

Daniel Remvik

## **Between Fiction and Reality**

The Production of Images of Reality in Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854)

Bachelor's thesis in ENG2900

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Department of Language and Literature  
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## **Abstract**

The thesis attempts to examine different aspects of the question of how fiction can have a political voice and influence. The objective of the thesis is centered around the British writer Charles Dickens and his novel *Hard Times* from 1854, which is often acknowledged as the novel with the greatest polemic and political potential in his writing. The thesis argues that *Hard Times* is political by creating, transposing, and exposing images of reality that question, transform one context to another, and display them for readers, which causes the limit between fiction and reality to be challenged. The novel operates as a configuration of the real world, where a mimesis of it is constructed, and overall, the text has great significance for the reader's understanding with respect to the themes Dickens explores in the novel. The primary focus of the thesis is based on the philosophy and perception of the education of children concerning the character Mr. Gradgrind as a representative image of the typical man during the hardest times of industrialization in Britain through the nineteenth century.

## **Sammendrag**

Avhandlingen forsøker å belyse ulike aspekter ved spørsmålet om hvordan fiksjon kan ha politisk makt og innflytelse. Fokuset for oppgaven trekker veksler på den britiske forfatteren Charles Dickens og romanen hans *Hard Times* fra 1854, som ofte betraktes som romanen med det største polemiske og politiske potensialet. Avhandlingen argumenterer at *Hard Times* er politisk ved at den oppstiller, omstiller og utstiller virkelighetsbilder som utfordrer, gjør dem synlige for lesere og endrer én sammenheng til en annen, hvilket gjør at grensen mellom fiksjon og virkelighet utfordres. Romanen fungerer følgelig som en konfigurasjon av virkeligheten hvorfra det konstrueres en mimesis av den, og overordnet har teksten en sterk betydning for leserens viten med henblikk til de temaene Dickens behandler i romanen. I lesingen av *Hard Times* fokuseres det især på hvordan karakteren Herr Gradgrinds filosofi og synspunkt på dannelsen av barn er et representativt bilde av den typiske mann under industrialiseringens tøffeste tider i Storbritannia gjennom det nittende århundre.

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## Introduction

What did Charles Dickens know about Victorian Britain? It may seem a rather frivolous question, but the objective of this thesis is to interrogate the relationship between fiction and the real world. We usually associate literature with fiction, imagination, and illusion as opposed to reality and the real world. A writer like Dickens provides insight into nineteenth-century Britain when depicting the social and economic realities of his contemporaries. When referring to Dickens, we often dwell on the different narratives of social commentaries related to the realist novel of the nineteenth century. Most of Dickens' fiction carries traces and hints from, and has something to say about, reality and the real world. There is namely a close connection between literature and politics since literary texts often reflect social and political issues, and the themes explored in a work are regularly rooted in the context of the real world in which the text is produced. How can Dickens depict realities of his times? Works of fiction have the potential to create, transpose, and expose reality through fictitious narratives, and literature is only a frame with its ability to construct a system of relationships that strongly resembles what we understand and recognize as reality. In that regard, literature is a reflection of the real world, and literature is political by reflecting and representing reality.

This thesis focuses on Dickens' 1854 novel *Hard Times*, often acknowledged as his most overtly political work. The aim of the thesis is, therefore, to explore this political potential and how this is conveyed. I argue that *Hard Times* is political by creating images of industrial Britain, transposing and changing one context to another through the circus, before exposing the confession of 'the typical' to readers. My argumentation draws on Frederik Tygstrup and Isak Winkel Holm's article "Cultural Poetics and the Politics of Literature" to describe three ways *Hard Times* is political, namely creating, transposing, and exposing images of reality. Creating images of reality is an adaptation of existing models of reality, while transposing them refers to the transpositioning from one symbolic form to another which challenges the relationship between the imaginative and the world it depicts. The exposure of images of reality allows to reflect on and communicate existing historical images of reality. These will have a great effect on the reader because Dickens offers readers insight into, and understanding of, Victorian Britain. In short, Dickens' depiction of industrialization is political by representing the world.

