discourse. All is text: "there is nothing outside the text." Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 158.

<sup>20</sup> See John Drakakis, "Trust and Transgression: the discursive practices of *Much Ado about Nothing*," in *Post-structuralist Readings of English Poetry*, eds., Richard Machin and Christopher Norris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 59-84. See also Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Methuen, 1981). Also for the question of the carnivalesque see Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).

<sup>21</sup> *During*, 5.



The idea of the carnivalesque or the cannibalization of culture has originally come from the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin. The carnivalesque is a literary term coined by him to refer to a literary mode that subverts and liberates the assumptions of hegemony through humour and chaos. And the origin of the carnivalesque is the concept of carnival. The carnival connects with the pre-Christian pagan rites and the Christian medieval *Feast of Fools*, which included a mock Mass and a blasphemous impersonation of church officials. The *feast of fools* is a medieval festival of the sub-deacons of the cathedral, held about the time of the feast of the circumcision (1 January), in which the humbler cathedral officials burlesqued and mocked the sacred ceremonies. Barbara Tuchman writes of the "Feast of Fools":

*Every rite and article of the Church no matter how sacred was celebrated in mockery. A dominusfesti, or lord of the revels, was elected from the inferior clergy ... whose day it was to turn everything topsy-turvy. They installed their lord as Pope or Bishop or Abbot of Fools in a ceremony of head-shaving accompanied by bawdy talk and lewd acts; dressed him investments turned inside out; played dice on the altar and ate black puddings and sausages while mass was celebrated in nonsensical gibberish; swung censers made of old shoes emitting "stinking smoke"; officiated in the various offices of the priest wearing beast masks and dressed as women or minstrels; sang obscene songs in the choir; howled and hooted and jangled bells while the "Pope" recited a doggerel benediction.... They rouse the bystanders to laughter with "infamous performances" and parody preachers in scurrilous sermons. Naked men haul carts of manure which they throw at the populace. Drinking bouts and dances accompany the procession. The whole was a burlesque of the too-familiar, tedious, and often meaningless rituals; a release of "the natural lout beneath the cassock."<sup>22</sup>*

Thus, the concept of the *carnivalesque* came to light through the Medieval pre-Lenten festivities when all social barriers are violated with impunity and social conventions are suspended and everyone is anyone's equal.

The term *carnival* and the *carnivalesque* came to have particular prominence for literary criticism after the publication of Bakhtin's *Rabelais and his World* (1965). Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque is derived from Rabelaisian satirical and parodic representation of society, especially in his great novel *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1534), with all its bawdy humour and veiled social satire. For Bakhtin the time of carnival features as a utopian irruption into the workaday world, a time of feasting when normally dominant constraints and hierarchies are temporarily lifted. The subversive and anti-authoritarian aspects of carnival are here emphasised authority figures are mocked, the joyless routines of everyday life are abrogated, and the lower bodily strata are allowed both to degrade and to regenerate those conceptions of the world which seek to exclude them. In this sense Rabelais's writing is seen as drawing its energies from these carnival practices, and therefore because of this direct connection with the carnival such writing is described as "carnivalesque".

In his *Rabelais and His World* and in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1973) Bakhtin likens the carnivalesque in literature to the type of activity that often takes place in the carnivals. In the carnival social hierarchies are profaned and overturned by normally suppressed voices and energies. Fools become wise, kings become beggars; opposites are mingled (fact and fantasy, heaven and hell, and so on). Thus, through the carnival and carnivalesque literature the world is turned upside-down, ideas and truths are endlessly tested and contested, and all demand equal dialogic status. For Bakhtin it is within literary forms like the novel that one finds the site of resistance to authority and the place where cultural, and potentially political, change can take place. Indeed, the carnival inversions, the world-turned-up-side-down, were clearly not aimed at loosening people's sense of the rightness of the rules which kept the world the right way up, but on the contrary at reinforcing them. For Bakhtin the carnival, as Simon Dentith argues, does not really "invert hierarchies and undermine boundaries, without at the same time recalling that many carnival and carnival-like degradations

<sup>22</sup> Barbara Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14<sup>th</sup> Century* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1978), 32-33.



clearly functioned to reinforce communal and hierarchical norms."<sup>23</sup> This is exactly what happens in *Hard Times* degrading the materialist system for the sake of imagination and fancy clearly functions to reinforce the communal system of the working class.

For Bakhtin and for Dickens the carnival "offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world," and to "enter a completely new order of things."<sup>24</sup> Through the use of such linguistic metaphors as abuse and cursing, death, copulation, birth, renewal, dismemberment, and pregnancy, Bakhtin captures the imagery of the carnival spirit. Cannibalization thus makes it possible to widen the narrow sense of life, or as Foucault would argue that it helps to extend our participation in the present system. The aspiration of carnival, as embodied for instance in *Hard Times*, is then to uncover, undermine even destroy the hegemony of any ideology that seeks to have the final word about the world; it offers a rejection of domination and hierarchy. It also helps to renew, to shed light upon life, the meanings it harbours, to elucidate potentials; projecting, as it Bakhtin, does an alternate conceptualization of reality. The carnival thus represents a theory of resistance, a theory of freedom from all domination: "carnival is the place for working out a new mode of interrelationship between individuals.... People who in life are separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers enter into free and familiar contact on the carnival square."<sup>25</sup> During the carnival there is a motivation to create a form of human social configuration that "lies beyond existing social forms."<sup>26</sup> Bakhtin's carnival theory is not reducible to terms such as anarchic, nor irresponsible; it is, in fact, a diverse tactic, one that may be implemented and sustained wherever there is a dominant regime. It also initiates dialogism between classes, and dialogism is a fundamental aspect of the carnival, each group bringing with them a different point of view, a different way of seeing the world.

