DICKENS AND GASKELL: MORAL CRITICS OF INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY

THE MORAL CRITICISM OF INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY IN SELECTED NOVELS OF CHARLES DICKENS AND ELIZABETH GASKELL

By

GARY A. BOIRE, B.A.

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AUTHOR: Gary A. Boire, B.A. (Loyola College: University of Montreal)

SUPERVISOR: Professor George Purnell

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract

My purpose in this thesis is to examine the moral nature of the social criticism found in selected novels of Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell. The works primarily dealt with share a common focus on the quality of life in mid nineteenth-century industrial society. These are The Old Curiosity Shop (1840-41), Hard Times (1854), Mary Barton (1848), and North and South (1854-55). The exclusion of Bleak House (1852-53) and Little Dorrit (1855-57) is a deliberate one, the limitations of time and space being a major factor. The inclusion of The Old Curiosity Shop is an attempt to evaluate a novel long regarded as a low point or eccentricity in the Dickens canon. The position taken herein is that it represents a major milestone in Dickens' imaginative development. Viewed as an embryonic type of novel, its social criticism can be seen as an initial attempt to come to grips with the world of Victorian society. It both continues the concerns of the earlier novels and anticipates the major developments of the later works.

Occasionally in the thesis I refer to novels outside the purview of the primary works, particularly in my treatment of Dickens' ideas of "benevolence" and imaginative sympathy. An attempt is made to evaluate the quality of the moral position in contrast to a political radicalism such as that of Marx or Engels. I have tried to do this by means of an analysis of the novels concerned, and by relating these novels to each other, to the moral nature of Dickens' and Mrs Gaskell's thought, and to the culture to which both authors belong.

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Note on References and Editions

Quotations in the text from the novels of Dickens and Mrs Gaskell are followed by an abbreviation of the title, and the chapter number in Arabic numerals within parentheses. In the case of novels divided into books, I have put the book numbers in Roman numerals, followed by the chapter number in Arabic. Footnotes are placed at the end of each section. I have used The Penguin English Library Editions for all the novels concerned, for which full information is provided in the bibliography. I have used the following abbreviations throughout.

Dickens:

Oliver Twist: OT

The Old Curiosity Shop: OCS

American Notes: AN

Martin Chuzzlewit: MC

Hard Times: HT

A Tale of Two Cities: TTC

Gaskell:

Mary Barton: MB

North and South: NS

"There is nothing personal in morality"...said Mr Pecksniff. (MC, 2)

For Al

Introduction

In The Moral Art of Dickens Barbara Hardy makes the following observation:

> The Victorian art of fiction is essentially a moral art. It questions the nature and purpose of moral action, and at its best, shows the difficulty and complexity of giving, loving, and growing out from self in an unjust, commercialized, and de-naturing society.[1]

In their imaginative exploration of industrial society both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell stress the need for a Christian code of behaviour. Society is seen as an oppressive configuration based on the abstract notion of the "cash nexus". Urbanization, the mechanization of labour, and the exploitation of the working-class combine to produce an impersonal and aggressive society. Within its confines the individual personality is subordinated to the needs of society at large. It is in their evaluations and recommendations that both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell display a definitely moral, rather than political or sociological, point of view.

Their criticism is directed primarily against the personal values and individual states of mind which make up an oppressive society. Although both satirize the anatomy of society itself, they call, more often than not, for a "change of spirit rather than a change of structure".[2] There is never a suggestion that society may be improved through the abolition of either specific institutions or the general social constitution. Mary Barton and

North and South emphasize the necessity of a personal morality, one whose fundamentals are love, sympathy, and mutual forbearance. The latter novel, in particular, is a well wrought study of the difficult survival of such virtues in an industrial world. Similarly, Dickens' criticism of society and its institutions stresses the need for a "man to man benevolence".[3] In The Old Curiosity Shop authorial approval is bestowed explicitly on the "one kind and generous spirit" (OCS,11) which offers the possibility that society may be humanly (and morally) redeemed. Likewise, Hard Times underlines the restorative powers of sympathy and personal understanding. Like Mrs Gaskell, Dickens presents the hope that society may be improved through a moral alteration of personal behaviour.

The novels of Dickens and Mrs Gaskell stand as moral fables designed to entertain, but more significantly, to educate. In his eulogy at Dickens' funeral service Benjamin Jowett made the following observations:

> Works of fiction would be intolerable if they attempted to be sermons directly to instruct us; but indirectly they are the great instructors of this world, and we can hardly exaggerate the debt of gratitude which is due to a writer who has led us to sympathize with these good, true, sincere, honest English characters of ordinary life, and to laugh at the egotism, the hypocrisy, the false respectability of religious professors and others.[4]

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Footnotes Introduction

[1]Barbara Hardy, The Moral Art of Dickens, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 3.

[2]George Orwell, "Charles Dickens", in his Decline of the English Murder and Other Essays, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 97.

[3]Humphrey House, The Dickens World, 2nd. ed., (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 206.

[4]Benjamin Jowett, "Sermon at Dickens' funeral service", The Times, 20 June 1870, in Stephen Wall, ed., Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 176.

I The Urban Complex

For most men in a brazen prison live,
Where in the sun's hot eye,
With heads bent o'er their toil, they languidly
Their lives to some unmeaning taskwork give,
Dreaming of nought beyond their prison wall.[1]

Of all the technological achievments of nineteenth-century England it was the arrival of the railways in 1825 which proved to be the most significant development of Victorian Industrialism.[2] To many Victorian minds its coming symbolized the birth of a new era in which provincialism gave way to national unity and agricultural life irrevocably surrendered to the rising power of commercial trade. The railway itself, as a new industry, came to be the "great demarcation line between past and present."[3] Writing in 1860 Thackeray remarked:

> Your railroad starts the new era, and we of a certain age belong to a new time and the old one ....We elderly people have lived in that prae-railroad world, which has passed into limbo and vanished from under us. I tell you it was firm under our feet once, and not long ago. They have raised those railroad embankments up and shut off the old world that was behind them. Climb up that bank on which the irons are laid, and look to the other side -- it is gone.[4]

The railway, together with the city, effected the most significant of social changes. As the factory system grew in economic importance the population of the nation underwent a considerable shift in concentration. The need for a larger labour

force combined with the new railway's overwhelming demand for "rolling stock, rails, bridge materials, and other iron products"[5] resulted in previously small towns being transformed into major urban centres. As Richard Altick points out: "the population of all the major industrial conurbations, Manchester, Leeds, Bradford, Birmingham, Liverpool, and Sheffield, gained an average of 50 per cent in the single decade 1821-31, and the rate of increase in the following decades was only slightly smaller."[6]

The swiftness with which the manufacturing towns were established resulted in a form of urbanization hitherto unexperienced by man. The rural village with its abundance of space and light was replaced by dark and fetid slums grouped closely around the factories, docks and railway terminals. Overpopulation, the lack of any effective construction regulations, an absence of zoning restrictions, use of cheap materials, and no proper sanitation facilities, all resulted in a perpetual state of "unimaginable degradation."[7] Breeding crime, disease, and moral dissolution the slum became synonymous with the concept of the city; Oliver Twist confronts such a London ghetto on his way to Fagin's lair:

> A dirtier or more wretched place he had never seen. The street was very narrow, and the air was impregnated with filthy odours. There were a good many small shops; but the only stock in trade appeared to be heaps of children, who, even at that time of night, were crawling in and out at the doors, or screaming from the inside....Covered ways and yards, which here and there diverged from the main street, disclosed little knots of houses, where drunken men and women were positively wallowing in filth; and from several of the doorways, great ill-looking fellows were cautiously emerging, bound, to all appearance, on no very well-disposed or harmless errands. (OT, 8)

As horrible and deforming as it was, the industrial city did, nevertheless, represent one of the highest achievments of the human imagination in its confrontation with Nature. Its sheer size and abundance of activity seemed to embody the very attributes of sublimity itself. It provided unending variety and complexity, and in contrast to rural memories, a cacaphony of sound and movement. In its very energy a type of exhilaration was to be found. Dickens himself reveals the reactions of his age in his own ambivalent attitude to the city. Insofar as it kindled his imagination the city was an indispensable and positive influence on his art.[8] But in his evaluation of its effects on the working-classes Dickens, like Mrs Gaskell, emerges as one of its major critics. For it was amidst this frantic period of technological progress and cultural change that both authors began to scrutinize the moral fabric of their society. The effects of the railroad, the factory system, social conditions -- all the concomitant effects on life in an increasingly industrialized society -- began to appear as central themes in their novels.

By the early 1840s, the cultural distinction of town and country was quickly dissolving. The effects of the railway and factory were far-reaching and contributed both to the diminishing economic stature of the village and its deteriorating cultural makeup. In the novels of both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell this impoverished countryside exists. Poverty is widespread; Nell herself finds "the people too poor" (OCS, 15) to solicit. And in the growing economic depression backbreaking agricultural labour, sim-

ilar to industrial labour in its monotony and physical drudgery, remains the only means of survival. As Margaret Hale explains to Higgins in North and South:

> They labour on, from day to day, in the great solitude of steaming fields -- never speaking or lifting up their poor, bent, downcast heads. The hard spadework robs their brain of life; the sameness of their toil deadens their imagination; they don't care to meet to talk over thoughts and speculations, even of the weakest, wildest kind, after their work is done; they go home brutishly tired, poor creatures! caring for nothing but food and rest. (NS, 37)

In both significance and culture the "country" had given way to the growing, industrial town.

While both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell acknowledge the reality of rural poverty their use of the countryside as a major vehicle of social criticism takes the form of the Christian pastoral. In contrast to the difficulties of life in the urban environment the countryside is portrayed as a "place apart, close to the elemental rhythms of nature"[9] in which the pre-urban innocence of man may be yet recaptured. The industrial effects on the rural community, although present in the novels, are de-emphasized in favour of an idealization (to an extent) and transformation of the countryside into an imaginative symbol. Although Mrs Gaskell, moreso than Dickens, deals with the reality of rural disintegration, she joins with him in the use of the country as an emblem of the rootedness or "strong local attachments" which are "almost obliterated among the inhabitants of a town" (MB, 10).

In the usurpation of the rural village by the industrial town both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell see the breakdown of personal cohesion and social harmony. Cultural, social, and political

progress seem to grow at the expense of the moral, spiritual, and imaginative well-being of the individual. With the tremendous shifts in population to the large urban areas the individual's sense of historical continuity gives way to a new experience of severance and disorientation. This loss of the old sense of integration results in personal alienation and signals the breakdown of both social unity and self-fulfilling productivity. The individual in one swift stroke, loses that significance which gave meaning and order to personal and social existence. It is significant then that in their presentations of rural life both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell attempt to develop a definite "symbol" that will convey the lost virtues (real or imagined) of active sympathy and imaginative empathy. Through a construction of a pastoral or rural ideal both authors attempt to recall the lost qualities of harmony, organic unity and personal integration. Juxtaposed to the present urban situation the pastoral both satirizes through contrast while simultaneously suggesting the means by which industrial man may alleviate his sufferings and redeem his "fallen innocence".

To Raymond Williams "Mary Barton, particularly in the early chapters, is the most moving response in literature to the industrial sufferings of the 1840s."[10] The intensity with which Mrs Gaskell explores the effects of industrialism is due, in great part, to the skill with which she uses the pastoral. As with Dickens, the countryside exists both as a real location and, more significantly, as an emblem of human sympathy, Christian virtue, and social happiness. It is no coincidence that Alice Wilson, the kindest and most sympathetic character in the novel, "is sustained by her early

memories of the countryside and by her trade as a herbalist which keeps her in touch with nature."[11] This method of drawing virtue by association is also evident in the portrayal of John Barton's wife who, like Alice Wilson, comes from the agricultural districts; at her death .

> One of the good influences on John Barton's life had departed that night. One of the ties that bound him down to the gentle humanities of earth was loosened, and henceforward the neighbours all remarked he was a changed man. (MB, 3)

Although Mrs Gaskell's construction of pastoral regions functions much in the same way as Dickens', the portrayals themselves do not suffer from the latter's tendency toward apotheosis and unqualified moral approval. Indeed, the distinguishing feature is that her country regions do not appear as Edenic idealizations as do those of Dickens. Although hardly as extensive as the emphasis on rural erosion in North and South, the countryside in Mary Barton appears as a realistic region offering both physical refuge and spiritual rejuvenation through the simple pleasures of uncomplicated life.

Unlike Nell's other world "where sin and sorrow never came; a tranquil place of rest, where nothing evil entered" (OCS, 54), the portrayal of Green Heys Fields anticipates the natural realism of George Eliot in the emphasis on the simplicity of the countryside:

> Here in their seasons may be seen the country business of haymaking, ploughing, &c., which are such pleasant mysteries for townspeople to watch; and here the artisan deafened with noise of tongues and engine, may come to listen awhile to the delicious sounds of rural life: the lowing of cattle,

> the milkmaids' call, the clatter and cackle
> of poultry in the old farmyards. (MB, 1)

The city's demoralizing effects on its inhabitants is censured through such continual juxtaposition with the countryside and its attendant virtues. The severance of industrial man from his natural heritage is emphasized by the use of "mysteries"; the particularly apt presence of the sounds of rural activity accentuate the destructiveness of industrial labour. Contrasted to the grim screech of machinery the countryside is virtually symphonic in its variety and cadence of elemental sound. In a similar manner this contrast of opposites is developed by Mrs Gaskell's emphasis on the profusion of vegetative life throughout the area; the images of "roses, lavender, sage, balm (for tea), rosemary, pinks, and wallflowers, onions and jessamine, [growing] in most republican and indiscriminate order" (MB, 1) jar strongly with industrial Manchester, where "alas! there are no flowers" (MB, 9). This mention of the "indiscriminate order" of thriving, living Nature also provides an apt contrast to the regimented city streets which are "so like one another that you might have easily been bewildered and lost your way" (MB, 2). Through such contrast the industrial city emerges as an "anti-life" conglomeration from which there is little hope of escape. The life giving, or more appropriately, the therapeutic effects of the country can be seen in the medicinal qualities of the herbs themselves: "long ago...when the garden was the only druggist's shop within reach." (MB, 1)

In his treatment of Mary Barton Raymond Williams complains of the ineptitude with which Mrs Gaskell concludes the novel:

> Mary Barton, Jem Wilson, Mrs Wilson, Margaret, Will, Job Legh -- all the objects of her real sympathy -- end the book far removed from the situation which she had set out to examine. All are going to Canada; there could be no more devastating conclusion. A solution within the actual situation might be hoped for, but the solution with which the heart went was a cancelling of the actual difficulties and the removal of the persons pitied to the uncompromised New World.[13]

There is much truth in what Williams complains of; the episode of emigration initially appears as something of a deus ex machina. A similar escapist resolution mars the conclusion of David Copperfield in which the Micawbers, Mr Peggotty, Emily and Martha are all shipped off to the promised land of Australia. But it is in the idealized portrayal of the rustic Wilson homestead that Mrs Gaskell provides a very definite, though simple, attempt at resolution:

> I see a long low wooden house, with room enough, and to spare. The old primeval trees are felled and gone for many a mile around; one alone remains to overshadow the gable-end of the cottage. There is a garden around the dwelling, and far beyond that stretches an orchard. The glory of the Indian Summer is over all, making the heart leap at the sight of its gorgeous beauty. (MB, 38)

On a superficial reading one confronts a typically Dickensian Eden in which a divinized Nature infuses its inhabitants with glowing happiness and health. What is significant however is that all of the "primeval trees", with one exception, have been cleared, a garden has replaced the untamed forest, and Jem Wilson, an industrial engineer, is now an "instrument maker" in the nearby "Agricultural College" (MB, 36). Despite its in-

trusion into the natural world industry has not destroyed nature. Rather, it is now being utilized to complement the natural world. By no means has Mrs Gaskell created an illusory region "far removed from the situation which she had set out to examine." Rather, she is attempting to reconcile imagistically the worlds of technology and nature. With the preservation of those virtues associated with the rural world the dilemma of life in the industrial state might conceivably be improved. For the physical attrition of the countryside does not necessitate a destruction of its moral qualities.

