

# “Why, He Formed Me That Way”: Patriarchy, Pedagogy, Capitalism, and (False) Consciousness in Charles Dickens’ *Hard Times*

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Within the nineteenth century, concurrent with Queen Victoria’s ascension to the throne, England was thought to be a preeminent civilization in its acquirement and development of immense amounts of wealth (Ure 6). Indeed, factories, mines, and mills began to emerge and scientific advances were refined. The industrialization process focused on the productive industry, which based itself on the acquisition of profit: that is to say, capitalism. Under this system, most everything is made into a commodity: for Karl Marx, “[a]n *object* becomes a commodity only when it has exchange value [the money which it can be traded for] or sign-exchange value [the social status it confers on the owner], and both forms of value are determined by the society in which the object is exchanged” (Tyson 62; emphasis mine). Commodities, then, become objects to be crafted, sold, and traded. Accordingly, those who create these objects stand in contrast to them and as a result become the subjects. In fact, in the analysis of objectivity/subjectivity, Marx suggests that “[s]ubject and object cannot be separated” (Fromm 28) because “sectarianism in any quarter is an obstacle to the emancipation of mankind” (Freire 37).

In a similar manner with the advent of Victorian capitalism, the doctrine of separate spheres also acted as a split between objects and subjects. In this case, the public sphere, reserved mainly for men, becomes a masculine subject; and the private sphere, where women are domesticized, becomes a feminine object. Thus, “[t]he concept of separate sphere... provided a rationale for a lifestyle fostered by industrialism” (Burstyn 19). Industrialism, then, in this analysis, is synonymous with capitalism, patriarchy, and vice versa. There is, however, a sphere that belongs somewhat in the middle of the object/subject and private/public dichotomies: the sphere of education. The system of education, within the framework of nineteenth-century discourse, becomes a place that is both public and private, for children occupy both spaces more freely than their adult counterparts. This sphere, then, encompasses both the public, private, subject, and object. Therefore, with the help of bell hooks, Karl Marx, and Paulo Freire, this analysis will explore the following: the ways in which patriarchy and capitalism are interconnected systems of domination that (re)produce and purposefully instill Marx’s concept of false consciousness and alienation through the education of children, within Charles Dickens’ *Hard Times*, in an attempt to train, as Andrew Ure explains in his *Philosophy of Manufactures*, “human beings to renounce their desultory habits of work and to identify themselves with the unvarying regulatory of the complex automaton” (15).

Marx’s philosophy acts as an objection against people’s alienation. Marx’s concept of alienation, or estrangement, means that “man does not experience

himself as the acting agent in his grasp of the world, but the world (nature, others, and he himself) remain alien to him. They stand above and against him as objects” (Fromm 37). Estranged people are dominated by forces of their own creation, but to them these dominating forces seem as foreign objects beyond their control – thus alien to their own consciousness. Indeed, Marxist philosophy positions itself in stark contrast to Ure’s ideological stance as, “it is a movement against the dehumanization and automatization of man inherent in the development of Western industrialism” (Fromm). In a similar fashion editor Janet Kourany, in *Philosophy in a Feminist Voice*, traces the ways that Western philosophy locates masculine spheres as superior and creates a human nature based on that of men: “[T]here has been much room for bias in their philosophizing — because these men have theorized about a very large and diverse group, the whole human race, from the vantage point of their rather small and homogeneous group” (5). As a matter of fact, Western philosophy enforces the gender binary that is made explicit through the division of spheres. For example, “there has been bias in the field’s emphasis on the mind and ‘reason’ in its characterization of human nature (both associated with privileged masculinity)” (Kourany 5). As a consequence, then, feminine human nature has been defined in the tradition of characteristics such as emotionality, passivity, incapacity for rational thought, and subservience. Hence, masculinity becomes related to the head, and femininity to the heart. Arguably, this oppressive ideology has been (re)produced mainly in the educational system of children since the “Victorians saw education as a means of... social control” (Burstyn 11). Thus, knowledge becomes an oppressive masculine construct that subjugates those who acquire it under its power.