Thus, for Bakhtin the central core of carnival is dialogue. And dialogue, the give-and-take exchange of language between two individuals, generally leads Bakhtin to invent his term dialogic which he associates with carnival, and for him dialogic has radical implications between two social groups and two different ideologies. To theorise carnival, to close it off from any dialogue would be to destroy the meaning of carnival. Although Bakhtin presents a theory of carnival, he does not enclose it in boundaries; it is always free to escape out of view. If dialogism ends, reveals Bakhtin, "everything ends." "Two voices is the minimum for life, the minimum for existence."<sup>27</sup> Bakhtin argues that by being outside of a culture can one understand his own culture. This process is "multiply enriching," it opens new possibilities for each culture, promotes "renewal and enrichment" and creates new potentials, new voices, that may become realizable in a future dialogic interaction. The carnival offers an arena of communication between otherwise alienated and marginalized social groups who not only gain a voice during carnival time, but they also say something about the ideology that seeks to silence them. "All were considered equal during carnival. Here, in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age."<sup>28</sup> The carnival offers an arena of communication between the Self and the Other, and as Stall brass and White argue in support of cultural history, the nineteenth century's initial "'disowning' of carnival and its symbolic resources," and the "gradual reconstruction of the idea of carnival" are due to "the culture of the Other."<sup>29</sup> For example, it is as members of a cultivated class that Mr. Bounderby and Mr. Gradgrind emphasise their own culture as a measure of class difference and protection. The carnival thus gives "birth to new ideas, only when it enters into genuine dialogic relationships with other ideas, with the ideas of others."<sup>30</sup> True thought is not to be found in the isolated minds of individuals, but at that point of dialogic contact between people engaged in discourse, in

<sup>23</sup> Simon Dentith, *Bakhtinian Thought: An introductory reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 74.

<sup>24</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1965), 34.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>29</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. R. W. Rotsel (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1973), 88.

<sup>30</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans. R. W. Rotsel (Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1973), 88.



carnival. Indeed, as if reflecting *Hard Times*, in describing the nature of the polyphonic novel, Bakhtin sees the entire scope of human life as a dialogic process whereby we find meaning only through our interactions with others.<sup>31</sup>

Such interactions between the rich and the poor, between the "central" and the "marginalized" forces are what we see operating in *Hard Times*. This illustrates Dickens's use of the "official" language of the culture of "facts" in contrast to the infusing diversity of the "unofficial" forms of speech acts of the poor class, represented in Slackbridge, Stephen and Rachael. The various obstacles faced by Sissy Jupe and her poor class, for example (in pages 49-56), in attempting to forge an authentic, authorial voice when confronted with the rigid nature of the education system are further examples of the nature of dialogic assimilation. In another famous book of his, *The Dialogic Imagination* (1981), Bakhtin renders such question of assimilating the disparate utterances of a certain language experience as a difficult process:

*The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language ... but rather it exists in other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own.... Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated overpopulated with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one's own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process.*<sup>32</sup>

Ironically enough, the ideological official language or the "authoritative" and "internally persuasive discourse," of Gradgrind and Bounderby ultimately fails in such assimilation when we see how Gradgrind's children fail miserably in education and in life in contrast to the happy conclusion of Sissy when Dickens writes that Sissy grows ever more happy and she eventually has children of her own. What ultimately Bakhtin is saying throughout this is that language has a "boundless dialogic context," a social terrain which mainly prospers in the carnival. Indeed the carnival leads to a culture of social and even divine "transcendence,"<sup>33</sup> a way of transcendence beyond all barriers which Dickens hopes to achieve in this novel.

Cultural cannibalization is somehow reflected in almost every chapter of *Hard Times*. Carnivalism is enacted through Dickens's focus on the trade unions and their failure to achieve anything tangible for the poor laborers of Coketown. Carnivalism is first embodied in the structure of novel: the choice of book titles, chapter titles and even character names. The novel is divided into three "books" entitled, Sowing, Reaping and Garnering. This agricultural motif is introduced by the "sowing" of facts as "seeds" into the fertile minds of the young pupils. "The one thing needful" is the seed of "fact" and even though the insistence upon "hard facts" seems infertile and unyielding, the motif of sowing makes the classroom a literal kindergarten. To be more precise, the imagery of "sowing" and horticulture varies from the children as the planted field and the children as plants themselves. At one point, "the Speaker" charges the instructor to "plant and root out" in order to form the children's minds. Later, the children are described as "little vessels ... ready to have imperial gallons of facts poured into them until they were full to the brim" not unlike the wisps of hair on the side of the Speaker's head, humorously described as "a plantation of firs" (1-2). Dickens's use of irony here is embodied in contrasting the words of gardening and horticulture with the actual scene depicted about the school and the speaker: "plain, bare, monotonous," "inflexible, dry and dictatorial." This means that there is no true sowing taking place in this "vault of a schoolroom." Carnivalism appears also in making architecture out of the physical description of "the speaker", who is a villain-like man. The description of the classroom is full of satire and caricature, a critique of

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>32</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 294.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.





utilitarianism and similar philosophies that suggest the absolute reliance upon calculations in opposition to emotion, artistic inspiration and leisure. Thus, Dickens's carnivalism is in itself an argument against "hard facts," for his carnivalesque depiction of twisted power-relationships offer the truth at the heart of the matter, if not the "hard fact."

Carnivalism appears more dramatically with Sissy Jupe and her poor examples, and the identities of the previously anonymous social roles that were given to them. The names of the characters are emblematic of their personality; usually, Dickens's characters can be described as innocent, villainous or unaware of the moral dilemmas of the story that surrounds them. Gradgrind, "a man of realities," "of fact and calculations," is a hard educator who grinds his students through a factory-like process, hoping to produce grads. He is also a "doubting Thomas" who dismisses faith, fancy, belief, emotion and trust, all in a carnivalesque way. Mr. M'Choakumchild is also villainous and he resembles the sort of fantastic ogres he would prefer students to take no stock in. Sissy and Bitzer are the most interesting characters who are of the same social class but yet they are different in their grasp of facts. Unlike the boy Bitzer (who has the name of a horse), Sissy has a nickname and she is the lone embodiment of "fancy". She is a romanticized figure who embodies carnivalism proper. Her last name, Jupe, comes from the French word for "skirts" and her first name, Cecilia, represents the sainted patroness of music. This leads to her carnival role as a member of the traveling circus, and how she represents "Art" and "Fancy" in contrast to M'Choakumchild, and his other 140 schoolmasters who "had been lately turned at the same time, in the same factory, on the same principles, like so many pianoforte legs" (7). When she says that she would carpet her room with flowers she is rebuked by the third gentleman: "you mustn't fancy ... you are never to fancy" (6).