Through the memory and present exercise of active sympathy and human kindness, the urban state becomes an habitable and potentially redeemable place. The Sturgis household is a case in point. Located in the midst of urban Liverpool it has "a country-town look about it in the middle of that bustling back street" (MB, 31). As Edgar Wright comments in his treatment of the new Wilson household: "The Manchester family have emigrated spiritually....back to Nature. Not to wild, untamed nature, a town is nearby, but at least back within the influence of the 'charm' which Manchester lacked."[14] Through the exercise of sympathy and a maintenance of the "old world" values the new industrial world loses its power as an impersonal and manipulating force, and becomes itself an agent of social improvement and personal re-integration.

Continuing this intention of Mary Barton, North and South is an extensive examination of the possibilities of "rural influences"

on the industrial state. The central metaphors of "north" and "south" are developed in the novel as complex images designed to represent both physical locales and distinguishable states of mind. As a social historian Mrs Gaskell is careful to record the decline of the countryside as an important economic centre and its decay as an effective alternative to the terrors of industrial strife. As an imaginative artist, however, she is more concerned to show the tensions and human complexities involved in the adjustment of the rural mentality to the new industrial takeover. The use of the pastoral, in both portrayal and emphasis, undergoes a radical change from the way in which it was used in Mary Barton. Initially Helstone is presented in much the same manner as a "village in a tale...a village in a poem" (NS, 1). In her reminiscence to Bessy Higgins Margaret luxuriates in her memories of the hamlet:

> ...though every leaf may seem still, there is a continual rushing sound of movement all around -- not close at hand. Then sometimes the turf is as soft and fine as velvet; and sometimes quite lush with the perpetual moisture of a little, hidden, tinkling brook near at hand. And then in other parts there are billowy ferns....some with long streaks of golden sunlight lying on them -- just like the sea. (NS, 13)

The stress on the simple vitality of life and on spacious surroundings contrasts sharply with the claustrophobic conditions of city life. The removal of the individual from elemental nature and its beneficent effects is conveyed bluntly in Bessy's flat statement: "I have never seen the sea" (NS, 13). But this emphasis on physical contrast quickly gives way to a more far-reaching analysis of the human effects of industrialism. In contrast to

Mary Barton Mrs Gaskell now disposes of the pastoral countryside in an effort to concentrate on the realities of industrial life.

To Edgar Wright "the rose-coloured spectacles have been discarded with a vengeance [in North and South] in her eagerness to praise the benefits of industrial life."[15] Though not totally correct Wright's statement reflects the shift in focus undergone since the writing of Mary Barton. However he omits a necessary qualification; Mrs Gaskell exhibits not so much "an eagerness to praise the benefits of industrial life", but an ardent desire to praise the benefits of industrial life insofar as it includes human sympathy and imaginative empathy. In short, she is continuing the basic direction of Mary Barton but is now considering it in a larger context: that if those values associated with rural life are maintained in an industrial society, technology may conceivably assist the creation of a beneficial and humanly profitable society.

Throughout North and South Mrs Gaskell is at pains to illustrate the redeeming qualities of the "gentle humanities of earth" (MB, 3). As bleak and impersonal as Milton appears, it becomes a "brighter place" to Margaret when she establishes a "human interest" (NS, 8) in the Higgins family. This development of what appears as a "sublimated" form of pastoral is evident in the gradual conversion of Thornton. Through his continued contact with the Hales, particularly Margaret, Thornton, like Gradgrind in Dickens' Hard Times, undergoes a type of secular redemption, and inadvertently voices the underlying principles of Mrs Gaskell:

> If we [Milton people] do not reverence the past as you do in Oxford, it is because we want something which can apply to the present more directly. It is fine when the study of the past leads to a prophecy of the future. But to men groping in new circumstances, it would be finer if the words of experience could direct us how to act in what concerns us most intimately and immediately; which is full of difficulties that must be encountered; and upon the mode in which they are met and conquered -- not merely pushed aside for the time -- depends our future. Out of this wisdom of the past, help us over the present. (NS, 40)

And it is through his exercise of those past virtues of the rural world that Thornton eventually develops both personal happiness and industrial improvements. Through the influence of "rural virtues" the problems of present-day unrest might conceivably be alleviated, though not dismissed: "My only wish is to have the opportunity of cultivating some intercourse with the hands beyond the mere 'cash nexus'....such intercourse is the very breath of life" (NS, 51). On this point Thornton's preservation of "some dead flowers" (NS, 52) -- roses from Helstone -- illustrates the need for maintaining the virtues associated with the past rural world. The pastoral countryside has physically deteriorated and, as Margaret discovers, is no longer the innocent world of childhood. Indeed she recognizes the necessity of change and acknowledges that "if the world stood still, it would retrograde and become corrupt." (NS, 46). Edgar Wright correctly remarks that "the element of continuity is provided by the feelings and moral principles"[16] rather than by the perseverance of any physical reality of rural life.

It is unfortunate, at this point, that Mrs Gaskell provides

the disappointing contrivance of Margaret's enormous legacy. Like the emigration espisode in Mary Barton her use of the conventional bequest stands as an inept attempt at resolution. Its intrusion into the novel disrupts the validity of her resolution and tends to undermine the integrity of her examination of industrial problems. The fact that the inheritance, the "opportunity" spoken of by Thornton, derives from Mr Bell and is loosely associated with the comparatively rural environment of Oxford does little to reinforce the notions of rural redemption. In seeking a realistic solution to the problem of industrial technology Mrs Gaskell fails drastically. But if her knowledge of political economy proves insufficient, her call for imaginative empathy and human sympathy provides a morality able to rectify the problems of personal alienation and individual isolation.

Similar to Mrs Gaskell's, Dickens' use of the rural world has a moral purpose as social criticism. Unlike the former, though, Dickens' portrayals of the countryside are pastoral fantasies though often of a freely imaginative kind. The early novels in particular represent the rural environment as a pre-urban (the term can be extended to pre-lapsarian) paradise of good will and angelic harmony; "a quiet spot with music in the air, and a sound of angels' wings" (OCS, 52). Admittedly this bathetic tone undergoes considerable modification in the latter works, particularly in Hard Times, where the use of natural imagery takes on a predominantly ironic function in the agricultural delineation of the novel's sectional structure.

In The Old Curiosity Shop, the rural world becomes an ideal counterpart to the demonic industrial city. The portrayal itself suffers greatly from a tendency toward apotheosis and, like the countryside, its inhabitants are, at best, unconvincing. Despite the presence in the novel of agricultural poverty the rural characters rarely show the same effects of deprivation as do those occupying the Black Country. The rural world becomes a virtual Garden of Eden:

> As they passed onward, parting the boughs that clustered in their way, the serenity which the child had first assumed, stole into her breast in earnest; the old man cast no longer fearful looks behind, but felt at ease and cheerful, for the further they pressed into the deep green shade, the more they felt that the tranquil mind of God was there, and shed its peace on them. (OCS, 24)

Appropriately enough it is at this point in the novel that Nell and her grandfather meet with the benevolent schoolmaster who later rescues both from the horrors of the Black Country. As with Mrs Gaskell, the physical detail of Dickens' rural world is always in sharp contrast to the physical descriptions of the city. The presence of God, the serenity and openness of the countryside, all provide a comment on the demonic "labyrinth of men's abodes" where the Grandfather sees "ruin and self-murder crouching in every street" (OCS, 15). This dichotomy of town and country is expanded to the point where the novel is virtually split in two. As Malcolm Andrews rightly asserts, moral approval is extended to Nell and the countryside while the city (and its principal occupants like Quilp and the Brasses) "take the lion's share of Dickens' moral condemnation."[17]

As J. Hillis Miller points out, the flight of Nell and her Grandfather is "one example among many of a horrified flight from the new industrial, urban, and commercial civilization to the nostalgically remembered rural, agrarian, and 'natural' civilization of the past."[18] Dickens describes the travellers as "two pilgrims" (OCS, 15) in search of the promised land. Similarly, the portrayal of Nell's unnamed village (usually identified as Tong in Shropshire) attests to its Edenic nature. Of prime importance, however, is the fact that Nell, unlike Oliver Twist, dies soon after her arrival in Utopia. Despite his attempts to portray one, Dickens can no longer construct a sustaining and untouched rural paradise. The Eden of the countryside no longer exists. Rather, it is only as a remembered state that it functions as a criticism of society. Because of this Dickens unfortunately reveals a feebleness in his portrayals of both countryside and rural folk. Both exist almost totally as emblematic creations of past virtues and moral principles. Unlike Mrs Gaskell's characters they are totally unrealistic.

Gabriel Pearson justly remarks that Nell's final resting place is "the land of Cockayne, the pre-industrial paradise, the feeling for which is justified by the furnaces and blighting misery of the Black Country Nell has traversed."[19] In much the same way as the pastoral effectively criticizes the industrial state so Nell's death becomes a striking, though heavily sentimental, indictment of urban civilization. As Philip Collins observes in his treatment of Dickens' child-deaths, "by dying they make a final indictment of the adult world's misdeeds...these children repudiate the adult world and Dickens is not sorry to see them thus escape from

'the contagion of the world's slow stain'."[20]

In much the same manner as Mrs Gaskell, Dickens attempts to compensate for the actual attrition of the rural country by constructing a community within the new society which maintains and thrives on the ethics and moral principles associated with the countryside. Such is the community headed by the elder Mr Garland and populated with the offspring of the novel's deserving characters. With its abundance of cheer, benevolence, and human sympathy it is meant to recall the past times of social harmony, organic unity, and personal security. In such an attempt it is appropriate that the Garland home is situated in rural Finchley.

The Garland image is a graphic illustration of the preservation of rural virtues, similar to the Sturgis household in Mary Barton. But if the portrayal is meant to convey an uncompromised vision of rural happiness, the actual image is one of incestuous self-perpetuation. As Hillis Miller comments, this microcosmic society which Dickens offers as a compensation for the lost rural community seems "rather to engulf and absorb the personalities of [its] members than to sustain them, and to transform everyone into a copy of a standard pattern swallowing up all uniqueness."[21] And so it is that

> When Kit had children six or seven years old, there was a Barbara among them, and a pretty Barbara she was. Nor was there wanting an exact facsimile and copy of little Jacob....Of course there was an Abel, own godson to the Mr Garland of that name; and there was a Dick, whom Mr Swiveller did especially favour. (OCS, 73)

In one of his frequent digressions in The Old Curiosity Shop Dickens

writes: "Everything in our lives, whether of good or evil, affects us most by contrast" (OCS, 53). As symbols of virtue and moral integrity his pastoral depictions provide successful imaginative contrasts to the horrors of the industrial state. Indeed, the juxtaposition of the Garland's garden-like home and Quilp's resort, "The Wilderness", illustrates most effectively the strict dichotomy upon which the novel rests. Through contrast Dickens is able to convey his censure of the fallen world of industrialism and comment on the unbearable divergence of separate moralities. In this sense Dickens' use of the pastoral as social criticism is fully effective. As a satisfying resolution to the novel, however, it emerges as a disappointing and, at best, a failed attempt.

Mary Barton, like North and South, contains the basic recognition that the country environment is changing beyond hope. It can exist intact only in the imagination, as in the case of Alice Wilson's delirium. But it is through such an imaginative recollection of a pre-urban innocence that one may re-create in the present those virtues attendant on the traditional image of the pastoral countryside. Within the novels themselves the concepts of imagination and memory as potential influences on the present are determining factors of sympathetic behaviour. The point is powerfully made in Hard Times with the representation of childhood memories as a "garden in the stony ways of this world." The importance of memory and imagination are stressed both as sources for sympathetic behaviour in later adulthood and, secondarily, as satirical comments on Gradgrind's educational methods. Louisa is

about to visit her dying mother:

> The dreams of childhood -- its airy fables; its graceful, beautiful, humane, impossible adornments of the world beyond: so good to be believed in once, so good to be remembered when outgrown, for then the least among them rises to the stature of a great Charity in the heart, suffering little children to come into the midst of it, and to keep with their pure hands a garden in the stony ways of this world, wherein it were better for all the children of Adam that they should oftener sun themselves, simple and trustful, and not worldly-wise -- what had she to do with these? (HT, III, 9)

Through memory an instance or experience of the past is recalled, imaginatively re-created in the mind and ultimately it emerges as a palpable effect on personal behaviour. As Mr Marton, the schoolmaster, explains to Nell:

> There is nothing...no, nothing innocent or good, that dies and is forgotten....An infant, a prattling child, dying in its cradle, will live again in the better thoughts of those who loved it; and play its part, through them, in the redeeming actions of the world. (OCS, 54)

It is on this basis that the worlds of the Old Sexton in The Old Curiosity Shop, Green Heys Fields and Helstone emerge as potential liberators of the industrial world. Through the memory and imaginative re-creation of those qualities associated with the rural world the sufferings and despair of industrial man might conceivably be alleviated. Through the re-introduction and preservation of sympathy, personal kindness and individual imagination the impersonality and alienating dehumanization of the manufacturing towns may be replaced by the happier conditions of rootedness, human connection, and social harmony.