## Charles Dickens and *Hard Times*: Utilitarianism and Political Economy

Charles Dickens is significant to the English literary canon due to his contribution to the nineteenth-century realist novel and his fictitious depiction of the social and economic issues of the Victorian Era. The term ‘Victorian novel’ often refers to the novels produced during the reign of Queen Victoria from 1837 to 1901, and this was a period of significant social and political change in Britain. The literature of the time tends to reflect on the consequences of these changes. Victorian novels are typically characterized by realism, social commentary and critique. As Louis James notes, the first major Victorian novel was Dickens’ *Oliver Twist* from 1837, and the rise of the novel as a literary genre strongly developed during the reign of Queen Victoria, turning away from the romantic and chivalry narratives of the romance to the more realistic and “accurate” illustrations of human life and its environment (1). Dickens’ novels typically reflect on societal issues through characters who exhibit the sheer absurdity of human nature, like the starving orphan politely asking for a second helping, or the grim schoolmaster and his rationalist behavior. When first published, his stories were serialized, that is, they were released a few chapters at a time in affordable literary magazines and journals. Dickens’ method did not only made fiction available to a wider audience but increased the hype around the author himself.

*Hard Times* is arguably the most polemic and political novel by Dickens because of its critique of education and industrialization. The novel may be categorized as an industrial novel because it portrays the impoverished conditions of the working-class in an industrial British town. Such characteristics are typical to Dickens’ writing and social commentary, that he highlights the wounds and bitter struggles of workers in Victorian Britain during the hard times of industrialization. Kate Flint explains further that a significant aspect of the novel is its critique of utilitarian education (xi). This is a type of education that focuses on sense over sensibility that can be applied in the workforce. The term ‘utilitarian’ comes from the philosophy of utilitarianism, which suggests that the moral worth of an action is regulated by its usefulness in achieving the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. In the context of education, utilitarianism focuses heavily on the significance of education in promoting economic growth and social progress. Dickens opens the novel in Thomas Gradgrind’s classroom in which the students are being heavily indoctrinated, nearly brainwashed, in the philosophy of fact and utilitarian thinking. This scene functions as a satirical commentary on this rationalist way of thinking in nineteenth century Britain which will be analyzed later on.

*Hard Times* explores the negative consequences of industrialization and the dehumanizing impacts of society primarily driven by economic thinking. Political Economy is, therefore, a central aspect of the novel, examining how economic management of political institutions shapes and contributes to economic outcomes and vice versa. Presented as a flawed system that neglects the emotional and spiritual qualities of humans, Political Economy functions to distribute and allocate resources and impact the power dynamics in society. The problem of economics is to maximize pleasure – that is to make sure to satisfy humans’ wants to the utmost in a manner of minimum effort (Jevons 40). The character Josiah Bounderby embodies certain aspects of Political Economy in the novel. Bounderby’s character represents the industrial bourgeoisie and embodies the values of the capitalist class of the Victorian Era. Consistently, he promotes the idea that individual success is solely regulated by personal effort and that the free market should be permitted to function without government regulation. Dickens gives insight into the omniscient narrator’s view on page 69, for example, which reads: “It is known, to the force of a single pound weight, what the engine will do; but not all the calculator of the National debt can tell me the capacity for good or evil, for love or hatred, for patriotism or discontent.” We learn that Dickens’ narrator counteracts the stereotypes of Bounderby of the poor as being lazy. The narrator’s normative perception of reality is particularly shaped by the understanding that emphasis on facts and rationality at the expense of imagination and emotion has dehumanized individuals and led to a seemingly morally bankrupt society. Even though he may suggest that people need to better understand these people, the narrator denotes that this awareness cannot be successfully achieved via calculation, measurement, or the accumulation of fact, but through sympathy and emotion.