Dickens's carnivalesque inversion of things appears also in how the children are seen as eager "vessels" of learning, and how the teachers as the criminals, the murderers of the innocents, who embody such carnivalesque inversion of art and fancy. Dickens is indeed arguing against a mode of factory-style, mind-numbing, grad-grinding production that takes the fun out of life. He believes that art requires an inquisitive and desiring mind, not teachers who are "monsters" "taking childhood captive, and dragging it into gloomy statistical dens by the hair" (8). That is why in a chapter called "A Loophole" Dickens says that there are many loopholes in Gradgrind's system which will ultimately bring it down. Mr. Gradgrind forbids his children any literature, art, or poetry or "silly" songs; he forbids "wonder" and encourages only classification, dissection, and the exposition of fact for he is the embodiment of "an eminently practical father" (9). The loophole offers an escape from such murdering system; it is a symbol of escape both mentally and physically. The symbol of contrast to the loophole is Stone Lodge, the home of Mr. Gradgrind, the "great square house," with its gardens "like a botanical account-book" (8-9). There are then several loopholes in the Gradgrind system that foreshadows his blindness from seeing the contradictions in his thought and the loopholes through which his model children might escape.

Dickens's use of carnivalism and caricature appears so vividly in his portrayal of characters as Bounderby in contrast to Gradgrind. Bounderby is metallic, and just like his friend Gradgrind, he is a man "perfectly devoid of sentiment." He always repeats that he is a very wealthy man; he has an imposing figure and his entire body is oversized, swelled and overweight, and he is always belching (27). He calls himself a "self-made man" and he always tells his friends stories of how he grew up in "a pigsty," "I was born in a ditch" (13). "I was a vagabond, errand-boy, vagabond, laborer, porter, clerk, chief manager, small partner, Josiah Bounderby of Coketown" (14). Indeed Bounderby has "a carnivalesque game of names"<sup>34</sup> that swings him between the clown, the ditch, and the serious and grave businessman. Such carnival naming is also repeated in Gradgrind's younger children who are named: Jane, Adam Smith and Malthus. This carnivalesque inversion is enhanced when we hear Bounderby's stories which sound very much like *fancy* to which he is nominally opposed. As in a classic imaginative fairy-tale, he says he has a wicked grandmother who mistreats him. Bounderby's reference to fairies

<sup>34</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 461.



and witches embodies carnival; his suggestion about vagabonds and circuses as being avenues for idleness and poverty also indicates his carnivalism in turning into the opposite; he becomes the symbol of money and industry in Coketown. Also Bounderby's "cavernous eyes" are a symbol of the deep, dark secrets hiding (cave-like) in his past; but his resemblance with Gradgrind reminds us that Bounderby and Gradgrind are always operating surveillance there is a juxtaposition in the adults' spying on the children as they peep at the public circus, and this awkward relationship reveals how much power the adults have. Indeed we know that Bounderby is a hypocritical man: he complains that he had to crawl out of poverty but he is the firmest advocate of Sissy's dismissal from school. Bounderby is certain that Cecilia Jupe must be a negative figure for the Gradgrinds.

Coketown itself embodies carnivalism in the way it is seen as a heavily- industrialized city with smoke hanging in the air, the water polluted, its windows rattling all day long. The streets are monotonous and the people are hardly different from one another, each performing pretty much the same job in the same factory, and the work they do is little different from one day to the next. In describing Coketown as hell, Dickens suggests that its residents are simply in need of some sort of diversion. This is the first class-oriented issue that Dickens elaborates in a carnivalesque manner in the novel. Hell is seen in the black canal that is an allusion to the river Styx. The coiled serpents of factory smokes are another symbol of immorality and sin. The images of the savage painted faces parallel the image of the dyed water, all of which typical of carnival. The irony in all this is when Dickens mocks these workers that they, like being in a carnival, are never satisfied and grateful for what they have, perhaps reflecting upon the ballad quoted earlier.

That is why they turn to circus-playing as exemplified by Sissy, her father, and Mr. Sleary's horsemanship. Carnivalism appears in the place where they live, a public house called Pegasus's Arms, which embodies a cultural shock to Bounderby and Gradgrind and as a way of cannibalizing life. This is enhanced when Sissy is surprised to find that her father has left her. In a typical carnivalesque reaction, Bounderby believes that Jupe "is a runaway rogue and a vagabond" to have abandoned his daughter (28). This reflects Dickens's use of carnivalism, caricature and comedy which dominates the novel; indeed the carnival tone, irony, and preferentiality are crucial in the novel. This circus group is described in a carnivalesque way as a family of families of fools, actors; these people "were not very tidy in their private dresses, they were not at all orderly in their domestic arrangements." "Yet there was a remarkable gentleness and childishness about these people." (31).

Mr. Sleary is definitely Dickens's best example of caricature and carnivalism with his loose eye and his lisp which make him appear as ridiculous as circus performer might be expected to be, as a clown in carnival. Indeed he has a great deal of wisdom, especially later on in the novel when he is an archetypal fool who is actually wise. Sleary appears as a fool in carnival in his comic way of speech: "Thleary. Thath my name, Thquire," he tells Mr. Gradgrind, and "Not athamed of it" (35). We admire the way he argues Sissy's case with Mr. Gradgrind and how he convinces Gradgrind and Bounderby not to dismiss Sissy from school. Indeed Sleary treats the whole scene as a performing act when he says goodbye to Sissy. Sleary can only think of things in terms of his circus profession: when he kissed Sissy goodbye, he "handed her to Mr. Gradgrind as to a horse" (36). The last word which Sleary tells to Cecilia reveals how much Dickens respects this "fancy" and poor-class-cultured society of horse riders as innocent and true in contrast to the money-minded and factual class of Bounderby and Gradgrind:

*People mutht be amuthed, Thquire, thomehow ... they can't be alwath a working, nor yet they can't be alwayth a learning. Make the bethth of uth; not the wurtht. I've got my living out of the horth-riding all my life, I know; but I conthider that I lay down the philothophy of the thubject when I say to you Thquire, make the bethth of uth: not the wurtht! (37-8).*