This concept of imagination and memory is an essential aspect of the pastoral art of Dickens and Mrs Gaskell. The countryside as

a traditional refuge from the complexities and pressures of urban life now exists only in the past. In order to act as an effective criticism of the urban present it was imperative to re-create it in the minds of the reading public. Hopefully the recollection of this past world's connotations of harmony, rootedness, social unity and personal sympathy would issue from the imagination into a more tangible reality. The concept itself of memory and imagination as effective influences on the present was voiced earlier by Wordsworth in his consideration of the creative process. In his Preface to Lyrical Ballads he comments:

> I have said that poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility: the emotion is contemplated till, by a species of reaction, the tranquility gradually disappears, and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind. In this mood successful composition generally begins, and in a mood similar to this it is carried on.[22]

Although Wordsworth's exposition of the creative process referred predominantly to Wordsworth himself, the basic theory of the power of imagination and memory had a lasting effect. Removed into the social sphere it was not inconceivable that the recollection of a past rural innocence, accompanied by an imaginative re-creation, might result in the present improvement of industrial life. From this point of view the pastoral art of both Dickens and Gaskell emerges as an ambitious project designed to both re-educate and reform an industrial society in which the rural values of sympathy and personal harmony were conspicuously absent.

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In their treatments of the industrial city both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell emphasize the deterioration of the physical landscape and, in turn, the spiritual disintegration of the individual. As with the pastoral, their portrayals of urban life, usually reflect the moral calibre and spiritual condition of the characters involved. Dickens, in particular, depends heavily on the use of symbol and myth in order to convey the destructive nature of urban monstrosity. Although such devices usually result in a powerful and, at times, overwhelming vision of imaginative katabasis such a method of attack tends to both distance the reader and weaken his sense of the historical reality of the situation. With Mrs Gaskell, however, the portrayals of industrialism are more realistic and less general than those of Dickens. Though they exist, like the latter's, as imaginative emblems as well as physical locations, the effectiveness of her portrayals depends more fully on the realization of individual characters and specific situations.

With Dickens the city becomes virtually synonymous with Dante's "Inferno", and Coketown, as well as the Black Country traversed by Nell, offer little hope of redemption in themselves. Indeed, it is because of his generalities, as powerful as they are as imaginative inventions, that Dickens falters as a knowledgeable critic of industrial society. As George Orwell complains in his study of Dickens: "When he writes about Cokestown [sic] he manages to evoke, in just a few paragraphs, the atmosphere of a Lancashire town as a slightly disgusted southern visitor would see it...that is as near as Dickens ever gets to the machinery of the mills."[23]

It is this inability to penetrate into the actual goings-on in both the industrial city and its factories that hinders Dickens in his analysis of the problems of urban life.

In contrast to Dickens' phantasmagoric constructions of city and mill, Mrs Gaskell is at pains to penetrate the surface and explore the effects of urban life on the individual personality. She does, no doubt, depend on the motifs of contrast and symbolic image but, unlike the early novels of Dickens, constructs a more organic type of novel depending less heavily on the realization of conflicting opposites. In spite of his incredible imaginative fertility and unparalleled handling of image and language, Dickens tends to construct novels mercilessly divided between moral approval and moral condemnation. Town and country, black and white, are distinct opposites. In the early novels there are no "gray" areas. Mrs Gaskell, however, creates a more variegated type of novel, one in which the industrial city exists primarily as a background for the treatment of human problems.

Unlike the mythical portraits of Coketown in Hard Times and the Black Country in The Old Curiosity Shop Mrs Gaskell's "general" portrayals of the industrial city are not predominant aspects in her examination of the complexities and problems of urban life. Whereas Coketown itself tends to emerge as one of the main "characters" of Hard Times, much in the same manner as Jacob's Island in Oliver Twist, the industrial cities in Mary Barton and North and South show Mrs Gaskell's attempts to construct unexaggerated and "non-mythical" urban locations. Their symbolic functions

play a secondary role to the attention paid to particular detail and specific nuance of individual situations within the actual industrial centre.

In Mary Barton Manchester, as an entirety, is only occasionally referred to as "a nasty, smoky hole" (MB, 27) and as a "black...place." (MB, 9). In North and South, however, Milton-Northern is more fully realized in general terms. In one of her few panoramic approaches Mrs Gaskell's depiction is one of economy and compact image; Margaret and Mr Hale are approaching the town in search of permanent lodgings:

> For several miles before they reached Milton, they saw a deep lead-coloured cloud hanging over the horizon in the direction in which it lay.... Nearer to the town, the air had a faint taste and smell of smoke; perhaps, after all, more a loss of the fragance of grass and herbage than any positive taste or smell. Quick they were whirled over long, straight, hopeless streets of regularly-built houses, all small and of brick. Here and there a great oblong many-windowed factory stood up, like a hen among her chickens, puffing out black 'unparliamentary' smoke, and sufficiently accounting for the cloud which Margaret had taken to foretell rain. (NS, 7)

As in Dickens, this initial presentation of the industrial city strongly emphasizes its physical filth, and suggests both the physical and spiritual deterioration of its impoverished inhabitants. Contrast with the moral, natural world of Helstone is stressed through the use of natural imagery, while Margaret's mistaken interpretation of the "lead-coloured cloud" conveys the "de-natured" state of the town. Most significant, however, is the ironic application of natural imagery to the factory itself which develops this notion of the unnatural state of urban life. For in

contrast to the delicate tenderness and fresh sense of sympathetic relationship conveyed by the image of the mother hen, Milton, as well as human relationships in its factories, is mostly characterized by impersonality, anonymity and a lack of sympathy. As with Dickens, in Hard Times, Mrs Gaskell exhibits a strong aversion to the rigid systematism characteristic of the factory slum. Her use of the word "hopeless" provides an apt comment on both its physical state and the physical, spiritual and moral condition of its inhabitants.

A prominent theme in Dickens is that if the peace of God permeates the countryside then the evil of Satan invests the town. His portrayals of the industrial environment reflect a masterful handling of grotesque and demonic terror. As effective tools of social criticism, however, they are weakened by the extent to which Dickens relies on their evocative power. For in place of Mrs Gaskell's development of realistic detail and continued examination of the complexities of urban life, Dickens seems content to establish an external image of intense horrific activity which is then made to carry the bulk of his moral judgement. Admittedly, though, these external portraits of the industrial "badlands" are unparalleled in their intensity and imaginative power. In The Old Curiosity Shop, especially, the image is one of concentrated violence; Dickens describes the Black Country in which Nell and her Grandfather are travelling:

> They came by slow degrees upon a cheerless region, where not a blade of grass was seen to grow; where not a bud put forth its promise in the spring; where nothing green could live but

> on the surface of stagnant pools....On every side, and as far as the eye could see into the heavy distance, tall chimneys, crowding on each other, and presenting that endless repetition of the same dull, ugly form, which is the horror of oppressive dreams, poured out their plague of smoke, obscured the light and made foul the melancholy air...strange engines spun and writhed like tortured creatures ...making the ground tremble with their agonies. (OCS, 45)

This indeed, is Pandemonium, the capital of the nether world. In contrast to the rural Eden where Nell seems to be "drawing nearer Heaven" (OCS, 53) the industrial scene emphasizes the demonic energy and sheer intensity of destruction. Dickens is careful to stress that the industrial world, indeed the very principles of industrialism, have become an uncontrollable, raging monstrosity which has in it all the elements of a nightmare. The rural Eden has become distorted beyond recognition.

It is significant that in his construction of this industrial world, a world fallen from the innocence represented by the countryside, Dickens chooses to rely heavily on a highly selective series of negatives. His portrayal is closely related to myth and reflects the traditional use of the blighted world or the physical cataclysm. Though by no means a conscious allusion, the absence of any greenery recalls the biblical use of natural blight to reflect the notion of godlessness or moral depravity in the face of God; in Pharoah's Egypt "nothing green was left on any tree or plant throughout the land."[24] Appropriately enough, in The Old Curiosity Shop, the factory smoke is figured as a polluting and blinding nuisance, contrasting with the rural world in which "the

smoke...coming from among the trees, seemed to rise upward from the green earth." (OCS, 53). The effects on vegetation likewise emphasize the virtually catabolic nature of the industrial factory while the striking image of "tortured creatures" provides a metaphorical comment on the disintegration of the labouring classes. Similar to Mrs Gaskell Dickens exhibits a strong distaste for the inhuman crowded living conditions of the factory slum. Through the image of the nightmare he suggests the disorientation and psychological upheaval suffered in the industrial towns where man mingled with machine to eventually become a single entity.

In Hard Times, written fourteen years after the inauguration of Master Humphrey's Clock, Dickens continues his attacks on the destructive, "anti-life" effects of the industrial city. The portrayal, as in the early novels, is one of intense visual impact strongly dependent on the use of archetypal negatives. Unlike such novels as Oliver Twist and The Old Curiosity Shop, however, the writing exhibits a stronger sense of authorial control and density of symbolic image. The name "Coketown" itself, with its direct allusion to industrial fuel, conveys both an image of the manufacturing town and the precarious conditions of the labouring classes who themselves have become little more than "food for powder."[25] In his external portrayal Dickens again constructs the equivalent of an existential hell:

> It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but, as matters stood it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for

> ever and ever and never got uncoiled. It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of building full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long, and where the piston of the steam engine worked monotonously up and down, like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness. (HT, I, 5)

Reliance on the traditional serpent image to denote demonic activity is reinforced by Dickens' further emphasis on the chaotic and noisy conditions within the factory. Indeed, industrialism itself is represented as a catabolic process which paradoxically thrives on the nature it destroys. As in The Old Curiosity Shop this destruction of the natural world reflects both the physical pollution of the industrial town and the erosion of moral principles, social community, and personal harmony. The nightmare image of the industrial centres in The Old Curiosity Shop is now transformed into the less compromising category of "madness".

To Dickens the breakdown of traditional human values occuring within the industrial town was equal to a virtual loss of innocence. Throughout Hard Times this initial portrait of a demonic Coketown undergoes such variations to emphasize its "demonic" nature. The primitive violence associated with "the painted face of a savage" is reinforced by Dickens' later mention of the "smoky jaws of Coketown." (HT, II, 9). Similarly the city and its factories emerge as metaphors of spiritual aridity and moral dissolution. Significantly enough Dickens' use of metaphor emphasizes its demonic, fallen state; during the course of the novel, Coketown is referred

to as "Towers of Babel" (HT, I, 12), "the desert" (HT, II, 1), "a black mist" (HT, III, 6), "that wilderness of smoke and brick" (HT, I, 14), and as "a dense formless jumble" (HT, II, 1).

Of prime importance is Dickens' development of the "unnatural" status of the industrial world. Because of its claustrophobic hold on the individual inhabitant the possibilities of imaginative release are virtually impossible. As Alan P. Johnson points out, the city's "interminable serpents of smoke" which discolour the vibrant red of the buildings' bricks reflects the smothering of the individual and collective imagination of its inhabitants: "the red of the untainted bricks suggests that the town was a product of imagination and might be, like Sleary's circus, a place where beneficent imagination might thrive."[26] But to Dickens, in its attack on Nature the industrial city, and the philosophy of hard fact behind it, offer no refuge for "the robber Fancy." (HT, I, 2). For Dickens this distortion of the natural world establishes the destructive power of the industrial city, "that ugly citadel where Nature was as strongly bricked out as killing airs and gases were bricked in." (HT, I, 10). In its subjection of spontaneity and imagination to the physical and spiritual monotony of mechanical efficiency, the city becomes, in fact, an unbearable affront to the very spirit of life.

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In their depiction of factory labour both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell attack the impersonal and dehumanizing conditions under which the industrial labourer functions from day to day. As in

their portrayals of the city, the factory in Hard Times, Mary Barton and The Old Curiosity Shop is presented as a demonic fallen world which brings about the disintegration of traditional human values. In Mary Barton the internal activity of the iron-works emerges as nightmarish drama:

> The men, like demons, in their fire-and-soot colouring, stood swart around...black figures, holding strange-shaped bucket shovels, came athwart the deep-red furnace light, and clear and brilliant flowed forth the iron into the appropriate mould. (MB, 19)

Similarly the factory in which Nell is offered temporary refuge is presented in a grotesque image of awesome, furious energy:

> In this gloomy place, moving like demons among the flame and smoke, dimly and fitfully seen, flushed and tormented by the burning fires, and wielding great weapons, a faulty blow from any one of which must have crushed some workman's skull, a number of men laboured like giants. (OCS, 44)

Unlike Dickens, Mrs Gaskell exhibits an ability to penetrate beneath her initial portraits of both town and factory. The shift of focus from the external image to internal conditions reflects a stylistic movement from myth to realism and conveys her knowledge and understanding of the labouring class itself. With Dickens, however, this shift from general perspective to specific instance is noticeably strained. When he moves from his external portrayal of either city or mill to an actual handling of either working conditions or the labouring class he lacks the sense of realism found in Mrs Gaskell. At this point he usually regresses to either sentimentalism or unconscious parody as in the case of Stephen Blackpool or the "suffering thousands" of The Old Curiosity Shop.

But if "the medium is inferior...the feeling is noble"[27] and Dickens, like Mrs Gaskell, exhibits a sense of moral horror at the dehumanizing effects of factory labour. In compensation, then, for his faulty handling of the specific, his external portrayals are made to operate as powerful images of the internal sufferings of the workers.

In Hard Times, especially, the external portraits of Coketown and its factories become striking images of the deadening effects of an utilitarian ethos which suppresses the imagination in favour of mechanical efficiency and statistical "prosperity."[28] The application of "fairy" images to the factories themselves provides an ironic comment on the erosive effects of the uncreative and unfulfilling labour within:

> The atmosphere of those Fairy palaces was like the breath of the simoom; and their inhabitants, wasting with heat, toiled languidly in the desert. But no temperature made the melancholy mad elephants more mad or more sane. Their wearisome heads went up and down at the same rate, in hot weather and cold, wet weather and dry, fair weather and foul. (HT, II, 1)

Like the city's, the factory's severance from natural rhythms suggests both its "apartness" in terms of organic unity and its disjunction from the rural world's virtues and moral principles. The external image of physical aridity and mechanical monotony conveys the spiritual attrition of the workers as well as the debilitating psychological effects of their monotonous labour.

To Dickens the concepts of "imagination" and "fancy" provide a virtual realm of positive activity. Of prime importance are their suggestions of an ability to actively empathize with one's

fellow man. Through suppression of the individual ego the imaginative faculty inspires the exercise of Christian sympathy. These qualities are most effectively conveyed by Sleary's troupe who exhibit "an untiring readiness to help and pity one another" (HT, I, 6). It is in the imaginative contrast afforded by the factory and circus that Dickens emphasizes the murderous effects of factory labour. For in contrast to his ironic description of the "Fairy palaces", Sleary's circus, with its profusion of human kindness and personal sympathy, is justly proclaimed to be "thtrong in the fairy bithnith" (HT, III, 7). Through this development and expansion of external portrayal and attendant image Dickens makes a successful imaginative attempt to convey the internal state of the town and factory. In contrast to the delving examinations in the novels of Mrs Gaskell, however, he exhibits a serious inability to deal with the actual conditions of industrial labour.