Even though, as stated earlier, the educational sphere is inhabited by both masculine and feminine personas, it operates under a system of capitalist patriarchy – which means that even though the physical manifestation combines both masculine and feminine, the ideological foundation privileges only the former. This is exemplified best in Dickens’ portrayal of Thomas Gradgrind: “[He is a] man of realities. A man of facts and calculations. A man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four, and nothing over, and who is not to be talked into allowing for anything over” (42). Indeed, he is “ready to weight and measure any parcel of human nature” (Dickens 42). Evidently, Thomas Gradgrind embodies (and espouses) the utilitarian system that he is placed under. However, it would be reductive to assume that he is merely a powerless figure under the industrial system, for “not only do circumstances make man; man also makes circumstances” (Fromm 19). In the same way that subject/object cannot be separated, for Marx an individual’s productivity in society creates the situations under which he/she is placed. In essence, Gradgrind is not only an oppressor of others, but also of himself – for power works as a two way street, and since “he makes his history, he is his own *product*” (Fromm 24; emphasis mine). In addition, readers are made aware that Thomas Gradgrind belongs to the (upper) middle class, and, since he makes no attempt to fight against the privilege he receives, he subscribes implicitly to bourgeois decorum. This means that he exploits those below him to further his own development. Thus Marx would argue that most of what Grandgrind “consciously think[s] is ‘false’ consciousness” (Fromm 19), which implies that his actions are

marred in ideology and *rationalization*; or, in other words, in a context where power hierarchies arise, especially in class relations, one’s consciousness is distorted by the creation of mental blocks, falsifications, and errors that begin to mold one’s thoughts, ideas, and actions. According to Marx, this distortion is systematically achieved by social mechanisms that condition the lower/working classes into subordination, which the oppressed classes then internalize and justify. It is important to note, however, that Marx’s analysis focuses mainly on false consciousness within the underclass. Nonetheless by using Marx’s own logic, which suggests that when oppressing others man oppresses himself and in turn becomes his own product, then it is arguable that Gradgrind himself, though a privileged member of society, can indeed internalize a false consciousness. However, he would not be justifying his oppression, but rather *his own superiority*.

Thomas Grandgrind “seemed a galvanizing apparatus” (Dickens 42), or a mechanism that stimulates life vis-à-vis electrical currents. This description suggests that he is a character within this narration that offers life to others. What is ironic, however, is Dickens’ coupling of this description with the chapter title “Murdering the Innocents” (42). This stark contrast is deliberate as it illuminates the truth about Thomas Gradgrind and his philosophy: “What I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the *minds of reasoning animals* upon facts” (Dickens 41; emphasis mine). The Gradgrind philosophy focuses on logic, reason, and “fact.” Indeed, Gradgrind actively desires to instill this capitalist patriarchal agenda into the children of the school; he wants to stimulate the minds of the young children, while ignoring the heart, which is their soul – hence his dehumanization of the children as “animals.” Arguably, Thomas Gradgrind acts out Andrew Ure’s wishes to turn productive hands (and minds) into automatons. As a result, the Grandgrind philosophy and what Ure calls “the philosophy of manufactures” (1) become the same.

These two philosophies, or capitalist patriarchal ideology (and “I am using synonymous terms” [Dickens 131]), are enacted in the “bare, monotonous vault of a school-room” (Dickens 41). Furthermore, Gradgrind (and the education system as a whole) employs what Paulo Freire coins as “the banking concept of education” (72); in this model, knowledge becomes a gift “bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (72). Indeed, as the basis for utilitarian education is entrenched in the Western philosophical canon of masculinity, Gradgrind, and other speakers and teachers within the school, become the holders of knowledge. Thus, education becomes an act of depositing, “in which students are depositories and the teacher is the depositor” (Freire 72). This is illustrated best in the ways the “little *vessels*... [are] ready to have imperial gallons of fact *poured into them* until they were full to the brim” (Dickens 42; emphasis mine).

In the same way, Freire argues that students within the banking model turn into “containers’, into ‘receptacles’, to be ‘filled’ by the teacher” (72). Hence, the teacher renders himself as subject, and those against him as objects. In fact, the more these “receptacles” are filled, the more they are perceived as better; this is portrayed best when Bitzer is asked by Gradgrind as to what his definition of a horse

is. The student answers, “Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy countries, sheds hoofs, too” (Dickens 42). Here, the reader is made aware of the banking model, which is mainly carried out through “empirical dimensions of reality, [which] tend in the process of being narrated to become lifeless and petrified” (Freire 71), much like the students who are dehumanized and “lifeless.” Indeed, it becomes “necessary for students to assimilate to bourgeois values in order to be deemed acceptable” (Hooks 178).