This is the best word of wisdom offered by Mr. Sleary when he, as an archetypal fool, is actually teaching the main lesson of the novel about education and facts. This act embodies his clownish carnivalesque



uncrowning and crowning. One should not always be teaching facts as Gradgrind and Bounderby profess throughout; their philosophy is a total failure where Sleary's is the practical and successful one. Sleary is saying here that their culture is always downtrodden and badly treated by the other well-off classes and that is why such way of life will never bear fruits. And it is high time that such horse-riders should take over society at least during their carnival time and should establish some kind of equality or some kind of dialogue with the other classes. Mr. Sleary is the teacher here theorizing about life and education, and as Mark Hennelly argues, "if Sleary's name ironically sounds like *Theory* when lisped, his speech disorder eloquently 'Slearizes' that carnival cannot be theorized;" it should be lived.<sup>35</sup>

Dickens's carnivalism is also best enacted in the other characters as Mrs. Sparsit, Mr. Bounderby's housekeeper; she is another source of carnival, irony and comedy. Her name involves "a carnivalesque game of names"; it can be read as a combination of the words "sparse" and "sit": throughout the novel she is always described in terms of her posture, usually sitting. Her character is riddled with contradictions and contrasts; she is both a "conqueror" and a "princess" (40). Bounderby inflates his respect for her in a typical carnivalesque way when he praises her and, yet again as in a carnival, degrades himself to limitless bounds as a way of threatening Cecilia (42). Bounderby thinks that Cecilia will definitely corrupt Louisa. Mr. Gradgrind's reaction is again typical of his factual doctrine: he believes that in having her in his house she "will be reclaimed and formed" and that her previous education (reading stories about fairies, hunchbacks, dwarves and genies) has come to an end. In fact, this hard line of reasoning means that Sissy will be "reclaimed and formed" both intellectually and morally, when we know at the end that this is not true and embodies what I am calling "carnivalism." This embodies the carnival uncrowning and crowing of things, and how the reference to the fairies and elves and genies is also typical carnival atmosphere which Dickens suggests in rejecting the material world.

Carnivalism also adequately characterizes the ways in which Louisa is brought up and ordered "never to wonder." Coketown children are "unlucky infants" who "were never to wonder." They should follow the orders of the social bodies, and the parade of carnival bodies goes on until "all the bodies agreed that they were never to wonder" (44). This represents one of the major carnival themes in conflict in the novel; ironically, Mr. Gradgrind does not approve of the town establishments. His son Tom has fallen under the sway of dullness and he represents the carnival proper when he ironically says, "I am a Donkey, that's what I am. I am as obstinate as one, I am more stupid than one, I get as much pleasure as one, and I should like to kick like one" (44). This inflating caricature goes on when he bitterly admits that, "I am a Mule too ... I must be a Mule. And so I am" (46). Representing carnival descent motif, Tom wants to take revenge against all those agents of facts, and to "blow them all up together!" (44) Indeed Louisa has angered and disturbed her mother to the carnival point where the mother says: "I really *do* wish that I had never had a family, and then you would have known what it was to do without me!" (44)

Carnivalism is also embodied in Sissy's progress at school and her attempts to run away from Gradgrind's custody. Sissy thinks that she is "stupid" and that she will not learn. But Louisa tells her that this is not true and that she is "more useful" in real life than anyone else (50). Louisa encourages her that her mistakes are natural and not mistakes at all. Sissy is spontaneous when she calls statistics "stutterings" because for her it is meaningless. Sissy's carnival responses are based more on compassion than on calculation. Sissy supports her argument about life through her mother who died when she was young. She says that her mother "was quite a scholar," "a dancer" (52). This is it, then, for Dickens's carnivalism, when education and learning becomes dancing, or, at least, has the same effect upon people's life. Sissy is proud of her father's circus profession and argues that throughout his life as a clown he gave his family a decent and honorable life. Carnivalism is thus embodied in Sissy when she represents moral and artistic progress in a way that the Gradgrinds have not. The

<sup>35</sup> See Mark Hennelly, "Victorian Carnavalesque," *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol. 30, no. 1 (2002): 365-81; also his "Alice's Adventures at the Carnival," *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol. 37, no. 1 (2009): 103-128.



Gradgrind family is described within images of winter, the archetype of death, whereas Cecilia within the images of spring, youth, life, and progress. That is why Dickens suggests that the Gradgrinds (especially Louisa) could actually learn from Sissy and not she from them. This embodies also another twist of carnivalism in Dickens's use of contrast, the carnival uncrowning and crowning: the contrast between Mr. Gradgrind and Sissy's father, the circus clown. Dickens suggests that Signor Jupe is a better father than Mr. Gradgrind. Later on in the novel, Dickens again uses the hoard character of the fool in order to show true wisdom. The constant battle between Fact and Fancy is complicated by the varying degrees of honesty, truthfulness and accuracy. While Mr. Gradgrind always insists on Fact, Jupe and Dickens prefer Fancy. Dickens and Jupe show that the preference for one or the other is a matter of choice and opinion. And regardless of which is better, both are necessary and life is miserable without them both.

Cultural carnivalism is indeed enacted in another two key characters in the novel: Stephen Blackpool and Rachael. They represent the culture of the workers of Coketown, known as "the Hands," the tools of production and even "stomachs" of consumption. The "hands" are viewed as mere factors of production, not much different than the machines they operate. Stephen is a decent man who looks much older than he is for the hard life he leads. Both Stephen and Rachael are like machines or cogs in machines who lost all their humanity (57). The part of town where they live is also symbolical of their misery and poverty. The houses are extremely small and dirty. Stephen does not even live in a house; he lives in a small room above a shop. Indeed his name 'Blackpool' suggests negative carnivalesque imagery; his life is a pool of mud and indicates his dim cultural prospects. This is true of a dogged carnival descent motif: he is always in "a muddle" and only bad things happen to him even though he remains an incredibly virtuous person throughout his adversity, especially with his madly-drunken abandoned wife. Both Stephen and Rachel fit into Dickens's sentimental and carnivalesque depiction of the working-class as more decent and morally fit than their alleged superiors. And his drunken wife represents some part of his ruined past, carnival culture, and reality. She symbolizes that poor people are not always decent but maybe forced into further labyrinthine proportion of misery and neglect. The factories of Coketown, the "Fairy palaces," the "serpents of smoke," the "clattering of clogs," the "ringing of bells," "and all the melancholy-mad elephants" of "the forest of looms" (61), which all symbolize the carnivalesque clash of fact and fancy, only increase the muddle in which these poor people live and the threatening danger which cause, if not death to them all, total imprisonment, as the title of the next chapter suggests, "No Way Out".