As a work of fiction, *Hard Times* addresses social and economic issues of the real world by *representing* the real world. Whereas it presents a fictional story and characters, the novel in an effective way critiques and comments on the social and economic realities of the Victorian times. The real question, however, is how Dickens can portray and represent these forms of reality. The following paragraphs explore how Dickens’ novel can be political. Works of fiction are often understood as something opposed to the real, yet there are aspects of fiction that make us treat literary works as presenting worlds not so unlike our own. By arguing for creating, transposing, and exposing images of reality, *Hard Times* is political by representing the realities of the nineteenth century.

## **Cultural Poetics and Symbolic Forms**

Literature is political by representing and reflecting the real world. Having this perspective in mind while reading Dickens, the thesis will explore how *Hard Times* can create images of, and draw our attention to, the real world and Victorian times. A culture produces images of the real world by capturing facts and incorporating them into interpretive frameworks. By this, I suggest that any culture, for example, the one around industrialization and nineteenth-century education, as Dickens depicts, is in possession of a collective set of models that can describe our ways of understanding and of relating ourselves to one another. Tygstrup and Holm share this perspective, that taking part in culture provides acquisition of this collective repertoire of viewpoints and cognitive forms that can be employed to depict facts (200). Enabling the production of cultural images, these forms and techniques will now be referred to as ‘cultural poetics’.

Cultural poetics will, and can, produce knowledge and facts of the real world. This form of poetics suggests that we can perceive some things, incidents, or phenomena to be factual, and perhaps most importantly what cannot be considered factual. Every culture has a collective set of models that prescribe our ways of interpreting, thinking, and relating ourselves to each other and the shared surroundings (Tygstrup and Holm 200). Cultural poetics *produces* facts, which indicates that this form of poetic determines what can be considered a fact and what cannot. This suggests that these poetics creates an including system that can capture facts and give them an explanation and, crucially, a framework (Tygstrup and Holm 201).

Ernst Cassirer uses the term ‘symbolic forms’ to refer to the role of symbols and cultural representations in understanding and expressing reality. Symbolic forms are not just arbitrary representations of reality. In fact, they are deeply rooted in human nature and have a particular effect on how we perceive and interpret our shared surroundings. Cassirer suggests that a workable image of reality must be understood *historically* with emphasis on the actual historical images of reality which we can uncover by studying cultural history (Tygstrup and Holm 203). Consequently, symbolic forms compose a historical schematism that operates as the “transcendental condition of possibility for the interpretation of reality in a specific culture.” (Tygstrup and Holm 203). In that regard, cultural poetics is a specific historical system of symbolic forms, and these forms function collectively as a set of mental simulations that allows us to consider and assess reality.

Literature is political in that it provides symbolic forms for the real world, and Tygstrup and Holm suggest three ways in which the political reveals itself: creation, exposition, and transposition (206). As a form of art, literary texts are solely due to their

framework and not their form. Literature is an institutionalized field, meaning that it has its own rules and its own economy. This institutionalization of fiction creates a fundamental distance from the surrounding cultural poetics by “suspending any ambiguously pragmatic function” (Tygstrup and Holm 207). By distancing themselves, works of fiction take a non-pragmatic approach to the reality it depicts, and this makes literature *deviate* from how cultural images of reality are produced.

### **The Politics of *Hard Times***

First and foremost, literary texts can be political by *creating* images of reality. This form of deviation can take the form of the creation of new images of the real world that directly challenge the dominant and stiff assumptions of reality. When creating images, Tygstrup and Holm imply that fiction serves to think and show something that does not necessarily fall within the usually conceived order of things (208). The literary representation of the real world is always a historical language, which means that the construction Dickens makes in *Hard Times* is an adaption of existing models (Tygstrup and Holm 208). Dickens’ novel functions as a deformation and transformation of the already existing ways of prescribing reality.