The industrial educational model confuses the authority of knowledge with the professional knowledge of the teacher, which he/she “sets in opposition to the freedom of the students” (Freire 73). Yes, the teacher is the subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects (Hooks 16). This rendering of both students and teacher into objects aids in the dehumanization of them, and encourages them “to learn obedience to authority” (Hooks 4). It becomes incomprehensible, then, for students to speak of matters other than the mind. In fact, it is considered a transgression to do so. When Sissy Jupe states, “I would fancy” (Dickens 46), it elicits a response from the teacher: “You are never to fancy... you are to be in all things regulated and governed... by fact. You must discard the word Fancy altogether” (Dickens 46). Here, the teacher is quick to reprimand the student for stepping outside of the hegemonic structure of education, which further pushes towards the split of mind and heart (and thus the public and private spheres). Indeed, Jupe, in this context, becomes the heart and stands in direct contrast to her classmates. This dismissal of “fancy” is merely a strategy to ensure the instillation of the capitalist patriarchal utilitarian consciousness within the students.

At times, the enforcement of the system and the filling of the students with industrial agenda fails, and at others, it succeeds. For example, Gradgrind suggests that Sissy Jupe has “not acquired, under Mr. and Mrs. M’Choakumchild, anything like the amount of exact knowledge which [he] looked for [in her]... [she is] extremely deficient in... facts” (Dickens 125). He continues to suggest that she is “altogether backward and below the mark” (Dickens 125). In this case, the feminine heart has managed to repel the masculine mind, but she is deemed unacceptable and thus has to deal with the social repercussions of her dissent. Indeed, Sissy has kept her humanity. However, in the circumstance of Gradgrind’s daughter, Louisa, the patriarchy has been internalized: “You have been so well trained, and you do... so much justice to the education you have received, that I have perfect confidence in your good sense. You are not impulsive, you are not romantic, you are accustomed to view everything from the strong *dispassionate ground of reason*” (Dickens 129; emphasis mine). Gradgrind’s positioning of his daughter as “dispassionate” is undeniably connected to Freire’s argument concerning the oppressor tactic, which uses “their dependence to create still greater dependence” (66). This deepened dependence causes the oppressed “to react in a passive and alienated manner when confronted with the necessity to struggle for their freedom and self affirmation” (Freire 64). This passivity is depicted best by Louisa’s acceptance of Mr. Bounderby’s proposal: “let it be so. Since Mr. Bounderby likes to take me thus, I am satisfied to accept his proposal. Tell him, father, as soon as you please, that this was my answer” (Dickens 133).

Similarly, though differing in treatment, Gradgrind’s son, Thomas, has also internalized the system for he too was “crammed with all sorts of dry bones and sawdust” (Dickens 167). However, unlike Louisa’s passivity, he, in his alienation, “want[s] at any cost to resemble the oppressors, to imitate them, to follow them” (Freire 62). Thus, “instead of striving for liberation, [the oppressed] tend themselves to become oppressors,” or “sub-oppressors” (Freire 45). This projection of oppression is explained through the ways in which the relationship between the siblings, Thomas and Louisa, changes over time. At first, they share a certain type of solidarity over their oppression: “I am sick of my life, Loo. I hate it altogether, and I hate everybody except you” (Dickens 87). However, over time, when they become adults, and he gains some autonomy through his privilege as a man, he distances himself from her: Louisa lovingly reprimands him for not visiting by stating, “you do let such long intervals go by without coming to see me” (Dickens 128). Since the doctrine of separate spheres provides men with the agency to exist outside of the domestic sphere, he begins to taste some freedoms that are inconceivable to Louisa, and, as a result, treats her with “scrutiny” (Dickens 128). The system undeniably subjugates any characteristic that is deemed feminine whether it manifests itself physically (i.e. Louisa is a woman, and thus her gender and sex are conflated), or intellectually (i.e. the acquirement of traits deemed feminine: emotionality and the incapability to rationalize).

Within *Hard Times*, Charles Dickens explores the ways in which the industrial/utilitarian philosophy has been intrinsically tied to patriarchy and capitalism. Through the exploration of nineteenth-century discourses, readers are made aware of the oppressive ideologies that underlines Andrew Ure’s work, which (re)produces concepts of alienation, false consciousness, and dehumanization. These constructs provide power to those who internalize them and act upon them the most; this “oppressor consciousness tends to transform everything surrounding it into an object of its domination” (Freire 58). As a result, this mode of domination creates the oppressive banking education, which “attempts to maintain the *submersion* of consciousness... [rather than] the *emergence* of consciousness and *critical intervention*” (Freire 81; emphasis author’s). This “emergence of consciousness” is synonymous with Marx’s theorization of “true consciousness” (Fromm 19), which is a mode of liberation achieved, within the framework of education, through, as Hooks suggests, “being vulnerable in the classroom, [and] being wholly present in *mind, body, and spirit*” (21). Arguably, Dickens attempts just that. Or, in other words, he advocates for the reformation of the system of patriarchal knowledge, which focuses mainly on a few masculine traits, by incorporating an intersectional approach that encompasses varying perspectives and experiences.

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