When Stephen comes to Bounderby to ask for help with his alcoholic-mad wife, Bounderby and Sparsit mock him. This carnivalesque reaction is important because it functions as an example of hypocrisy on Mrs. Sparsit's part when we know that her own husband dies of alcoholism and that she should help. This again foreshadows Bounderby's bleak marriage with Louisa at the end of the novel. Bounderby goes on to express his carnivalesque disappointment in Stephen's "unhallowed opinions" and the fact that he would air them in front of a decent lady like Mrs. Sparsit, and that he is "turning into the wrong road" and he has "been listening to some mischievous stranger or other" (68). This cold-hearted businessman simply embodies all carnival monstrosities, which make us reconsider what is natural and unnatural by dissolving constructed boundaries between the two. Bounderby knows all of the bricks in Coketown, but little about the concerns of individual people. He lives so isolated from the lives of common people that even he fails to notice the irony in his desire to terminate his own marriage. Such carnival conversations between Bounderby and Blackpool demonstrate Dickens's tendency to emphasize middle-class efforts to avoid social contacts with the lower classes.

Along with Sissy, Rachael is part of the motif of young women who have maternal, caring qualities because they are poor and live hard lives. Rachael makes Stephen think about the larger philosophical questions and mysteries of life and death as he lives it with his wife. He thinks of the "inequality of Birth" and the equality of Death. Indeed death is a carnivalesque element by which Stephen's culture is excavated. Death is one of the main questions in the novel which the author treats as a real thing and as a metaphor in Stephen's life: how he exists in a living-death situation; he is trapped in between sleep and being awake. Even worse, he can find "no way out" of his present situation in either of these conditions. But Rachael appears to him as an angel



who takes equal care of him and his wife and who exhibits a real sacrifice towards her class of people. In fact, carnivalism reveals the true personality of Stephen (and Bounderby) as a married man. As Julia Kristeva writes, carnivalism excavates culture's "underlying unconscious: sexuality and death," sometimes even "beyond the pleasure principle." Carnival spectacles further probe the inner "states of soul, such as madness, split personalities, daydreams, dreams, and death."<sup>36</sup>

Indeed carnivalism is also embodied in how Bounderby and Sparsit are described as rich who are rising and making their way up in society. The irony is that they (unlike the poor class) are going to suffer their own social and moral "falls" on account of their excessive pride; Sparsit is always described as a "fallen lady," unlike what Bounderby thinks of her; she represents carnival descent motif. Within the same criteria of contradiction there are more intense carnivalesque images of verticality in the lives of the poor: the serpent, the rising smoke, Lucifer the fallen angel and the grim, black ladders attached to each house. Each of these images becomes an explicit symbol of how easy it is for the poor to fall farther into the dumps and the difficulty of coming up. On the one hand, we have Stephen whose steady fall throughout the novel is simply on account of his already being down and having no other direction in which to travel. On the other, we see him becoming the symbol of change, innocence, faith and development even after his death.

Louisa's marriage to Bounderby formulates the ultimate meaning of carnivalism in the novel. Under his own terms and philosophy, Gradgrind decides that his Louisa should marry Bounderby in the same way that his son should join Bounderby's Bank. Gradgrind convinces Louisa that she should marry Mr. Bounderby for the benefit of them all; she is his "capital girl" (85) who will have great potentials for profit. This is a disappointing and carnival union of contrasts. Symbolically, the presence of a wilderness in this marriage as opposed to the cycle of seasons reflects the lack of fertility and the end of growth for Louisa. From her youth, she threatens to become a bitter old woman, and that is why her marriage becomes a total failure, a carnival farce. The whole thing is strange: Louisa's upbringing has prevented her from knowing what emotions to express. She blames her father about the whole matter: "You have trained me so well, that I never dreamed a child's dream.... I never had a child's belief or a child's fear" (91).

This marriage explains why Gradgrind is seen as "Blue Beard" and his office full of "blue books"; this is a combination of irony, allusion, and carnivalism. It is so striking how Gradgrind is such a villain to force his daughter into marriage which is death to her. Bluebeard, the villain from a child's fairy tale story, foreshadows the marriage drama that unfolds and it is a reminder of the war against "fancy" that Gradgrind upholds. Louisa's marriage is carnivalesque enough to suggest that both Louisa's father and her husband are sinister bluebeard figures who prove to be some ogres. He and Bounderby have had Louisa under monstrous carnival surveillance and observation for some time. When she accepts to become a debased human being, the mere "subject of a proposal," she proves to them the failure of their subjugating system. In her own weak acceptance she reverses the course of the action: she is defiant and stands "impassive, proud, cold" and the winner after all. She embodies the carnival "image of a clownish carnivalesque uncrowning" and crowning of both father and husband.<sup>37</sup> She proves to her father and to Bounderby that they are both blind to the "facts" of life which they claim they master and that they are terribly unable to understand the human soul.

Louisa's and Bounderby's marriage ceremony is typical of Dickens's carnivalism and caricature. Instead of love courtship and romance, the whole thing is wholesale deal, business contract, and of "a manufacturing aspect"; "the business was all Fact" (96). The wedding is adequately dry and Bounderby makes an adequately carnivalesque and long-winded speech often offered by a clown in a circus rather than by a groom on his wedding day: "as you all know me, and know what I am, and what my extraction was, you won't expect a speech from a man who, when he sees a Post, says "that's a Post," and when he sees a Pump, says "that's a

<sup>36</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Lion Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Lion Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 78, 83.

<sup>37</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, 79.



Pump," and is not to be got to call a Post a Pump, or a Pump a Post, or either of them a Toothpick" (96). All this tells us how things are turned up-side-down in a carnivalesque manner and how victims seem jolly and how jolly people are actually victims. Through Mr. Bounderby's marriage we begin to wonder who is going to be the victim! Is it him or Louisa or even Mrs. Sparsit? The interesting carnival contrast here foreshadows the eventual bleakness of the marriage. This also contrasts with the other marriage victims in the novel, Stephen and Rachael.