Dickens *creates* new images of reality through his detailed descriptions of the setting. The novel is set in the industrial town of Coketown, which Dickens in detail describes as a bleak and soulless place, heavily dominated by industrialization, factories, and machinery. Dickens depicts the town as:

a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but as matters stood it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, [...] You saw nothing in Coketown but what was severely workful. (26).

Dickens explains the grotesque and materialist atmosphere of Coketown in “red brick” with “smoke and ashes” and that it is “unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage”, which are significant elements to the industrial town in nineteenth century Britain. Dickens even ironically suggests that smoke is “the healthiest thing in the world in all respects, and particularly for the lungs. If you are one of those who want to consume it, I differ from you.” (118). Through these descriptions of Coketown, Dickens creates new models of the real world, enabling his readers to understand and perceive hitherto unseen aspects of their

reality. *Hard Times* was written in a time of great social upheaval, by increasing awareness around social issues related to poverty, too many mouths to feed, and the rights of workers. As Dickens sets the setting to this industrial town, he is able to be political and explore these subject matters concretely and vividly, by *showing* the readers the harsh everyday reality of the Victorian Era, making them nearly impossible to ignore. Tygstrup and Holm (209) adds to the fact that fiction has considerable potential to create new models of the real world, especially as texts function as a configuration of the real world.

Though *Hard Times* may not be an authoritative source with regard to, say, scientific knowledge, its use offers a unique sort of knowledge that is grounded in interpretation and imagination. Felski namely notes that fiction in reasonable manners presents complex and different situations that require the reader to engage in interpretation in order to grasp and appreciate the message of the work (82). Fiction often presents diverse situations that require the reader's active involvement to understanding the underlying message of the work. That means that works of fiction go beyond and offer deeper layers of meaning. Moreover, the relationship between literature and knowledge is noteworthy because "it can also expand, enlarge, or reorder our sense of how things are.", as Felski argues (83). The prefigured semiotic material becomes *configured* by the literary text (Felski 84-85). Mimesis thus comes into the picture, and importantly, that is not a mindless act of copying, but rather a creative and productive way of picturing the hardest times of industrialization and the tough conditions during the Victorian Era. As *Hard Times* presents the harmful effects of industrialization via his illustration of Coketown, Dickens offers the reader a deeper understanding of the complexity of the human condition during this eventful period in modern history.

As far as this configuration goes, the creation of images of reality does not only reflect what is perceived as the ordinary – fiction becomes political when it attempts to depict something that does not naturally fall within the given order of things, too. The second way deviation can take place in *Hard Times* is when Dickens *transforms* images of reality. This is specifically the case when taking the circus of Coketown into consideration. The industrial town of Coketown, with its utilitarian and grey atmosphere, and the philosophy of Mr. Gradgrind offer a social critique of Victorian Britain and industrialization. However, one may argue that the transformation of images of reality from one framework to another forms an effect of defamiliarization, simply by challenging the context (Tygstrup and Holm 210). That is, *Hard Times* become political in the sense that they *transform* existing symbolic forms; literature, therefore, becomes realistic and political, since it attempts to capture and portray

views and pieces of the real world that have not yet been addressed properly (Tygstrup and Holm 211). The well-known circus of Coketown is in many respects a sharp contrast to the utilitarian thinking of the day. We learn that “‘I should as soon have expected to find my children reading poetry.’”, as Mr. Gradgrind finds his children dazedly gaping at the circus, saying furthermore that “[w]hether Louisa or Thomas can have been read anything? Whether, in spite of all precautions, any idle story-book can have got into the house?” (Dickens 21-23). Gradgrind’s concern about the texts and the circus seems to suggest that the children are lacking curiosity, and the narrator ironically comments on the fears of Gradgrind.