In 1867 Karl Marx wrote in Das Kapital:

> [Manufacture] seizes labour by its very roots. It converts the labourer into a crippled monstrosity, by forcing his detail dexterity [sic] at the expense of a world of productive capabilities and instincts; just as in the States of La Plata they butcher a whole beast for the sake of his hide or tallow. Not only is the detail work distributed to the different individuals, but the individual himself is made the automatic motor of a fractional operation, and the absurd fable of Meninius Agrippa, which makes a man a mere fragment of his own body, becomes realized.[29]

Both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell, recognized and morally condemned the dehumanizing effects of industrial labour. Its reduction of man to a mechanized contrivance and anonymous statistical entity forms a strong theme in Mary Barton where such characters as "No. B72" (MB, 21) populate the industrial labour force. Mrs Gaskell recog-

nizes not only the psychological distortion of mechanized labour but is at pains to emphasize its economic significance. With the incorporation of the machine as a principal aspect of production, output was increased while wages barely remained at a subsistence level. The blunt statement of "several voices" stresses the labouring-class' sense of disenchantment: "Machines is th' ruin of poor folk" (MB, 8).

In Hard Times Dickens' recurring use of "Hands" emphasizes the functionalistic point of view of industrial society. The workman is no longer self-realizing but is totally defined by his utilitarian productivity. The reduction of the human personality to the state of a mechanical extension is developed to the point where the distinction between man and machine is not apparent: "The loom, and wheels, and Hands, all out of gear for an hour" (HT, I, 2). Essentially the labouring man has become enslaved by industrial civilization, slavery being determined "pas par l' obéissance, ni par la rudesse des labeurs, mais par le statu d' instrument et la réduction de l'homme à l'état de chose."[30] Indeed, Dickens recognizes this pervasive expansion of the machine to the point where it becomes psychologically domineering:

> Old Stephen was standing in the street, with the odd sensation upon him which the stoppage of the machinery always produced -- the sensation of its having worked and stopped in his own head. (HT, I, 10)

Of equal importance to both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell are the physically dangerous conditions of the Victorian mill. As Richard Altick points out the industrial labourer "was forever imperiled [sic]

by unguarded shafts, belts, and flywheels. Industrial diseases and those caused simply by the proximity of many unwashed, chronically ill human bodies conspired with accidents to disable and kill them."[31] Increasing the horror of the situation was the disturbing reality that both women and children, as well as men, worked up to sixteen hours a day under the most oppressive conditions. Though a somewhat sentimentalized example, the Furnace Attendant in The Old Curiosity Shop provides an apt comment on the sheer servility of industrial labour. In Mary Barton the industrial accident which cripples Jane Wilson is a striking example of the physical jeopardy to which the industrial worker was exposed.

Despite the "progress" made since the times of unregulated labour and conditions the Factory Acts had an indirect debilitating effect on the labouring classes.[32] Inadvertently they increased the levels of both poverty and physical squalor. In Mary Barton Mrs Gaskell is careful to stress these less positive effects of governmental legislation. For as horrible as the working conditions were, and as distasteful as child-labour was, it was a necessary evil in order for the working-class family to merely survive; Mrs Davenport expresses her sense of the situation to John Barton:

> "I'm sure, John Barton, if yo are taking messages to the parliament folk, yo'll not object to telling 'em what a sore trial it is, this law o' theirs, keeping children fra' factory work, whether they be weakly or strong. There's our Ben....I han gotten no money to send him t' school, as I would like; and there he is, rampaging about th' streets a' day, getting hungrier and hungrier, and picking up a' manner o' bad ways; and th' inspector won't let him

> in to work in th' factory, because he's not right age." (MB, 8)

The Davenport situation clearly establishes the plight of the labouring class where murderous labour becomes the only means of survival. The inaccessibility of an effective education further insulates the prevading atmosphere of ignorance and boredom, and virtually dismisses the possibility of either personal or social improvement. As Mrs Davenport comments, the absence of education contributed strongly to the rampant growth of crime and "bad ways" in the industrial towns. In their poverty, then, child-labour remained one of the few means of survival, albeit meagre, for the labouring-classes.

In his article on Dickens, Orwell points out an essential feature of the former's social criticism: "He has an infallible moral sense, but very little intellectual curiosity. And here one comes upon something which really is an enormous deficiency in Dickens -- that he has no idea of work."[33] Unlike Mrs Gaskell, when Dickens attempts to deal directly with the types of work which are so murderous he usually resorts to vague generalities and emotional pathos. His treatment of the death of Stephen Blackpool is a case in point. As in his critique of the urban environment, external images carry the bulk of his moral judgements. He exhibits little knowledge of exactly what type of work was carried on in the outdated mines, and attacks only the fact that it "kills wi'out need". The thrust of his criticism depends almost totally on the emotional appeal of Stephen's death-bed rhetoric:

> "I ha' fell into th' pit, my dear, as have cost

> wi'in the knowledge o' old fok now living, hundreds and hundreds o' men's lives....I ha' fell into a pit that ha' been wi' the' Fire-damp crueller than battle. I ha' read on't in the public petition...in which they ha' pray'n an pray'n the lawmakers for Christ's sake not to let their work be murder to 'em ....When it were in work, it killed wi'out need; when 'tis let alone, it kills wi'out need. See how we die an no need, one way an another -- in a muddle -- everyday!" (HT, III, 6)

Significantly the name of this pit is "Old Hell Shaft" (HT, III, 6). In this image Dickens conveys his sense of the victimization of the worker by industrial civilization which has emerged as a demonic world of fire and brimstone. As an imaginative construction it provides a powerful denunciation of the demonic industrial world and is an appropriate variation of the hellish Coketown. As realistic social criticism, however, it reveals Dickens indulging in emotional escapism. It has little of the stark reality or grim precision of Mrs Gaskell's treatment of Bessy Higgins in North and South.

In contrast to Dickens, Mrs Gaskell exhibits a full understanding of the particular effects of a specific type of work. In place of Dickens general metaphor of Old Hell Shaft she provides a detailed analysis of the relationship between a definite type of labour and Bessy's fatal contraction of byssinosis:

> "I think I was well when mother died, but I have never been rightly strong sin' somewhere about that time. I began to work in a carding-room soon after, and the fluff got into my lungs and poisoned me."
> "Fluff?" said Margaret, inquiringly.
> "Fluff," repeated Bessy. "Little bits, as fly off fro' the cotton, when they're carding it, and fill the air till it looks all fine white dust. They say it winds round the lungs, and tightens them up. Anyhow,

> there's many a one as works in a carding-room, that falls into a waste, coughing and spitting blood, because they're just poisoned by the fluff." (NS, 13)

Unlike the martyred Stephen Blackpool who appears as an abstract victim rather than a believable labourer, Mrs Gaskell's Bessy Higgins emerges as a realistic character whose sufferings and death provide a moving condemnation of industrial society. In place of Dickens' vagueness Mrs Gaskell's attention to particularities reinforces rather than detracts from her attack on the murderous quality of industrial labour. Through her characterization of Bessy she delivers a moral upbraiding of the indifference, the exploitation and the inhumanity of the industrial system in which labour objectifies the labourer himself. In contrast to Dickens' powerful generalizations it is Mrs Gaskell's specificity which forms an essential aspect of her moral evaluation of society.

In their confrontations with industrial, urban monstrosity both Dickens' and Mrs Gaskell's criticism of society is almost exclusively moral. In comparison to Marx's radical proposals for a structural change of society, both authors point rather to a personal reformation of the individual spirit. Despite their attacks on the deadening effects of industrial labour neither proposes any definite structural alteration of the situation. The factories remain capitalist enterprises and continue their monotonous humming at the close of Hard Times. Similarly Thornton's spiritual conversion to human sympathy in North and South does little to change the reality of the assembly-line or power loom.

In the traditional sense of "revolutionary" the resolutions offered by both appear as somewhat middle-class, paternalistic platitudes. But in the absence of any realistic social recommendations both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell hit at the very basis of human society. In their emphasis on the meritorious aspects of charity both authors offer a viable means by which men may exist harmoniously in a class-structured, capitalist society. Their call for human sympathy and Christian virtue formed a revolutionary critique of a society based on brutal indifference and stolid exploitation. In their concentration on the need for a personal change of spirit rather than a structural change of society both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell embrace the most fundamental form of radicalism.

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Footnotes Chapter I

[1]Matthew Arnold, "A Summer Night", vv. 37-41, in Lionel Trilling, ed., The Portable Matthew Arnold, (New York: The Viking Press, 1962), pp. 122-23.

[2]For the most specific definition of "Industrialism" in the sense in which it is used throughout the text, see Raymond Williams, Culture and Society 1780-1950, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961), p. 13: "In the last decades of the Eighteenth century industry...became a collective word for our manufacturing and productive institutions, and for their general activities....Industry, with a capital letter, is though of as a thing in itself -- an institution, a body of activities -- rather than simply a human attribute...The rapid growth in importance of these institutions is seen as creating a new system, which in the 1830s is first called Industrialism."

[3]Richard D. Altick, Victorian People and Ideas, (New York: Norton, 1973), p. 75.

[4]Quoted in Altick, p. 75

[5]Altick, Victorian People and Ideas, p. 41

[6]Ibid.

[7]Cf. Altick, Victorian People and Ideas, pp. 42-3: "In Liverpool as late as the sixties, there were 66, 000 men, women, and children for every square mile....These teeming slums were the sites of almost unimaginable degradation. Large families, even two or three families, occupied a single room. As many as seven or eight persons -- children and adults of both sexes -- slept in one bed (or, more likely, on a filthy collection of rags), a practice that frequently resulted in incest, just as it did under similar conditions in the countryside....A single communal privy, itself never cleaned, might serve as many as forty multi-family dwellings. Cesspools, where they existed, constantly overflowed. Efficient sewer piping had not yet been invented, and even if it had, there was no supply of continuously flowing water to carry away the waste. Open-air drains therefore sent the walkways and unpaved streed awash with filth, thus creating monstrous enlargements of the disease-breeding conditions which had prevailed in towns ever since the Middle Ages."

[8]In Switzerland, while having difficulties in the writing of Dombey and Son, Dickens wrote to Forster (8/30/46): "But the difficulty of going at what I call a rapid pace is prodigious: it is almost an impossibility. I suppose this is partly the effect of two years' ease, and partly of the absence of streets...but Lord! I had two miles of streets at least [in Genoa], lighted at night, to walk about in"; in Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, Vol. 2, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1952), p. 602. A similar comment on the inspirational aspects of city streets marks the introductory meanderings of Master Humphrey in The Old Curiosity Shop.

[9]M. H. Abrams, A Glossary of Literary Terms, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), p. 121.

[10]Raymond Williams, Culture and Society, p. 99.

[11]Edgar Wright, Mrs Gaskell: The Basis for Reassessment, (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 96.

[12]The influence of Mrs Gaskell's pastoral country-life is most evident in George Eliot's Adam Bede. The portrayal of the Poyser Farm, like Gaskell's Green Heys Fields, abounds with an emphasis on the countryside's natural vitality which interacts with the human occupants: "There is quite a concert of noises: the great bulldog, chained against the stables, is thrown into furious exasperation by the unwary approach of a cock too near the mouth of his kennel, and sends forth a thundering bark, which is answered by two fox-hounds shut up in the opposite cowhouse; the old topnetted hens, scratching with their chicks among the straw, set up a sympathetic croaking as the discomfited cock joins them; a sow with her brood, all very muddy as to the legs, and curled as to the tail, throws in some deep staccato notes; our friends the calves are bleating from the home croft; and, under all, a fine ear discerns the continuous hum of human voices." [George Eliot, Adam Bede, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968), first published 1859, chapter 6, p. 63.]

[13]Williams, Culture and Society, p. 103.

[14]Wright, The Basis for Reassessment, p. 96.

[15]Ibid., p. 137.

[16]Ibid., p. 136.

[17]Malcolm Andrews, "Introduction", in The Old Curiosity

Shop, (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1972), p. 18.

[18]J. Hillis Miller, Charles Dickens: The World of his Novels, (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1969), p. 95.

[19]Gabriel Pearson, "The Old Curiosity Shop", in John Gross and Gabriel Pearson, eds., Dickens and the Twentieth Century, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), p. 80.

[20]Philip Collins, Dickens and Education, (London: MacMillan; New York: St Martin's Press, 1963), p. 125.

[21]Miller, Charles Dickens: The World of his Novels, p. 96.

[22]William Wordsworth, Preface to Lyrical Ballads, in Thomas Hutchinson, ed., The Poetical Works of Wordsworth, 24th ed., revised by Ernest de Selincourt, (London: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 740.

[23]Orwell, "Charles Dickens", pp. 118-19.

[24]Exodus 10:15.

[25]Shakespeare, Henry IV, Part One, IV, ii, v. 72.

[26]Alan P. Johnson, "Hard Times: 'Performance' or 'Poetry'", Dickens Studies, V (May 1969), 72.

[27]Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, Vol. 1, p. 323.

[28]For an earlier example of Dickens' antagonism to the ethos of Industrialism cf. his "The Amusements of the People", (Household Words, March 30, 1850): "There is a range of imagination in most of us, which no amount of steam engines will satisfy; and which The-great exhibition-of-the-works-of-industry-of-all-nations, itself, will probably leave unappeased."

[29]Karl Marx, Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Edited by Frederick Engels; Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, trans., (New York: The Modern Library, n.d.), p. 396.

[30]"neither by obedience nor by hardness of labour but by

the status of being a mere instrument, and the reduction of man to the state of a thing." François Perroux, La Coexistence pacifique, (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1958), vol. III, 600; in Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), pp. 33-33n.

[31]Altick, Victorian People and Ideas, p. 43.

[32]The Factory Act of 1833 was an attempt to rectify some of the problems and disallowed the employment of children in factories under nine years of age. In 1844 further legislation worked toward "improvement" in a provision for the incorporation of safeguards around industrial machinery. It limited the number of working hours per day to a maximum of six and one-half for children but lowered the minimum age of child-labourers to eight. It also established a maximum workday of twelve hours for women. The Ten Hours Act of 1847 -- the most bitterly opposed of the Factory Acts -- was retrogressive in its setting of a maximum workday of ten hours, six days a week, for women and children alike. (cf. Altick, pp. 46-47).

[33]Orwell, "Charles Dickens", p. 121.