This element of carnivalism continues in Book two of the novel when Dickens ironically says "I wonder" when there is little wonder to be in Coketown. He wonders if "the eye of Heaven itself becomes the evil eye" glaring over Coketowners. And when "Coketown lay shrouded in a haze of its own" (99), it unravels the symbol of carnival death, decay and destruction, not only to its inhabitant workers but also to Bounderby's dreams and reality, as well as to Gradgrind's system of facts. Mrs. Sparsit is still sitting upstairs and watching in the Bank; she "considered herself ... the Bank Fairy"; Bitzer "regarded her as the Bank Dragon, keeping watch over the treasures of the mine" (101). The relationship between Bitzer and Mrs. Sparsit is very much like a relationship between a spy and his employer. James Harthouse, the sophisticated and manipulative young London gentleman who comes to Coketown to enter politics as a disciple of Gradgrind, and who quickly becomes attracted to Louisa and resolves to seduce her, is another example of carnivalism. In a carnivalesque clownish monstrosity, Bounderby tells Harthouse, "You see our smoke. That's meat and drink to us. It's the healthiest thing in the world in all respects, and particularly for the lungs" (113). When Harthouse meets Louisa, he finds her very hard to understand. There is irony when her face is "a natural play" but "locked up"; Louisa is represented by her imprisoned, stony face. It is ironic and comical how Harthouse uses the word "wonder" when he is against the whole idea of wondering, and how he wants to promote his political candidacy when he is wholly lacking in convictions. He is an example of carnivalism when we read all his thoughts and mind as a fool who is quite transparent, but yet he is able to ultimately cause mischief to Louisa.

Cultural carnivalism is also appropriately embodied in the conniving and dishonest man Slackbridge, the head of labour unions. His deceit is very evident in the language he uses to round people with him:

*OH my friends, the down-trodden operatives of Coketown! Oh my friends and fellow countrymen, the slaves of an iron-handed and a grinding despotism! 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, and crumble into dust the oppressors that too long have battened upon the plunder of our families, upon the sweat of our brows, upon the labour of our hands, upon the strength of sinews, upon the God-created glorious rights of Humanity, and upon the holy and eternal privileges of Brotherhood! (123-4)*

This is very ideological and political and acceptable by all workers if it had been spoken by a more genuine labour leader than Slackbridge. Slackbridge is one of Dickens's archetypal carnivalesque caricatures. His name is typically derived from one image: a 'slack bridge.' The carnival juxtaposition of slack and bridge, should amply explain the danger that Slackbridge (nearly a trap) presents as a leader for the urban poor workers. Like a bridge, he is essential to the cause, but he is slack, limp and floppy, not dependable, untrustworthy and dangerous. It is the combination of slack and bridge that produces his fault. The worthless content of Slackbridge's carnival message is caricatured by the alliteration in the phrase "froth and fume," which is only "roaring" and demagoguery. Indeed Slackbridge's demagoguery can be compared and contrasted to Bounderby's and Sparsit's, the other two leading demagogical orators of the novel. In fact, this carnivalesque speech roaring, "Gay Grammar," and "linguistic clownery," as Bakhtin argues, reaches its peak in Slackbridge's speech.<sup>38</sup> Slackbridge's carnival speech is full of linguistic impediments which are the overarching symbol of the poor workers' entire life. He shakes, sweats, chokes, and shouts near death to attract enthusiasm from his audience. Slackbridge embodies the "abuses, curses, profanities, and improprieties," which "are the unofficial elements of

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 468, 472.



speech" in carnival. "Such speech forms, liberated from norms, hierarchies, and prohibitions of established idioms, become themselves a peculiar argot and create a special collectivity, a group of people initiated in familiar intercourse, who are frank and free in expressing themselves verbally."<sup>39</sup> Slackbridge so mischievously seems to "intermix and confuse" his speech forms, to intermix the clean with the dirty, the fact with fancy, and game with work.<sup>40</sup>

Indeed it is so strange how under Slackbridge's new culture, Stephen is ostracized as a traitor and is ignored and shunned. But unlike Slackbridge, Blackpool's negative name has no correlation with his character. All the biblical references Slackbridge cites (from Jacob to Judas) all failed to blacken Blackpool. Suffering the silent treatment, Stephen avoids seeing Rachael because he worries that if she is seen with him she will be treated in a similar way. Stephen's life has simply gone from bad to worse and "into the loneliest of lives" (129). This has also led to a more radical example of carnivalism in the way things turn up-side-down for Stephen. When Stephen rejects Slackbridge's unionism he thinks that it would please his master Bounderby, although Stephen did not do it for Bounderby; he did it for complicated reasons, out of principles and for Rachael. Bounderby makes a carnival spectacle of Stephen by laughing at him in front of Louisa, Harthouse, and Tom and mocking him as a sort of specimen of the lower classes, those "pests of the earth," "who ought to be hanged wherever they are found" (131). When Bounderby describes the workers as "a set of rascals and rebels whom transportation is too good for," Stephen defends them as honorable folk who unite with each other under all conditions. Stephen describes the situation as a "muddle" and he assures Bounderby that the problem of the workers is larger than Coketown and its factories:

*'Deed we are in a muddle, sir.... Look how we live, an where we live, an in what numbers, an by what chances, an wi' what sameness; and look how the mills is alwus a goin, and how they never works us no nigher to onydis'ant object ceptinalwus, Death. Look how you considers of us, an writes of us, an talks of us, and goes up wi' yor deputations to Secretaries o' State 'bout us, and how yo are alwus right, and how we are alwus wrong, and never had'n no reason in us sin ever we were born. Look how this ha growen and growen, sir, bigger an bigger, broader an broader, harder an harder, fro year to year, fro generation unto generation. Who can look on't, sir, and fairly tell a man 'tis not a muddle? (134-5)*

For Stephen the "muddle" then is social, cultural and material; it is created through the hypocrisy of the rich and the incredible want of those who are lower on the social ladder. Bounderby does not appreciate such criticism and in revenge he accuses Stephen of betrayal for his "waspish, raspish" and carnivalesque behaviour (136). Indeed, Stephen is martyred and wounded despite his good heart, and his situation gets worse and worse to fulfill, it seems, the fate of the curse of his name. This carnival cycle of uncrowning and crowning which we find throughout *Hard Times* reinforces the temporality of historical, personal, cultural, and cosmic cycles, which ultimately lead to change and renewal, and to which the poor strongly adhere.