The circus in *Hard Times* functions as a new context to the novel, a new perspective that defamiliarizes and challenges the already existing images of the hardest times, which in turn makes the novel political. The effect of alienation is not something literary texts are unfairly subject to. It is, at the same time, something it can utilize (Tygstrup and Holm 210). This is characteristic to the tradition of Russian Formalism, and even more so in the writings of Viktor Shklovsky and his article “Art as Technique” from 1916. Shklovsky argues that the objective of art is to defamiliarize our habitual perspectives of the world by presenting them in new and unusual ways, and this can successfully happen through, for example, the use of metaphors in fiction (1). Defamiliarization implies that we are presented to familiar objects or ideas in a way that disrupts the reader’s automatic understanding of that particular object (Shklovsky 2-3). By defamiliarizing, Dickens aims to make it appear unfamiliar, which stimulates the reader to actively engage with it. The circus may in that regard function as a metaphor for the imaginative, the colorful, and the true nature and spirit of childhood and children. The metaphor may introduce a new approach to understand the lack of emotion and imagination by presenting it through the circus in a new form. Ultimately, the circus functions a stark contrast to the grey and utilitarian thinking of Mr. Gradgrind.

In addition, the circus of Coketown represents amusement in contrast to the philosophy of Mr. Gradgrind. Sleary, the circus director, says that “[p]eople muth be amuthed [...] they can’t be alwayth working, nor yet they can’t be alwayth a learning”, which arguably suggests the importance of entertainment and creativity in people’s lives (Dickens 269). When described, Dickens depicts Sleary as jolly and cheerful, and his circus represents a clear contrast to the industrialized and utilitarian society. Sleary’s words emphasize the value of diversion and amusement, implying that there certainly is a need for breaks from work to engage in activities that bring joy and emotional fulfillment. His approach opposes and challenges the typical thinking of the day, meaning that Dickens transposes the symbolic form of Mr. Gradgrind’s thinking. Schlicke namely suggests that the circus is indeed an



alternative attitude (xviii). The circus does not necessarily represent a practical course of action in Victorian Britain – rather one to replace an extensively held belief of utilitarianism and Political Economy. Thus, literature challenges the existing boundaries between the novel “and the social institutions surrounding it” (Tygstrup and Holm 210).

Deviation of reality takes its final shape in *exposing* images of reality. Tygstrup and Holm suggest that a confession as a symbolic form “makes it possible to form an image of a person’s intimate life” (203). The confession, or the statement a character makes, is a notable example of symbolic forms found in the novel: By revealing and exposing the beliefs and ideas of a character to the reader, a confession can produce a sense of intimacy and realism which in turn can make the story realistic and relatable to readers. Through this true realism, the confession will expose images of the real world that can be powerful, suggestive, and influential. Literature does not only become a laboratory for the creation and transformation of cultural poetics, but it also becomes a medium that directly exposes existing forms. Tygstrup and Holm claim that the exposition, via a confession, can be understood as a citation of existing images of reality (209). Direct quotations, as a use of a historical language, in *Hard Times* may be an example that illustrates the exposition.

As suggested, a confession could be considered a symbolic form because it makes it possible to create images of a character’s inner life and perspective on particular issues. If an author like Dickens wants to express something true, he may have to break with the truth of his contemporaries, since constructing a mental landscape is not necessarily the ambition but rather to work out an actual visual and textual collection of historical images of the real world (Tygstrup and Holm 204). The subject matter is, in other words, not ideas or beliefs concerning reality, but, importantly, *representations* of reality. The confession is not meant to function as an underlying template – rather it aims to operate as a swarm of existent and factual confessions in their already available textual manifestations. In *Hard Times*, there is a particular symbolic form regarding the Gradgrind philosophy: that facts and sense overwhelm emotions and sensibility due to the dehumanizing effects of Britain’s industrialization. The opening lines of the novel, for example, sum up effectively the rationalist ideas of Mr. Gradgrind:

“Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. [...]. You can only form the mind of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, Sir!” (Dickens 7).