II Society and the Working-Class

> "Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, the heart cannot conceive", the half of the suffering endured by this poverty-stricken people.[1]

A major aspect of both Dickens' and Mrs Gaskell's treatment of the working-class is their concept of the society in which the workers exist. The physical conditions of the industrial city, the deterioration in the significance of the individual, and the hard ethos of laissez-faire capitalism all combined to produce an oppressive society in which the working-class received the brunt of such oppression. In terms of any qualitative change the industrialization of labour itself became a major instrument in the containment of the working-class. The foremost feature of this new labour -- mechanization, the transformation of the working-man from artisan to operative -- increased to its furthest limits the victimization of the labourer:

> Pendant les siècles passés, une cause important d'aliénation résidait dans le fait que l'être humain prêtait son individualité biologique a l'organisation technique: il était porteur d'outils; les ensembles techniques ne pouvaient se constituer qu'en incorporant l'homme comme porteur d'outils. Le caractère déformant de la profession était a la fois psychique et somatique.[2]

It is this notion of "victimization" which characterizes Dickens' and Mrs Gaskell's treatment of the situation of the working-class. As Arnold Kettle points out in his discussion of Oliver Twist, it

is a "world of the most appalling poverty and ugliness, a world of brutality and violence in which life is cheap, suffering general and death welcome."[3]

With Dickens in particular, industrial society emerges as something of a raging juggernaut crushing the life and vitality out of the working-class. Like Mrs Gaskell he is at pains to emphasize both the tangible effects of social conditions as well as the more impalpable forms of bondage and spiritual attrition. Unlike their more socially radical contemporaries, however, neither Dickens nor Mrs Gaskell advocate a structural alteration of capitalist society. Neither affirms a socialistic form of social community. Their recommendations implicitly provide for the maintaining of private property, the continuation of free enterprise, and the perpetuation of the class system. Both authors work on a moral level. They attack both the bleak impersonality of class relations and the reduction of men to anonymous units of a larger whole. Their call is for a more humanistic form of social relations, one in which the individual personality may be humanly fulfilled within his given social station.

Industrial society as it is presented in the novels of both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell is essentially paradoxical. It flourishes on that which it negates. With the disintegration of the village the old sense of organic community rapidly gives way to personal isolation in the overwhelming largeness of the industrial city. The sense of connection or belonging to a vital community is now replaced by a profound experience of discon-

nection from the external world. The individual personality has become increasingly self-oriented. The point is aptly illustrated in The Old Curiosity Shop where Nell and her Grandfather encounter the bleak insentience of the manufacturing town: they "stood amid its din and tumult...as strange, bewildered, and confused, as if they had lived a thousand years before, and were raised from the dead and placed there by a miracle" (OCS, 43).

Within the labour market this replacement of a responsive external environment by an impersonal void necessitates a "looking after oneself" in the bleakest sense. From this point of view self-interest becomes the primary means of survival in industrial society. As Engels comments in his The Condition of the Working-Class in England:

> We know well enough that this isolation of the individual -- this narrow-minded egotism -- is everywhere the fundamental principle of modern society....The disintegration of society into individuals, each guided by his private principles and each pursuing his own aims has been pushed to its furthest extremes....Indeed human society has been split into its component atoms.[4]

The paradox of the situation, however, can be seen in the significance attached to the individual self as a part of the larger society. In contrast to the rural world in which the labouring individual forms an essential aspect of the organic community, these "component atoms" of industrial society are minor, dispensable parts of the larger social machine. Whereas industrial society perpetuates personal isolation and, hence, rampant self-interest, it simultaneously negates the importance of the indi-

vidual response within itself. At one and the same time society literally denies the worth of those parts which constitute society itself. It is this paradoxical, oppressive structure that both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell attempt to castigate, and to some extent reform, in their portrayal of the working-class.

In both Mary Barton and North and South Mrs Gaskell's discussions of industrial society concentrate on the antagonism of the "two nations", rich and poor. Unlike Dickens there is little of the kaleidescopic portrayal of working-class problems. With Mrs Gaskell the use of generalized metaphor and gross sensationalism is replaced, on the whole, by an attention to social detail and an honest attempt to grasp the reality of social dichotomy. Her authorial presence is evident in Margaret Hale's evaluation of Milton society:

> I see two classes dependent on each other in every possible way, yet each evidently regarding the interests of the other as opposed to their own; I never lived in a place before where there were two sets of people always running each other down. (NS, 15)

Although Mrs Gaskell recognizes the existing division of interest, she is strictly a product of her class -- like Dickens and Disraeli, hers is essentially a middle-class mind. In her attempts to understand the psychological workings of such characters as Barton or Nicholas Higgins she continually maintains an uneasy distance from any of their more socially radical activities. There is never any indication that she supports an outright abolition of class structures or any violent alterations of the

social fabric. Rather, hers is strictly a middle-class recommendation, one which calls for the replacement of antagonism and hatred by a mutual sympathy between rich and poor. Indeed, the crux of her argument is that the basic cause of class tension is the lack of sympathy, understanding and communication between these social factions. Aside from her attempts at resolution, though, her stark portrayal of working-class conditions reflects a clear understanding of the destruction wrought by class distrust. Through her precise realization of the working-class state of mind she delivers a powerful blow to the brutal indifference of the middle and upper classes of Victorian society.

In comparison to Dickens' Stephen Blackpool the character of John Barton is a more realistic portrayal of the working man and he emerges as a more valid spokesman of working-class grievances. As F. R. Leavis rightly comments, the figure of Stephen is something of a sham, an unconscious parody of the industrial labourer: "he invites an adaptation of the objection brought, from the negro point of view, against Uncle Tom, which was to the effect that he was a white man's good nigger."[5] Throughout Hard Times he appears as little more than a sentimental wish-fulfillment of Dickens' middle-class imagination. In contrast to Blackpool's grating humility and tiresome monologues on the sorrows of the working-class, Barton's fierce antagonism and downright hatred of the upper-classes provide a somewhat more accurate realization of the despair of the labouring-class:

> "Don't think to come over me with the old tale, that the rich know nothing of the trials of the poor. I say, if they don't know, they ought to know. We are their slaves as long as we can work; we pile up their fortunes with the sweat of our brows; and yet we are to live as separate as if we were in two worlds; ay, as separate as Dives and Lazarus, with a great gulf betwixt us: but I know who was best off then," and he wound up his speech with a low chuckle that had no mirth in it. (MB, 1)

Through the particularly apt reference to the parable of Dives and Lazarus Mrs Gaskell constructs a potent image that operates on a variety of levels. Initially it provides a conceptual image of the division existing in the industrial society where "there is a great gulf fixed"[6] between rich and poor. But in the association of the idle profligacy of Dives with the Victorian upper classes, it functions as a strong moral censure of their indifference and solid lack of sympathy. The reference itself reinforces her call for a more sympathetic Christian relationship between the classes. This comparison of Lazarus with the working-class likewise stresses, for her middle-class reading public, the deprived conditions suffered by the lower classes of society. In an overall view of Barton's biblical quotation one can read the implication that such scriptural optimism is but a grim consolation to the oppressed members of the labouring classes.[7]

As in Mary Barton, a central thematic concern of North and South is the lack of sympathy which characterizes the industrial environment. With this novel, however, Mrs Gaskell presents a more far-reaching analysis than in the former. Like John

Barton, Nicholas Higgins is present in the novel primarily as an emblem of the working-class and it is through him and his family that she delivers her most ambitious evaluation of working-class conditions. At the death of Bessy his ensuing discussion with Mr Hale stands as a major indictment of middle and upper-class indifference:

> "Well, I sees these people [the middle and upper classes]. Their lives is pretty much open to me. They're real folk. They don't believe i' the Bible, -- not they. They may say they do, for form's sake; but Lord, sir, d'ye think their first cry i' th' morning is, 'What shall I do to get hold on eternal life?' or 'What shall I do to fill my purse this blessed day?' Where shall I go? What bargains shall I strike?' The purse and the gold and the notes is real things; things as can be felt and touched; them's realities and eternal life is all a talk." (NS, 28)

Although at points in the novel Higgins is little more than a romantic figure, on the whole he provides a powerful example of the extent to which the working-class has been ground under by the forces of society. His gradual affirmation of a basic materialism pinpoints, for Mrs Gaskell, a major aspect of the ills of society. In place of any humane social intercourse, relations in the industrial society revolve around the "cash nexus" (NS, 51). Milton, like Manchester in Mary Barton, is typified by a type of "godlessness" which both bolsters the prevalent feelings of hopelessness and despair and supports the materialistic outlook of all classes. Continuing the implication of Barton's death bed speech, Mrs Gaskell, at this point in North and South, is emphatic in her moral condemnation of this form

of monetary idolatry. The point is registered by Dickens in Hard Times where his description of Coketown ironically emphasizes this apparent "divinization" of capitalistic, political economy:

> What you couldn't state in figures, or show to be purchasable in the cheapest market and saleable in the dearest, was not, and never should be, world without end, Amen. (HT, I, 5)

The passage stands as an ironic invocation to the abstract concepts of society which have now been raised into an "absolute Divinity".[8]

To both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell, then, the lack of a basic Christian sympathy is equal to the worst type of social oppression. Like Dickens, Mrs Gaskell espouses a "religion of humanity" -- one which offers a limited form of personal liberation within the existing, class-structured society. And like Dickens', her espousal is designed as a constructive moral alternative to the dehumanizing exploitation which she sees as the basis of the Victorian social ethic.

Although fourteen years separate the publications of The Old Curiosity Shop and Hard Times Dickens maintains a consistent vision of industrial society. Like Mrs Gaskell, Dickens attacks the forms of imprisonment, both tangible and intangible, which constrict and repress the freedom and vitality of the individual. As mentioned above, his social criticism depends heavily on the successful realization of forceful external metaphors meant to convey a sense of internal conditions. With his handling of

specific characters, scenes, and situations he constructs an allegorical image of the exploitation and oppressive indifference suffered by the poorer classes of society. As Rex Warner notes in his treatment of The Old Curiosity Shop, "Dickens is describing forces which are bigger than the characters themselves, and is embodying in his people and scenery the cruelties and delusions which he observes in a wider society."[9]

Dickens, more so perhaps than any of his contemporaries, exploits to the fullest the power of the physical image to connote a moral, spiritual, or intellectual condition. In contrast to Mrs Gaskell's socio-historical approach, Dickens provides an imagistic exploration of his society. And in this exploration the predominant metaphors are usually ones that suggest nightmarish frenzy or grotesque distortion. Dickens' portrayal of industrial society is rarely commendatory.

Whereas The Old Curiosity Shop can hardly be read as a novel of the working-classes, the image of society contained therein provides both an interesting anticipation of Dickens' more analytical treatment in Hard Times, and an important development from the portrayal of society in Oliver Twist. In a definite sense The Old Curiosity Shop represents a major milestone in Dickens' imaginative and intellectual growth. As with the later work he is dealing primarily with the notion of victimization, and in the figure of little Nell attempts to create a "symbol for all the victims of...society."[10]

As with Mrs Gaskell, Dickens is concerned to expose the

inimical nature of modern society. In Oliver Twist Fagin emerges as a grotesque emblem of the grasping cupidity of society. Through the use of Oliver's child-like point of view Dickens creates an horrific image of its destructive energy, and in his fairy-tale-like portrayal of Fagin creates a supreme caricature in the line of the Jewish Bogey cum Christian demon. In a similar manner the figures of Quilp and the curiosity shop emerge as grotesque images of the pernicious forces of an aggressive and threatening society. As Dickens notes in the "Preface to the First Cheap Edition (1848)":

> I had it always in my fancy to surround the lonely figure of the child with grotesque and wild, but not impossible companions, and to gather about her innocent face and pure intentions, associates as strange and uncongenial as the grim objects that are about her when her history is first foreshadowed. (OCS, Preface)

This explicit association of the grotesque nature of the curiosity shop with the external uncongeniality of personal relations emphasizes the degree to which modern society has alienated its own inhabitants. The "suits of mail standing like ghosts... the distorted figures in china and wood and iron and ivory" (OCS, 1) which populate the shop provide apt counterparts to the ghastly characters with which Nell and her Grandfather contend in the outer world. Quilp, in particular, as Malcolm Andrews points out, can be seen as a "microcosm of Dickens' London, the city whose ferocious and destructive energy is at once repulsive and fascinating, and whose individual features become grotesquely disproportionate when assembled to make a whole entity."[11]

Like Fagin, Quilp stands as a phantasmagoric parody of

society's aggressive, and to Dickens, primitive barbarism. His pursuit of Nell and her Grandfather and his exploitation of every character with whom he comes into contact reinforces Dickens' attack against society's victimization of its weaker members. Industrial society has become a mélange of grotesque, dispirited corpses between whom there is precious little human or sympathetic relationship. Unlike Oliver Twist the benevolent saviours of the oppressed now prove ineffectual. Society appears as a nightmarish negation of reality and, like the tapestries and furniture of the curiosity shop, "might have been designed in dreams" (OCS, 1). As J. Hillis Miller succinctly observes, Dickens constructs an "inimical world, a world which refuses to support or recognize... personal existence."[12]

The sheer intensity with which Dickens attacks the deadness of contemporary society is tempered in Hard Times. In place of the violent emotionalism, a trademark of The Old Curiosity Shop, his handling of his themes reflects a greater imaginative control, one which seeks to expose the fundamental evils of industrial society. Whereas The Old Curiosity Shop dealt primarily with the product of industrialism, Hard Times is more an analysis of its basic causes. To Dr Leavis, Dickens "is unmistakably possessed by a comprehensive vision, one in which the inhumanities of Victorian civilization are seen as fostered and sanctioned by a hard philosophy, the aggressive formulation of an inhuman spirit."[13] Indeed, the list of tentative titles for the novel which Dickens sent to Forster reflects his intention to focus on the fundamental

ethos of industrial society: a stark rationalism which would reduce the human personality to an arithmetical bundle of figures.[14]

The irony implicit in such titles as Something Tangible, A Matter of Calculation and A Mere Question of Figures suggests the oppressive social systematism which negates the reality and importance of the imagination, thereby creating a society in which mechanical factualism becomes the predominant form of oppression. The final choice of Hard Times as a title, with its connotations of want and deprivation, likewise conveys the image of human life lacking in essentials, both physical and spiritual. The physical persecution of Nell in The Old Curiosity Shop is now replaced in Hard Times by a more far-reaching treatment of the more intangible -- as well as tangible -- forces of bondage and victimization. Although Hard Times emerges as a much more polemical type of novel than those under consideration by Mrs Gaskell, it is strikingly similar to them in its attack on the dehumanizing aspects of social absolutism. Like Mrs Gaskell, Dickens morally condemns a society in which the individual personality loses its human integrity and exists primarily as a statistical entity. In a letter to Charles Knight, Dickens explicitly defines the target of his attack:

> My satire [in Hard Times] is against those who see figures and averages and nothing else -- the representatives of the wickedest and most enormous vice of this time -- the men who, through long years to come, will do more to damage the real useful truths of political economy than I could do (if I tried) in my whole life.[15]

***

It is within this bleak society that both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell attempt to grasp and re-create the fundamental nature of the working-class. Industrial society has become an enormous structure of oppressive containment. Class prejudice, laissez-faire insouciance, impersonality, and the singular aspect of "godlessness" become the major aspects of this containment. To Engels the social process is one of pure destruction. The "industrial proletariat" endures on all levels

> permanent or temporary suffering, sickness and demoralisation either from the nature of the work or from the circumstances under which they are forced to live. Everywhere the workers are being destroyed. Slowly but surely they are ceasing to be human beings, either physically or morally.[16]

Although neither Dickens nor Mrs Gaskell disparage the continued existence of a class society, they do attack the oppressive agents which the working-man must endure. Like Engels, both recognize and condemn the victimization of the industrial working-class. Unlike Engels, however, their outcry is directed primarily against the oppressive nature of existing conditions rather than the structures of society itself. Despite the apparent inclusiveness of their social criticism both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell are writing from a middle-class point-of-view; neither of them are particularly anxious to alter the basic framework of society. They may attack the indifference and paltry complacency of manufacturers or Parliament, but both maintain a staunch belief in the potential of capitalist society and the Victorian ideal of progress. In their attack on working-class conditions both affirm the constructive

value of personal sympathy and individual benevolence. Through the exercise of Christian sympathy the dehumanizing aspects of industrial life may be improved, though the structures of society remain unaltered.