Mrs. Sparsit is further caricatured when she is rightly judged by her carnival facial features. Her "Coriolanian eyebrows" and her all-seeing (antlike) eyes are indicative of her powers of surveillance; her eyes are "lighthouses on an iron-bound coast" (172). This is a symbol of Sparsit's strength and intensity all put together to destroy Louisa's marriage. Her powers of surveillance, however, do not rescue anybody except herself. As a real spy, she moves without being seen but she sees all. Indeed, Sparsit's main carnival concern is not Bounderby but his wife. Sparsit employs the image of the staircase on which she sees Louisa walking down to her destruction without giving her any help. Sparsit's staircase represents carnival descent motif, the archetypal fall of most characters into their bad fate, particularly the descent of Stephen into the Old Hell Shaft, the Gradgrinds' fall into sin, the destruction of their educational and cultural statures, and Tom's final descent and death. One example of this carnival fall is Mrs. Gradgrind's death, when she blames her husband for failing

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 178-8.

<sup>40</sup> Peter Sallibrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 31.



to bring up his children properly, for forcing his daughter into such bad marriage, and for all the "Ologies" he inculcated into their heads. Another example is when Sparsit tries hard to entrap Louisa into the mire of her staircase by catching her red-handedly with Harthouse, but she fails. We laugh at the way she gets herself dirty and muddy hiding behind the shrubs and crawling in the rain like a thief to hear what they say, while she gets her clothes torn and disheveled. In this way Sparsit appears as a fool when she loses the trail. Sparsit is very concerned about not being blinded or fooled but in the end, she fools herself and misses her victory; she falls into the "gulf" she has prepared for Louisa.

The most exciting form of carnivalism appears in the chapter "Found" which tells about the finding out of the real identity of Bounderby and his mother, instead of finding out the bank robber. Sparsit is again the clown of this carnival and again she is mistaken in her show. She drags the "mysterious old woman" behind her in a comic spectacle and followed by many people in the street into Bounderby's house. The maximum comedy is achieved when Sparsit meets Bounderby, Gradgrind, and Tom, and announces her discovery. Bounderby knows his mother and is shocked to see, yet again, another of Sparsit's carnivalesque blunders being enacted in his own house. He tells her never again "poke your officious nose into my family affairs?" (233) this mortifies Bounderby, for in her carnival defense, Mrs. Pegler has uncovered her secret. Gradgrind blames Pegler that she ought to be ashamed of herself for arriving at the scene after deserting her son in his youth and leaving "him to the brutality of a drunken grandmother" (234). But Mrs. Pegler is furious at the attack and she wonders how Gradgrind would dare to attack her as a cruel mother when her son is present and who should surely defend her. Gradgrind is the most astonished at this theatricality and for the discovery of the real falseness of his close friend Bounderby and how much he kept lying about his reality. Bounderby is detected "as the Bully of humility" and the "most ridiculous figure" (235) ever lived. Everybody is amazed at his and Sparsit's falling from their "pinnacle of exultation into the Slough of Despond" (235). The climax of such theatrical carnivalism and clownish uncrowning is vividly played by Bounderby, especially when we learn of his loathsome behaviour to his mother by giving her only thirty pounds a year while he runs mad after the one hundred and fifty pounds being lost in the bank.

Carnival theatricality of the clownish uncrowning and crowning is finally enacted in the penultimate chapter entitled "Philosophical," where Mr. Sleary, the clown, the wise fool of the circus, is in control of Mr. Gradgrind and he uncrowns him; how he helps Tom escape punishment, and how he turns 'noble' people into fools and clowns. We find here the educator receiving instruction from the fool Mr. Sleary the clown. Mr. Sleary is a wise man who is perceived by all (including himself) to be a fool, whereas Sparsit, for example, is a fool who perceives herself to be wise. As a way of concluding and tying things up, Bitzer is shown here as the one who has been spying over Gradgrind, Louisa, Sissy, and who, in a carnivalesque way, is refusing Gradgrind's orders, humiliating his own teachings of facts, and how he wants to bring Tom back to Coketown, as his duty dictates. It is so ironical how Bitzer refuses the bribe Gradgrind offers him, which is part of their materialist philosophy and culture. Gradgrind, now "broken down, and miserably submissive to" Bitzer (256), realizes the fruits of his own teachings; Bitzer shows no emotion, no heart, no mercy as he exactly learnt in Gradgrind's school. Another big irony emerges when Mr. Sleary, in his typical carnival performance, helps Tom escape because his family has been good to Sissy.

Thus, the interesting form of carnivalism and caricature enacted by Dickens in this novel is how he generally brings out his heroes from lower classes or vagabonds, whereas the upper-class characters are dominated by moral faults. In a carnivalesque way *Hard Times* reveals how Dickens creates his heroes from the circus, the carnival, the fair, and the game-shows, the place, as one critic argues, which "could be thought of as low, dirty, extraterritorial, it could be demonized (or in time idealized) as the locus of vagabond desires."<sup>41</sup> Although Dickens does not always portray the poor in a positive light, all of his heroes do rise from the ranks of the poor without necessarily rising in social standing. Mr. Sleary ironically helps Gradgrind with his son who

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 31, 6-20, 171-90.





has become a culprit, a vagabond, and who needs to be shipped away with other criminals. Mr. Sleary concludes with his typical carnival teaching, uncrowning and crowning of Mr. Gradgrind that his circus company which promotes fancy and entertainment is not a "dirty place," not dangerous to people, but it is "the site of communal celebration." Sleary's circus is indeed like a marketplace where people meet and communicate; it should be at the centre of society not at the periphery; it is "at the crossroads, situated at the intersection of economic and cultural forces" which unite rather than separate<sup>42</sup>: "Thquire, thakehandth, firtht and lath! Don't be croth with uth poor vagabondth. People mutht be amuthed. They can't be alwayth a learning, nor yet they can't be alwayth a working, they an't made for it. You muth have uth, Thquire. Do the withe thing and the kind thing too, and make the betht ofuth; not the wurtht!" (262) This related image of a clownish carnivalesque uncrowning and crowning appears in Sleary's final act and lesson to Gradgrind, of himself becoming the wise man. Gradgrind is both figuratively decapitated and literally uncrowned of his educator's cap and reappears instead as the learner from the teacher of life, Sleary. Dickens's carnival cycles of uncrowning and crowning reinforce the temporality of historical, personal, cultural, and cosmic cycles, which ultimately lead to change. This is what Dickens aims at through Sleary's spectacles and carnival circus performances.