Mr. Gradgrind's language is crucial to take into account when discussing this particular symbolic form. While suggesting that "nothing else will ever be of any service to them." to his students, Dickens makes it known to readers that Mr. Gradgrind's belief and idea that facts are principal, since they allow humans to dig into their personal interests. Referring to his students as "reasoning animals", Mr. Gradgrind treats them nearly like machines by taking away their fantasies and emotions. He monotonously repeats the word "Fact" multiple times, which is arguably a symbolic form of his unemotional, mechanical, and objective character. When Dickens *exposes* the confession of Mr. Gradgrind, readers are invited to see the world from his perspective and to understand his philosophy on a deeper level, more specifically his utilitarian approach to education.

Furthermore, Mr. Gradgrind, as a character, is an image of the typical nineteenth-century man with a harsh and underlying nature of the educational system that prioritizes facts over free thinking. Paul Schlicke adds to this perception of Gradgrind and writes that he considers him as mostly preoccupied with the idea that the objective of education is to produce efficient workers that will contribute to society (ix). According to his reasoning, this can only be successfully achieved when teaching children facts, figures, and statistics in preference to creativity and imagination. This way of reasoning was, as provided in *Hard Times*, typical in nineteenth-century Britain, and thus Gradgrind's characterization functions as a representation of the typical man and society at the time. Tygstrup and Holm assert that one way of exposing images of reality is by employing a character that operates as a representation of that reality the writer wishes to express (209). This is an essential element in the realism of literature. Tygstrup and Holm refer to George Lukács' formulation of 'the typical', and he moreover makes reference to the works of the French writer Honoré de Balzac, who includes a representation of the typical banker, journalist, and countess in his writing (209). 'The typical' here means to recognize recurring patterns or conventions that are characteristic of a particular literary or historical tradition or context. Thus, Mr. Gradgrind can be read as a form of generalization that captures the essence of a larger group by embodying common distinctive traits, allowing readers to identify and interpret him within a broader cultural framework (Tygstrup and Holm 209-210). Mr. Gradgrind is, therefore, "the representative of widely prevalent and deeply pernicious ideas about man and society" (Schlicke ix-x). Ultimately, Dickens conveys images of reality by displaying the typical school superintendent via Mr. Gradgrind, with a utilitarian view on the meaning of education.

Importantly, Mr. Gradgrind as the typical summarizes some of the most essential features of Victorian social reality. The school board superintendent is in fact “[a] man of realities. [...] 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.” (Dickens 8). This depiction Dickens delivers can be read as an art of characterization he *condenses* significant forms of a historically important cultural poetics. In this case, Dickens’ exposition of images of reality has replaced the functional pragmatics of images of reality. Tygstrup and Holm suggest that the language through which the character expresses is a major form of exposing symbolic forms. With specific regard to the statement made by Mr. Gradgrind in the previous sections, the words and sentences written by Dickens perform like an ethnographical object in a display case (Tygstrup and Holm 210). The quotation marks become nearly invisible to the reader because the symbolic forms are not just exposed, but also applied. Therefore, Dickens is able to capture reality successfully, as he exposes the symbolic forms of the Gradgrind philosophy and utilitarian thinking of his contemporaries as what they are in reality.

What is the useful with Dickens and *Hard Times* could be their political potential. The poetics of literature in general is simultaneously a part and apart of the cultural poetics (Tygstrup and Holm 206). That is, the literary poetics takes place both within the cultural poetics, since it contributes to the production of images of reality that can function as reproductions for other claims to a grasp of the world, we are living in. The literary poetics is, furthermore, apart, and different from the cultural poetics. This is due to its framework, and this is an “institutional regulation of the social function of different utterances in respect to how they are produced, how they circulate and how they are used.” (Tygstrup and Holm 206). In other words, literary texts do not have a special selection of exquisite symbolic forms that can only be discovered in literature – the framework of the texts employs the symbolic forms by exercising them as tools.