A prominent feature of Dickens' and Mrs Gaskell's treatment of working-class conditions is their emphasis on the physical filth of working-class living quarters. Overpopulation, inhuman high-density housing, no civil maintenance of streets, and a total lack of any effective sanitary facilities combine to produce a disease-ridden environment unfit for human habitation. Indeed, neither author has need to resort to imaginative embellishment -- the conditions which they describe were common to working-class life. But in their handling of actual conditions the images of filth become powerful metaphors of the extent to which human life had been reduced. In Mary Barton the precise realization of the physical conditions of the Davenports stands as a stark image of unmitigated suffering and inhuman degradation. As Barton and George Wilson approach the Davenport home they confront the typical horrors of the poorer, working-class quarters:

> As they passed, women from their doors tossed household slops of every description into the gutter; they ran into the next pool, which overflowed and stagnated. Heaps of ashes were the stepping-stones, on which the passer-by, who cared in the least for cleanliness, took care not to put his foot...They got to some steps leading down into a small area, where a person standing would have his head about one foot below the level of the street...You went down one step even from the foul area into the cellar in which a family of human beings lived. (MB, 6)

The real horror of the situation lies in the italicized

"every". Like Dickens, Mrs Gaskell, though intent on providing a full picture of working-class conditions, exhibits a definite reticence in her portrayal of its more offensive aspects. Nevertheless, hers is a more precise image than Dickens' vague "overflowing kennels" (OCS, 44) and provides a grim image of life at its lowest level. Her use of the phrase "family of human beings" stands as an ironic conclusion to her preceding description of what initially appears as a storage locker or animal kennel. Like her emphatic portrayal of physical filth, the phrase offers a sharp comment on the oppression of the working-class. Similarly the claustrophobic nature of the Davenport dwelling reflects the repression of the working-class in industrial society. For confronted with the larger social machine this class inevitably is forced down and made to succumb to oppressive conditions either in death or despair. Although cellar dwellings like the Davenport's were a commonplace feature of Victorian society,[17] Mrs Gaskell's graphic portrayal of the downward movement into the dwelling reinforces this concept of repression or oppressive containment.

Like Mrs Gaskell's, Dickens' intention in his portrayal of the physical conditions of the working-class is to emphasize the helplessness, and hopelessness, of their situation. In both Oliver Twist and The Old Curiosity Shop he is careful to point out the physical filth of slum dwellings. As with Mrs Gaskell, excremental imagery is designed to convey a blunt sense of the degraded conditions of the working-class. In Hard Times phys-

ical impurity is but one aspect of his treatment of these conditions. As in Mary Barton Dickens is concerned to show the victimization or, more precisely, the overwhelming of the individual personality within industrial society. Unlike Mrs Gaskell, however, Dickens exhibits little knowledge of working-class tenements or dwellings, and usually reverts to an external focus in his portrayal. This type of treatment, in Hard Times, is extremely effective and works as an emphatic condemnation of working-class conditions. The introduction of Stephen Blackpool, in particular, stresses the insignificance of the individual within the larger society. Claustrophobic imagery reinforces the notion of dehumanization and the concentrated style, recalling the opening pages of Bleak House, emphasizes the almost apocalyptic inundation of Stephen himself. In one sentence Dickens epitomizes the basic principles of his attack:

> In the hardest working part of Coketown, in the innermost fortifications of that ugly citadel, where nature was as strongly bricked out as killing airs and gases were bricked in; at the heart of the labyrinth of narrow courts upon courts, and close streets upon streets, which had come into existence piecemeal, every piece in a violent hurry for some one man's purpose, and the whole an unnatural family, shouldering, and trampling, and pressing one another to death; in the last close nook of this great exhausted receiver, where the chimneys, for want of air to make a draught, were built in an immense variety of stunted and crooked shapes as though every house put out a sign of the kind of people who might be expected to be born in it; among the multitude of Coketown, generically called "the Hands", -- a race of who would have found more favour with some people, if Providence had seen fit to make them only hands, or, like the lower creatures of the sea-shore, only hands and stomachs -- lived a certain Stephen Blackpool, forty years of age. (HT, I, 10)

The passage itself is a stylistic masterpiece. Through a deft handling of syntax and image Dickens manages to convey the sense of convoluted energy completely dwarfing the human participant. Indeed, the appearance of Stephen seems totally overpowered by the preceding description of the industrial environment. The gradual shift in focus from general to specific likewise reinforces the notion of the insignificance of the specific, individual working-man in relation to the larger society. Like Mrs Gaskell, Dickens sees the severance of man and Nature as the primary cause of both social distress and personal alienation. The image of society as an "unnatural family" suggests its inorganic, unresponsive qualities which negate the possibility of any vital processes. Within its confines personal relations are characterized by indifference and impersonality, characteristics which both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell deem contrary to a fulfilling human life. Within the context of the novel Sleary's Circus, with its vital energy and profusion of personal sympathy, reinforces Dickens' attack on the inhuman mechanism and dull torpidity of Coketown. The image of the city as an "exhausted receiver" reflects the loss of vital human impulses and the revivifying activity of the circus troupe. Reinforcing this attack on society's destructive nature, the image of the working-class within this "labyrinth" emphasizes the distorting effects of both industrial labour and the circumstances under which the working-class must live. In the final image of the "Hands" Dickens delivers a direct criticism of the depersonalizing

process of utilitarian abstraction. Like Marx, he reacts against the reduction of the labourer to a mere extension of the machine, a form of instrumentality wherein the individual personality ceases to exist.

In her treatment of working characters Mrs Gaskell attacks society's victimization of the labouring-classes. As in her description of society in general her characterizations are typified by an attention to particular detail and an attempt at accuracy of social observation. Although she does not condemn the capitalist structure of society, she is able to detect its detrimental effects on the working-class. She points out that the health and welfare of the working-class is totally dependent on the economic state of privately-owned concerns. This centralization of financial power inadvertently becomes the primary means of mastery and the working-class is literally enslaved by the capitalist mill-owner. Hence, domination is further enforced by the social structures and in the disparate allotment of wealth the working-class receive the brunt of suffering in times of economic fluctuation. The point is bluntly conveyed in a discussion of the effects of Carson's fire between Barton and George Wilson:

> "Well, Barton, I'll not gainsay ye. But Mr Carson spoke to me after th' fire, and says he 'I shall ha' to retrench, and be very careful in my expenditure during these bad times, I assure ye'; so yo see th' masters suffer too."
>
> "Han they ever seen a child o' their'n die for want of food?" asked Barton, in a low, deep voice. (MB, 6)

In contrast to Dickens' diagrammatic labourers those of Mrs Gaskell are a more realistic representation of the working-man and reflect more convincingly the oppression suffered by the working-class. Like Dickens, however, her intention is to expose both the physiological and psychological effects of industrial life on the working-class individual. In both Mary Barton and North and South working-class life is characterized by an overwhelming prevalence of disease, poverty, suffering and death. "Clemming" is an accepted aspect of adulthood; John Barton thinks about his daughter: "She was young and had not learned to bear clemming" (MB, 12). In addition to the horrific examples of poverty, such as the Davenports in Mary Barton and the Boucher family in North and South, Mrs Gaskell's attention to homely details provides a poignant, acutely observed image of unyielding poverty. Such images as the Bartons' "half-dozen" tea-cups and saucers (MB, 2) and Mary Higgins' simple gift to Margaret of Bessy's "common drinking cup" (NS, 43) reflect the very real lack of commonplace necessities. Similarly the physical appearance of her characters attest to the deforming effects of life in industrial society and labour in the industrial mill. Barton's "stunted look" (MB, 1) and Bessy Higgins' death stand as stark images of the fatal consequences of factory labour. And as in the episode of the dying Ben Davenport, Jem Wilson's physical appearance suggests the prevalence of disease in working-class life: he "might have been handsome, had [his face] not been here and there marked by the smallpox" (MB, 4). In her treatment

of Boucher's suicide Mrs Gaskell comments on both the despair to which the working-class is susceptible as well as the pervasive, destructive nature of industrialism itself. It leaves its mark even in death: "Owing to the position in which he had been found lying, his face was swollen and discoloured; besides, his skin was stained by the water in the brook, which had been used for dyeing purposes" (NS, 36).[18]

Like Mrs Gaskell's, Dickens' working-class characters are designed as victims of the larger social order. Through them he attempts to indict the impersonal forces of society which reduce the individual to the level of insignificance and relegate the human being to inhuman conditions. His manner of portrayal, however, is a simplistic one and lacks the sense of realism found in Mrs Gaskell. In contrast to her explorations of the complexities of working-class frustration and pain, Dickens creates rather one-dimensional figures who emerge less as human personalities than as emblems of social conditions or moral states. The mawkish sentimentality which invests a number of his portrayals likewise weakens the effect of his criticism and tends to qualify the sincerity of his approach. As a representative of the working-class Stephen Blackpool is drastically unrealistic; he stands as a tepid saint in the guise of an industrial labourer. The episodes of little Nell and her Grandfather in the industrial Midlands are equally ineffectual and stand as gross examples of Dickens' uncontrolled emotionalism. As Aldous Huxley points out: "The overflowing of his heart drowns his head and

even dims his eyes; for, whenever he is in a melting mood, Dickens ceases to be able and probably ceases even to wish to see reality [sic]."[19]

This is a shrewd remark, for Huxley seems to hit on an essential aspect of Dickens' treatment of the working-class. The squalor of their situation becomes an affront to middle-class concepts of decency and human dignity, and inspires feelings of both sympathy and repulsion. With Dickens the awareness that such horrors exist results in a personal and artistic ambivalence. He wishes both to rectify the situation through a direct confrontation with it and, at the same time, wishes to dismiss it from his consciousness. He literally "ceases even to wish to see reality." In the midst of this intellectual (and emotional) confusion Dickens' overriding sense of society's immorality in its oppression of the working-class necessitates a certain idealization of that which is being oppressed. Emotionalism, or "sentimentality", as Stephen Marcus observes, "is delivered with impassioned sincerity, and is summoned for use in connection with the largest issues of moral conduct."[20] In his sentimental portrayal of the working-class, then, Dickens attempts both to compensate for his own sensation of repulsion and to arouse in his readers a sense of moral indignation over society's "immoral" oppression of the working-class.

In both The Old Curiosity Shop and Hard Times the oppression of the working-class is seen as essentially murderous. Through a use of recurrent death images Dickens attempts to con-

struct an effective imaginative symbol for the intrinsically destructive nature of such oppression. In The Old Curiosity Shop the use of child-deaths is designed to reinforce the evocative power of his social criticism. Aside from his obsession with Mary Hogarth's death in 1837, Dickens' use of child-deaths is a conscious literary device. They stand as a powerful thrust at the sheer brutality of Victorian society. Indeed, the deaths of children (and women) reflect society's uncompromising cruelty toward, and abuse of, its weaker inhabitants. Although the deaths of Nell and Harry (the little scholar) are unrelated to the working-class itself, they stand as moral judgements on the oppressive nature of society at large. In a similar manner Mrs Nubbles' casual mention of Little Jacob and the baby being "half baptised" (OCS, 47) accentuates Dickens' concern with the physical oppression of the lower classes. The image of infant-death as a direct comment on the state of the working-class is culminated in Nell's experience in the Black Country. Stopping to beg at some "wretched hovels" she receives only a stern rebuke:

> "What would you have here?" said a gaunt miserable man, opening the door .
> "Charity. A morsel of bread."
> "Do you see that?" returned the man hoarsely, pointing to a kind of bundle on the ground. "That's a dead child. I and five hundred other men were thrown out of work three months ago. That is my third dead child, and last. Do you think I have charity to bestow, or a morsel of bread to spare?" (OCS, 45)

The passage itself is typical of Dickens's treatment of working-class deprivation. It is at once ridiculous and tremendously

evocative. The power of the scene rests in Dickens' superb handling of the visual image. The man's gaunt features, his hoarse voice, and the bleak image of "a kind of bundle on the ground" provide a powerful attack on the severity of the working-class situation. His angry frustration and blunt rebuff to Nell suggest both the erosion of personal sympathy and the desperation which may lead to violent reaction. The man's aggressive tirade on the effects of unemployment, however, seems ludicrous when addressed to a starving child-beggar. His explanation of the causes of his suffering emerge as irrelevant, post facto documentation. As in the case of Stephen Blackpool, Dickens undermines the efficacy of his portrayal through an emotional excessiveness.

In Hard Times images of death are used as metaphorical illustrations of the dire effects of utilitarian theory on the working-class. Society is seen as a dehumanized force based on an aggressively "anti-life" philosophy. To Dickens the practical application of Gradgrindian theory is literally a murderous process. In the abolition of imagination in deference to a rigid factualism the well-spring of life itself is destroyed. The reduction of the personality to a measurable "parcel of human nature" (HT, I, 2) negates both complexity and emotion, and actively perpetuates the oppression of the individual. As in The Old Curiosity Shop, Dickens' use of the child becomes an emphatic image of the tangible effects of oppression. In the chapter aptly entitled "Murdering the Innocents" the effects of Gradgrindian theory are presented entirely in terms of destruc-

tion or annihilation. Sissy's new identity as "girl number twenty" reflects the reduction of life to a "case of simple arithmetic" (HT, I, 2). The violence of such reduction is evident in the portrayal of the characters themselves. Gradgrind is viewed as "a kind of cannon" about to "blow the children clear out of the regions of childhood" (HT, I, 2). The unnamed inspector is "a professed pugilist...certain to knock the wind out of common-sense, and render that unlucky adversary deaf to the call of time" (HT, I, 2). Similarly the image of M'Choakumchild as "not unlike Morgiana in the Forty Thieves" (HT, I, 2) emphasizes the violence done to the human mind by the Gradgrindian ethic. Significantly his teaching is presented in terms of spiritual (and intellectual) destruction; he attempts "to kill outright the robber Fancy lurking within -- or sometimes maim him and distort him" (HT, I, 2).