The final chapter of the novel called "Final" concludes quickly the novel's last spectacle of carnivalism in the way Mrs. Sparsit is thrown away from Bounderby's house. She has always called him with contempt "a Noodle" behind his back and now to his face. Gradgrind clears Stephen's name as he promised and thereby implicating his son. Gradgrind repents of his old philosophies and he is "no longer trying to grind that Heavenly trio in his dusty little mills" (266). Tom is lonely, thousands of miles away, and when he decides to come back he is delayed by illness and eventually dies in isolation. Finally, Sissy is the happiest, and her "happy children" escape the emotional destruction of Gradgrind's educational system and they love Louisa who becomes their wonderful teacher. Louisa has "grown learned in childish lore" and she assures their escape of what almost destroyed her.

Thus, the culture carnivalism of *Hard Times* nicely develops the way Dickens's Victorian bourgeoisie are viewed from a singular perspective, the perspective of the poor working class, those at the bottom of the social and economic system. The working class seems to be in carnival endeavouring to straighten the bourgeoisie's distorted view of human nature. Sleary seems to have done this and he is the more virtuous businessman. Bounderby and to some extent Gradgrind as greedy and individualistic, self-serving capitalists, are the exact manifestation of what is wrong with industrial society. But Sleary is the typical image of the traditional working-class people who earn their living honorably. In the same token, and to the amazement of the Gradgrinds, Sissy identifies her free spirit with nature, culture, fancy, and freedom. Sissy changes not only from the carnivalesque "stupid student" to the self-governing care-taker, but from an isolated individual to a participant in liberating social intercourse. Sissy's insights move her into the crowning position of the care-taker and counselor as they identify her with practices of social discipline, care, advice or spiritual exploration as well as a visionary aesthetic discourse and social readings. Sissy's carnival existence resembles her own lower-class imaginative fancy stories in which she is immersed and with which she lives. Through her own imaginative carnival performance of multiple roles the poor "ignorant student," the deserted circus orphan in Gradgrind's house, the care-taker or entertainer who helps the Gradgrinds Sissy acquires the mobility of the knowing subject, the familiarity of cultural positions and the liberality of her own class. Indeed these roles both expand her mind and expand the range of her carnival culture. It is the culture which becomes for Dickens the new nature which is also inevitably human and dialogic. It is the culture that cannot be acquired; it is inherent and comes naturally with one when one is born. Culture is the huge carnival patch on which many kinds of fundamental questions are stitched together. Culture is indeed so porous an entity which encompasses in its folds so many other fields which are central to literary analysis and criticism.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 28-30.



International Journal of Humanities and Applied Social Science (IJHASS)  
E-ISSN: 2471-7576  
E-mail: editor@ijhassnet.com  
<http://ijhassnet.com/>

©Center for Promoting Education and Research (CPER) USA, [www.cpernet.org](http://www.cpernet.org)

## Bibliography

- Adorno, Theodor, and Max Horkheimer. "The culture industry: enlightenment as mass deception." In Simon During. Ed. *The Cultural Studies Reader*. pp. 29-43.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and his World*. Trans. Hélène Iswolsky. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1965.
- .....*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Trans. R. W. Rotsel. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1973.
- ..... *The Dialogic Imagination*. Ed. Michael Holquist. Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.
- Castle, Terry. *Masquerade and Civilization: The Carnavalesque in Eighteenth-Century English Culture and Fiction*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986.
- Dentith, Simon. *Bakhtinian Thought: An introductory reader*. London and New York: Routledge, 1995.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976.
- Dickens, Charles. *Hard Times*. Beirut: York Press, 2002.
- Drakakis, John. "Trust and Transgression: the discursive practices of *Much Ado about Nothing*." In *Post-structuralist Readings of English Poetry*. Eds., Richard Machin and Christopher Norris. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987: 59-84.
- During, Simon. Ed. *The Cultural Studies Reader*. London and New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Dyer, Richard. "Entertainment and Utopia." In During, pp. 271-283.
- Eagleton, Terry. *After Theory*. New York: Basic Books, 2003.
- Easthope, Antony. *Poetry as Discourse*. London: Methuen, 1983.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Foucault Reader*. Ed. Paul Rabinow. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986.
- Grossberg, Lawrence. "History, politics and postmodernism: Stuart Hall and Cultural Studies." In David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen. Eds. *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*. pp. 151-173.
- Hall, Stuart. "Encoding, decoding." In During, pp. 91-103.
- Hennelly, Mark. "Victorian Carnavalesque." *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol. 30, no. 1 (2002): 365-81.
- ..... "Alice's Adventures at the Carnival." *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol. 37, no. 1 (2009): 103-128.
- Jameson, Frederic. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. London: Methuen, 1981.
- Kristeva, Julia. *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. Ed. Lion Roudiez. Trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Lion Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1980.
- Morley, David, and Kuan-Hsing Chen. Eds. *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Olssen, Mark. *Michel Foucault: Materialism and Education*. Westport: Bergin & Garvey, 1999.
- Stallybrass, Peter, and Allon White. *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986.
- Stallybrass, Peter. "Bourgeois hysteria and the carnivalesque." In During, pp. 284-292.
- Stoler, Ann Laura. *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1995.



International Journal of Humanities and Applied Social Science (IJHASS)  
**E-ISSN: 2471-7576**  
**E-mail: editor@ijhassnet.com**  
**http://ijhassnet.com/**

©Center for Promoting Education and Research (CPER) USA, [www.cpernet.org](http://www.cpernet.org)

- Tuchman, Barbara. *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14<sup>th</sup> Century*. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1978.
- Williams, Raymond. *Culture and Society: Coleridge to Orwell*. 1958; rpt. London: The Hogarth Press, 1987.
- ..... *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. 1976; rpt. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.
- ..... *The Long Revolution*. 1961; rpt. New York: Harper and Row, 1966.
- Young, Robert. *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. London: Routledge, 1995.