Literature as a medium of expression is extraordinary because of its framework and not its form. This is what makes works of fiction unique and special when communicating different themes and debates, and not their physical format or appearance – it is how the different elements of a text are organized into patterns and presented to readers, and this framework allows to perform a way of mimesis. Felski, with her understanding of Paul Ricœur, suggests that mimesis is a sort of recast with reception as important as production. Mimesis functions as a type of metaphor (87). These terms collectively share their capacity to produce new perspectives by reconstructing a world already mediated by language (Felski 86). Literature is an institutionalized field with its own rules and systems (Tygstrup and Holm

206). An important aspect of this institution is the collective agreement to understand specific texts with a particular approach and attitude of mind, and this agreement is often identified by granting texts a particular material, which Tygstrup and Holm suggest as ‘paraliterary’ (206), through which they can be recognized.

Literature, and Dickens’ fiction especially, is a means of disrupting the established order and creating new ways of understanding and experiencing the real world. For the French philosopher Jacques Rancière, politics signal the designed configuration of social relations, and he suggests that political theory has tended to perceive politics as a sphere of domination (Kornbluh 3). Literature and politics are closely linked, and the first mentioned has the exceptional ability to challenge and directly confront dominant forms of knowledge. Fiction can provide a space for the marginalized and the excluded to articulate their points of view and experiences, as the reality Dickens attempts to illustrate in his writing looks quite similar to the construction humans do when constructing a cultural reality. We put facts and experiences together in a particular context that offers them a purpose, and collectively that will form truth and paint a realistic picture of reality. In that regard, literature becomes a form of dissensus, and it becomes a powerful tool for political and social transformation – one that has the true potential to create new forms, new images of reality, and new forms of subjectivity (Kornbluh 3-4).

## **Conclusion**

In the introduction of the thesis, I asked what does Charles Dickens know about Victorian Britain. Throughout the analysis, I may argue that Dickens certainly knows and understands aspects of his contemporaries with particular respect to social and economic issues. The thesis argues that Dickens’ *Hard Times* reflects Victorian Britain by creating, transposing, and exposing images of social and economic issues of the real world.

When creating images of the real world, Dickens becomes political because offers readers insight into the harsh conditions under which people lived. As a form of illustration, I have paid particular attention to the depiction of the setting and the city of Coketown in which the novel is set. These descriptions that Dickens provides are nearly impossible to ignore when reading since the novel shows something that does not necessarily fall within the usually conceived order of things. By creating such images, Dickens becomes political.

Secondly, I introduced that the novel is political by transforming images of reality. This form of deviation allows us to depict something that does not necessarily fall within the

given order of things. The local circus of Coketown has been my primary example for illustrating this form of deviation. The circus serves as a symbol of freedom from, and imagination in, a society that values facts and senses over imagination and sensibility, and it functions as a place where the children can escape the utilitarian education of Mr. Gradgrind.

Ultimately, the final shape of deviation takes the form of exposing images of reality. The exemplification of Mr. Gradgrind has been of the utmost importance for how the novel represents the real world. The idea of the 'typical' has been the primary solution to the question, and it is especially the utterance from the opening lines of the novel that reveal the harsh realities of the Victorian Era. In that regard, Mr. Gradgrind functions as a representation of the typical man during the industrialization of Britain, who solely swears that facts are crucial and beneficial to society's progress.

In summary, the thesis has revealed that *Hard Times* is political by creating, transposing, and exposing images of reality. Therefore, the novel will produce knowledge of industrialization and the utilitarian education of children. I have throughout the thesis emphasized that works of literature are a reflection of, and represent, the real world in which they were created. Literature becomes a tool for educating, offering readers insight into the issues that the work explores. *Hard Times* has been identified as a novel with great political potential, and the thesis has implied that Dickens' text successfully represents the hardest times of industrialization between fiction and reality.

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