In his treatment of the working-class Dickens emphasizes the analogy between it and the "case of the little Gradgrinds" (HT, I, 5). Like Tom and Louisa the working-class suffers a subjection of the imagination to the dull routine of mathematical monotony. The process of Gradgrindian factualism is carried over from the school to the mill, and characterizes the quality of life there. The worker no longer possesses an human identity but rather becomes an anonymous unit or "hand". Labour loses its qualities of imaginative creativity and the labourer is reduced to an unthinking attendant on a mechanical apparatus. As in the case of the little Gradgrinds Dickens views this reduction of

life as intrinsically destructive. Through the image of physical death he creates a metaphor for the effects of this social absolutism. Preceding his actual demise, the nightmare of Stephen Blackpool embodies the effects of such absolutism on the working-class. He sees himself standing in a church, about to be married. In the midst of this imaginary happiness the scene shifts abruptly, leaving him alone with the clergyman:

> They stood in the daylight before a crowd so vast, that if all the people in the world could have been brought together into one space, they could not have looked, he thought, more numerous; and they all abhorred him, and there was not one pitying or friendly eye among the millons that were fastened on his face. He stood on a raised stage, under his own loom; and, looking up at the shape the loom took, and hearing the burial service distinctly read, he knew that he was there to suffer death. In an instant what he stood on fell below him, and he was gone. (HT, I, 13)

As in the portrayal of Stephen's actual death Dickens here indulges in an excessive emotionalism. The dream-death itself reads like a crucifixion. Indeed the image of Stephen is, at points in the novel, a pure allegorization of his biblical namesake.[21] Aside from this idealization, however, the dream sequence acts as a microcosmic image of Dickens' general view of the state of the working-class. The momentary achievement of union or harmony is quickly overcome by a disorienting shift into loneliness or isolation. This loss of love reflects both Stephen's personal misfortunes with Rachael and his drunken wife, and the larger concerns of the novel: the destruction of love in an impersonal society. The figure of the loom suggests

the killing nature of industrial labour and its overbearing absorption of the individual personality. Death is seen as the final dissolution of self within the wider society. In the central image of Stephen as a social pariah Dickens attempts to pinpoint the situation of the individual working-man. Stephen's refusal to join the Union ultimately sets him apart from his fellow labourers, while his defense of his class leads to an outright rejection by those above him. Caught in this social vise he is literally squeezed out of life. Hence in this sentimental portrayal of Stephen Blackpool, Dickens embodies what he feels to be the plight of the individual working-man. To Dickens martyrdom becomes a real probability in the industrial world.

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In their treatment of the oppression of the working-class both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell attempt to evaluate the qualitative effects of trade unionism. Their attitudes towards the unions are characterized by a marked ambivalence -- a mixture of sympathy and fear. Viewed as a defensive corrective designed to better working-class conditions the unions are a positive, if not welcome, invention. Mrs Gaskell, in particular, stresses the defensive nature of unionism, and in her sympathetic portrayal of Nicholas Higgins emphasizes the necessity out of which organized solidarity is established:

> "In those days of sore oppression th' Unions began; it were a necessity. It's a necessity now, according to me. It's a withstanding of injustice, past, present, or to come....Our only chance is binding men together in one common interest; ...

> our only strength is in numbers. (NS, 28)

A similar principle underlies Dickens' treatment of both trade unions and other working-class combinations. He consistently stresses the desperation which breeds working-class solidarity, and emphasizes the workers' earnest attempts at personal improvement. In Hard Times and in his editorial articles in Household Words he displays a marked sympathy for the workingmen and a definite antipathy to those who would deny their right to combine. "To Working Men" underlines the worker's "right to every means of life and health that Providence has provided for all."[22] Similarly, "On Strike" reflects a sympathy and admiration for the workers' self-control and discipline during times of economic hardship. Although Dickens views the strike as a "deplorable calamity", he stresses that the workers' "mistake" is "generally an honest one and that it is sustained by the good that is in them and not by the evil."[23] In Hard Times the characters of Bitzer and Mrs Sparsit in discussion, like that of Mr Snapper in "On Strike", are designed as caricatures of the middle-classes' petulant arrogance toward their social inferiors. In their dialogue concerning the unions Dickens embodies those qualities of class-antagonism and utilitarian dehumanization which he felt contributed directly to the "muddle" of industrial society:

> "What are the restless wretches doing now?" asked Mrs Sparsit.
> "Merely going on in the old way, ma'am. Uniting, and leaguing, and engaging to stand by one another."
> "It is much to be regretted," said Mrs Sparsit,

> making her nose more Roman and her eyebrows more Coriolanian in the strength of her severity, "that the united masters allow of any such class-combinations."
>
> "Yes, ma'am," said Bitzer. (HT, II, 1)

It is from a moral standpoint, however, that both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell attack the unions as an ultimately oppressive creation. Despite their sympathy for the attempts of workingmen to improve their situation, both emphatically define their union activities as either unwise or pathetically misguided. Two points are influential in this fluctuation of their attitudes. Of prime importance is the middle-class position of both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell themselves. Both maintain a middle-class political attitude toward "mob" activity (and the violence associated with it). Seen as an offensive counter to bourgeois exploitation, the unions are something of an anarchic body bent on the destruction of social order. In both The Old Curiosity Shop (ch. 45) and North and South (ch. 22) the riot scenes are powerful embodiments of the violent revolution feared by the middle-classes. As in the murder of Harry Carson in Mary Barton they are more a dramatization of the middle and upper-class fear of violence, than portrayals of observed or authentic experience.[24]

Similarly affecting their moral censure of Trade Unionism is Dickens' and Mrs Gaskell's belief in the value of the individual. Solidarity is seen as a positive quality insofar as it allows the maintenance of a personal identity. Both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell understand the malleability of the herd instinct. They are careful to point out the possibility that the workers may easily be enjoined

to act against their better interests. In Hard Times the point is registered in Dickens' emphasis on the divergence of attitude of the workers toward Stephen as men, and as union members subservient to the union practice of ostracism or "blackballing". The union's demand that "private feeling must yield to the common cause" (HT, II, 4) represents the highest form of tyranny. In this sense trade unionism comes to be as oppressive as the industrial society against which it reacts. Like society the unions negate the value of the individual personality in deference to the impersonal whole. Hence, both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell celebrate as virtues the qualities of personal sympathy and individual kindness. In their treatment of trade unionism both emphasize the need for a man-to-man relationship between masters and men; a relationship which maintains the principles of human decency and which seeks social improvement through the initiation of a personal and sympathetic communication.

It is in her exploration of its basic tenets that Mrs Gaskell displays most forcefully her own feelings of sympathy for and fear of trade unionism. Like Dickens she recognizes the sincerity of the workers themselves, and exhibits a definite sympathy for their cause. Her fear is evident, however, in her consideration of the union's demand for a complete solidarity. She sees the sacrifice of the individual to the greater institution as an ultimate form of oppression. In Mary Barton her judgment of the union's fierce maltreatment of "knobsticks" is unequivocal in its moral condemnation. The instances of vitriol-

throwing and physical battering constitute "the real wrong-doing of the Trade Unions." She reacts primarily against the tyrannizing of the individual and, in a succinct question, establishes the principal contradiction of the combinations: "Abhorring what they considered oppression in the masters, why did they oppress others?" (MB, 15).

In North and South Mrs Gaskell continues her attack on the union's aggressive assimilation of the individual. In her portrayal of John Boucher she creates a poignant image of the physical and psychological effects of the union demand for solidarity. His mental despair, coupled with his physical deprivation, emphasizes the inclusive consequences of the union need for absolute unity. His angry speech to Nicholas Higgins counterpoints the latter's desperate belief in the value of combination:

> "Yo' know well, that a worser tyrant than e'er th' masters were says, 'Clem to death, and see 'em a' clem to death, ere yo' dare go again th' Union.' Yo' know it well, Nicholas, fo a' yo're one on' em. Yo' may be kind hearts, each separate; but once banded together, yo've no more pity for a man than a wild hunger-maddened wolf." (NS, 19)

To Mrs Gaskell the union's principal wrong-doing rests not so much in its physical oppression, but in its psychological reduction of the individual to a manipulated entity. Although she may sympathize with the workers' desperation, and may recognize that the unions provide a very real hope for the working-class, she is adamant in her moral censure of their refusal to allow the existence of personal choice. In her portrayal of Boucher's

predicament she attacks the impersonality of the unions themselves, as well as the absence of Christian sympathy in the anonymous organization of the unions. In their physical and psychological oppression of the individual they are seen as a principal agent of "unfreedom", an agent paradoxical in its semblance to the masters against whom it reacts.

In her study of union-related activities Mrs Gaskell stresses the need for a Christian, humanistic relationship between masters and men. In both Mary Barton and North and South she condemns the use of violence as a means of social protest. The murder of Harry Carson is viewed as an inhuman act which destroys the perpetrator as well as the victim. As in Dickens, murder stands as the supreme act of self-alienation. In a similar manner, Boucher's instigation of a mob-riot serves only to isolate him further from all members of the social community. In both instances Mrs Gaskell exhibits a sympathy for the workers' despair, but is inflexible in her moral censure of their actions. As in Dickens violence is seen as an essentially futile activity, one whose principal effect is the fragmentation of the human community; as John Barton is made to meditate: "But now he knew that he had killed a man, and a brother -- now he knew that no good thing could come out of this evil, even to the sufferers whose cause he had so blindly espoused" (MB, 35). In contrast to this violent antagonism Mrs Gaskell proposes the exercise of sympathy and Christian understanding. As a moralist she is concerned primarily with the personal effects of human relations.

Like Dickens she displays no wish to eradicate existing social structures, but rather a wish to formulate a more Christian relationship between the existing classes.

In Mary Barton her moral intention is perilously close to undermining the literary quality of her work. Through the somewhat maudlin image of the childhood spat (MB, 35) she attempts to reinforce the final reconciliation of master and man. The portrayal is a dismal one, and is thankfully secondary to the powerful image of Carson and John Barton united in suffering. Carson's only words throughout the reconciliation embody for Mrs Gaskell her Christian proposal: "God be merciful to us sinners. -- Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us" (MB, 35). In a similar manner North and South concentrates on the need for a moral alleviation of the tensions of industrial relations. Speaking to Higgins Mr Hale longs for a Christianizing of the labour movement:

> "Oh!" said Mr Hale, sighing, "your Union in itself would be beautiful, glorious, -- it would be Christianity itself -- if it were but for an end which affected the good of all, instead of that merely of one class as opposed to another." (NS, 28)

As in Mary Barton the recommendation is purely moralistic. What is significant is the stress on the removal of class-antagonism. Like Dickens, there is no mention of any political or social change bur rather an explicit call for a moral alteration of class attitudes.

Through the eventual rapprochement between Higgins and John Thornton Mrs Gaskell creates a personal image of a con-

summate relationship between master and man. Although both maintain their social station, their intercourse reflects a mutual respect and forbearance, and is grounded in the Christian ideals of sympathy and human understanding. Thornton's initial construction of a dining-hall provides an apt image of personal concordance and social harmony. In her portrayal of this reconciliation, however, Mrs Gaskell is careful to avoid undue idealization. As Thornton himself points out, his "experiments" may very well fail: by no means will they "prevent the recurrence of strikes". Rather, the cultivation of a personal commerce between master and union may hopefully "render strikes not the bitter, venomous sources of hatred they have hitherto been" (NS, 51). In his final conversion from impersonal despot to personable master, Thornton, like Carson at the close of Mary Barton, embraces the Christian proposals of Mrs Gaskell; he bespeaks her moral intention:

> "I have arrived at the conviction that no mere institutions, however wise, and however much thought may have been required to organize and arrange them, can attach class to class as they should be attached, unless the working out of such institutions bring the individuals of the different classes into actual personal contact. Such intercourse is the very breath of life." (NS, 51)

Like Mrs Gaskell, Dickens is concerned to show the oppressive nature of trade unionism. Unlike the former, however, he displays little real knowledge of his subject, and tends to create a monstrous parody of the workers' union. As Humphrey House correctly observes, the damning treatment is due primarily

to Dickens' unqualified assimilation of two basic popular assumptions: first is the belief that the workers themselves will inevitably fall prey to demagoguery; and second, the knowledge that the union demand for solidarity becomes a chief force of oppression against non-union blacklegs.[25] In Hard Times both points are heavily emphasized, and in the dramatic contrast of Stephen Blackpool and the grotesque Slackbridge Dickens delivers an unmitigated moral censure of the trade unions. The technique is essentially a rhetorical one designed as a calculated means to manipulate the reader's sympathy. He creates a saint and then deliberately has a monster berate him.

To George Bernard Shaw, Slackbridge is "a mere figment of the middle-class imagination."[26] The point is a perceptive one, for in the character of the rabid orator Dickens embodies what he feels to be those attributes typical of the trade unions. Slackbridge's demagogic control of the workers, his gratuitous rhetoric ("Oh my friends and fellow-suffers, and fellow-workmen, and fellow-men!" HT, II, 4), and his unsympathetic treatment of Stephen Blackpool all stand as evocative images of misguided and destructive union activities. As in the caricature of Bounderby, Slackbridge emerges as a purely negative character. To Dickens, his call to ostracize Stephen constitutes the fundamental evil of trade unionism. The workers are seen as a manipulated body, one which, under the influence of union agitation, loses the Christian qualities of sympathy and brotherly love. As in the novels of Mrs Gaskell, the view that "private feeling

must yield to the common cause" (HT, II, 4) is here condemned as an essentially immoral one which reduces the workers to a faceless and unsympathetic institution.

Like Mrs Gaskell Dickens emphasizes the need to "Christianize" the problems of industrial relations. His attack on the unions is directed primarily against that destruction of personal sympathy. In his treatment of Bounderby he is explicit in his moral condemnation of the braggart's sheer lack of humanity. During his interview with Stephen Blackpool (HT, II, 5) the latter's deprecation of totalitarian oppression effectively underlines Bounderby's total indifference to the plight of the working-class. In "On Strike" Dickens stresses the futility of an antagonistic relationship between masters and men, and calls for a more humanistic association: "I believe...that into the relations between employers and employed...there must enter something of feeling and sentiment; something of mutual explanation, forbearance and consideration;...otherwise those relations are wrong and rotten at the core and will never bear sound fruit."[27]

In Hard Times personal sympathy and Christian understanding are seen as essential aspects of human relations in industry. Stephen's death-bed speech epitomizes Dickens' moral proposal:

> "But in our judgements, like as in our doins, we mun bear and forbear. In my pain an trouble, lookin up younder, -- wi'it [the starlight] shinin' on me -- I ha' seen more clear, and ha' made it my dyin prayer that aw th' world may on'y coom toogether more, an get a better unnerstan'in o' one another, than when I were in't my own weak seln." (HT, III, 6)

Like Mrs Gaskell's, Dickens' recommendation is a call to establish a Christian, humane relationship between the social classes. Though the image of the starlight is a sentimental contrivance, it accentuates the basically religious nature of Dickens' moral exhortation. As in both Mary Barton and North and South, a fundamental sympathy is seen as a redeeming alternative to the political "muddle" of industrial society. Like Mrs Gaskell, Dickens avows a moral, rather than civic, revolution within the bounds of the given society. The plea that "aw th' world may on'y coom toogether more" embodies the moral intention underlying the bulk of his social criticism. Like Mrs Gaskell, Dickens also stands as a major proponent of "the gentle humanities of earth" (MB, 3).

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Footnotes Chapter II

[1]Anon., "The Morning Chronicle", 9 December 1843, in Friederick Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England, translated and edited by W. O. Henderson and W. H. Chaloner, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958), p. 215.

[2]"During the past centuries, one important reason for alienation was that the human being lent his biological individuality to the technical apparatus: he was the bearer of tools; technical units could not be established without incorporating man as bearer of tools into them. The nature of this occupation was such that it was both psychologically and physiologically deforming in its effect." Gilbert Simondon, Du Mode d'existence des objects technique, (Paris: Aubier, 1958), in Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man, pp. 24-24n.

[3]Arnold Kettle, An Introduction to the English Novel, vol. I, (London: Arrow Books, 1962), p. 135.

[4]Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England, p. 31.

[5]F. R. Leavis, "Hard Times: The World of Bentham", in The Great Tradition, (London: 1948); rev. and rpt. in F. R. Leavis and Q. D. Leavis, Dickens: The Novelist, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), pp. 272-273.

[6]Luke 16:26.

[7]Mrs Gaskell's recurrent use of biblical allusion throughout Mary Barton reveals a discriminating choice of scriptural references. Her use of the Bible is an explicit attempt to intensify her portrayals of the conditions of the working class, while offering an implicit suggestion as to the means by which they may be corrected. Her always carefully chosen sources almost inevitably contain this dualistic intention: a combination of criticism and recommendation. Continuing the implication found in the parable of Dives and Lazarus the use of biblical phraseology in her treatment of the effects of bad times likewise emphasizes the oppression suffered by the working class:

> The people had thought the poverty of the preceding years hard to bear, and had found its yoke heavy; but this year added sorely to its weight. Former times had chastised them with whips, but this

chastised them with scorpions. (MB, 10)

The allusion is to III Kings 12:11; the speaker is Roboam, son of Solomon, who, on his succession to the throne, rejects the pleas of both the people and wise counsellors for gentleness in favour of a more authoritarian rule:

> And now my father put a heavy yoke upon you; but I will add to your yoke: my father beat you with whips, but I will beat you with scorpions.

Initially Mrs Gaskell's choice of reference works as a powerful visual image of the insidious nature of the working-class' sufferings. However, as in her use of the Dives-Lazarus parable, the allusion functions as a direct affront to both the ruling classes and the very nature of society itself. Through her incorporation of this particular reference Mrs Gaskell questions the "wisdom" of those classes which would reject the counsel of benevolence and sympathy in place of authoritarian oppression. The fact that Roboam's unintelligent handling of his people eventually results in their violent revolt furthermore acts as a type of indirect warning to the Victorian upper-classes. Despite its hint at anarchic upheaval, however, Mrs Gaskell is hardly the sort of revolutionary who condones violent measures. Rather, her inclusion of this reference functions less as a threat than as an emotional plea for sympathy and a more benevolent handling of class-structures. Keeping in mind the overall concerns of Mary Barton it is significant, I think, that she refers to the passage of Roboam's rejection of what anticipates typical Victorian liberalism:

> If thou wilt yield to this people today, and condescend to them, and grant their petition, and wilt speak gentle words to them, they will be thy servants always. (III Kings 12:7)

[8]Joseph Gold, Charles Dickens: Radical Moralist, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1972), p. 199.

[9]Rex Warner, "On Reading Dickens", The Cult of Power, (New York: 1947), rpt. in George H. Ford and Lauriat Lane, Jr., eds., The Dickens Critics (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1961), p. 185.

[10]Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, Vol. I, p. 327.

[11]Malcolm Andrews, "Introduction", in The Old Curiosity Shop, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), p. 19.

[12]J. Hillis Miller, Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels, p. 91.

[13]Leavis, "Hard Times: The World of Bentham", p. 253.

[14]On 20 January 1854, three months prior to the appearance of Hard Times, Dickens sent to Forster a list of fourteen titles which he was considering for the new novel. The frequency with which Gradgrind appears in these proposals suggests the limits within which the work was to operate. Similarly the prominence given to arithmetical terminology shows Dickens' pre-occupation with the utilitarian reduction of the human being. The enclosed titles were: According to Cocker, Prove It, Stubborn Things, Mr. Gradgrind's Facts, The Grindstone, Hard Times, Two and Two are Four, Something Tangible, Our Hard-headed Friend, Rust and Dust, Simple Arithmetic, A Matter of Calculation, A Mere Question of Figures, and The Gradgrind Philosophy. [John Forster, The Life of Charles Dickens, (1872; rpt. London and Toronto: Dent; New York: E. P. Dutton, 1927), II, 119-20.]

In addition to these titles, John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson report that the manuscript contains five others: Fact, Hard-headed Gradgrind, Hard Heads and Soft Hearts, Heads and Tales, and Black and White. [John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, Dickens at Work, (1957; rpt. London: Methuen and Co., 1968), p. 202.] As the authors point out, these titles anticipate some of the broader thematic concerns of the novel which was to appear, appropriately enough, in Household Words, whose policy Dickens had outlined in the paper's inaugural address (30 March 1850):

> ...No mere utilitarian spirit, no iron binding of mind to grim realities, will give a harsh tone to our Household Words. In the bosoms of the young and old, of the well-to-do and of the poor, we would tenderly cherish that light Fancy which is inherent in the human breast; which, according to its nurture, burns with an inspiring flame, or sinks into a sullen glare, but which (or woe betide that day!) can never be extinguished.

[15]Charles Dickens, from a letter to Charles Knight, 30 January 1855, in Stephen Wall, ed., Charles Dickens: A Critical Anthology, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 96.

[16]Engels, The Condition of the Working Class, p. 240.

[17]Cf. Dr. J. P. Kay, The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes employed in the Cotton Manufacture in Manchester, (2nd enlarged edition, 1832), p. 32, in Engels'

The Condition of the Working Class in England, p. 77: "A whole ...family is often accomodated on a single bed, and sometimes a heap of filthy straw and a covering of old sacking hide them in one undistinguishable heap, debased alike by penury, want of economy and dissolute habits. Frequently the inspectors found ...more than one family lived in a damp cellar, containing only one room, in whose pestilential atmosphere from twelve to sixteen persons were crowded. To these fertile sources of disease were sometimes added the keeping of pigs and other animals in the house, with other nuisances of the most revolting character."

[18]It is significant that although Dickens and Mrs Gaskell employ the death-image as a metaphor for the destructive effects of working-class life, both recognize that death itself becomes one of the few means of escape for the working-man. The case of Boucher is self-evident. In Mary Barton the death of George Wilson is viewed as "bad news"; and yet John Barton comments, "Best for him to die" (MB, 9). Similarly the death of Ben Davenport is seen as a liberation from material woe: "The face grew beautiful, as the soul neared God. A peace beyond understanding came over it...No more grief or sorrow for him" (MB, 6).

This view of death as a type of release from oppressive, personal circumstances plays a prominent part in Dickens' treatment of the poorer classes. In The Old Curiosity Shop Master Humphrey mentions the fact in his opening preamble; from a bridge "some...pause with heav[y] loads, remembering to have heard or read in some old time that drowning was not a bad death, but of all means of suicide the easiest and best" (OCS, 1). Similarly Stephen Blackpool sees his own death (and that of Rachael's sister) as a glorious removal from "working people's miserable homes" (HT, III, 6). Indeed in both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell the afterlife stands as the last hope of the working-class -- a type of pie-in-the-sky -- where one achieves "a far, far better rest...than one has ever known" (TTC, III, 15).

[19]Aldous Huxley, "The Vulgarity of Little Nell", in George H. Ford and Lauriat Lane, Jr., eds., The Dickens Critics, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1961), p. 154.

[20]Stephen Marcus, From Pickwick to Dombey, p. 140.

[21]For a fuller treatment of Stephen's likeness to the biblical Stephen, see Joseph Gold, Charles Dickens: Radical Moralist, pp. 201-207.

[22]Charles Dickens, "To Working Men", Household Words, 7 October 1854, in Miscellaneous Papers from "The Morning Chronicle",

"The Daily News", "The Examiner", "Household Words", "All The Year Round", etc., (London: Chapman and Hall, 1914), p. 452-53.

[23]Charles Dickens, "On Strike", Household Words, 11 February 1854, in Miscellaneous Papers, p. 433.

[24]A sound treatment of the murder episode in Mary Barton may be found in Raymond Williams, Culture and Society, p. 102.

[25]Humphrey House, The Dickens World, p. 209.

[26]George Bernard Shaw, "Introduction" to Hard Times, (London, 1912), in George H. Ford and Lauriat Lane, Jr., eds., The Dickens Critics, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1961), p. 132.

[27]Charles Dickens, "On Strike", in Miscellaneous Papers, p. 424.

III The Gentle Humanities of Earth

I ask Thee for a thoughtful love
Through constant watching wise,
To meet the glad with joyful smiles,
And to wipe the weeping eyes;
And a heart at leisure from itself
To soothe and sympathise.

-- Anon., (NS, 5)

It is in their critical recommendations that both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell emerge most forcefully as "moral" critics of industrial society. Their resolutions call for a moral reformation of personal behaviour and individual values within the social system. In opposition to the hard philosophy of utilitarian ideology they propose an applied form of Christian humanitarianism. Divorced from its historical and dogmatic trappings, ethical Christianity becomes a basic guide for an improvement in the quality of human life. Personal virtue, benevolence, love, and above all, an active sympathy for the underdog are the tenets of such ethics. Like Comte's Religion of Humanity this form of Christian humanitarianism is designed to act as a modus vivendi in a dehumanized, and secular, society. In a letter to Reverend R. H. Davies, Dickens epitomizes this non-devotional approach to Christianity:

> There cannot be many men, I believe, who have a more humble veneration for the New Testament, or a more profound conviction of its all-sufficiency, than I have...[however] I discountenance all obtrusive professions of and tradings in religion

> as one of the main causes why real Christianity has been retarded in this world; and because my observation of life induces me to hold in unspeakable dread and horror, those unseemingly squabbles about the letter which drive the spirit out of hundreds of thousands.[1]

To both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell the exercise of active sympathy is an essential aspect of "real Christianity" which stands as the foremost prerequisite for personal goodness and social redemption. In Mary Barton a spontaneous "heart's - piety" toward a suffering person is viewed as the "true religion, pure and undefiled" (MB, 36). A similar concept is evident in Dickens' treatment of the "moral conversion". Authorial approval attends those characters who progress from self-indulgence to an active participation in "Faith, Hope, and Charity" (HT, III, 9). As Orwell comments of Dickens: "When he speaks of human progress it is usually in terms of moral progress -- men growing better."[2]

In regard to social improvement both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell emphasize the role of active sympathy as a principal agent of betterment. The proposal is a simple one which ignores the many shortcomings of the Victorian social structure. Although a sympathetic relationship between masters and men may alleviate the tensions of industrial relations, it does nothing to ameliorate the monotonous forms of labour or the disparate allotment of wealth, power, and quality of life. As Christian moralists, however, both authors are concerned primarily with the problems of establishing good relations within the bounds of a given society. Although their recommendations do little

to improve some of the basic problems of industrial society, their doctrine of sympathy stands as an effective alternative to the exploitation and personal abuse characteristic of Victorian capitalism. It is in their consideration of the social institutions, the class-structure, and the role of the individual that both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell stress the need for a more humane relationship between men, one which is based on Christian love, personal kindness and active sympathy. For it is through such virtues that the individual might conceivably preserve his humanity in spite of the inhuman nature of his surrounding society.

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In the writings of Dickens and Mrs Gaskell there are three basic institutions which offer the possibility of some type of amelioration. These are the law, religion, and education. As in their treatment of trade unionism, both authors attack the impersonality and anonymity of the institutional body. To both the essential failing of these institutions is their reduction of the individual to a mathematical, unfeeling, and dispensable entity. Through its lack of human sympathy and personal contact the institution is merely another force which contains, rather than liberates, the victimized members of society.

In The Old Curiosity Shop the legal process is viewed by Dickens with a jaundiced eye. Human law is seen as an arbitrary vehicle of oppression, twisted out of shape to become a complex tool for the privileged few. In Hard Times, Stephen

Blackpool's inability to obtain a divorce underlines the double standard inherent in the legal system. In Dick Swiveller's poetic allusion to The Beggar's Opera Dickens provides an ironic questioning of equality before the law: "Since laws were made for every degree, to curb vice in others as well as in me -- and so forth you know" (OCS, 65). Reference made to "that dangerous strait the Law" (OCS, 35) similarly suggests its inefficacy as a means of social improvement. Although Dickens does recognize the positive potential of the legal process, he is careful to stress the ease with which it may be made subject to self-interest and personal bias. In his introduction of Sally Brass he attacks the easy corruptibility of both lawyers and the law:

> In mind, she was of a strong and vigorous turn, having from her earliest youth devoted herself with uncommon ardour to the study of the law; not wasting her speculation upon its eagle flights, which are rare, but tracing it attentively through all the slippery and eel-like crawlings in which it commonly pursues its way. (OCS, 33)

Like Mrs Gaskell, Dickens has little sympathy for lawyers themselves. Among the "roll of attorneys" he complains that "many names remain among its better records, unmolested" (OCS, 73). In his portrayal of the Brasses' residence Dickens' emphasis on the profusion of "yellow and ragged" papers (OCS, 33) combined with the dreary atmosphere of the rooms effectively conveys an appropriate image of both physical decay and moral deterioration. In a similar manner the confusion of "crazy" and "treacherous" (OCS, 33) furniture suggests the rather precarious nature of the Brasses' legal practice. Through his caricature of Sally and

Sampson Brass Dickens castigates the simpering opportunism and aggressive cupidity which he sees at the basis of social law.

A prime target in Dickens' portrayals of lawyers is their indifference and total detachment from actual justice. Like Jaggers in Great Expectations, the prosecuting attorney in Kit Nubbles' trial is totally unscrupulous about the innocence or guilt of his clients:

> The gentleman who was against him had to speak first, and being in dreadfully good spirits (for he had, in the last trial, very nearly procured the acquittal of a young gentleman who had had the misfortune to murder his father) he spoke up you may be sure. (OCS, 63)

A similar theme is prominent in Mrs Gaskell's treatment of lawyers. In Mary Barton she attacks the moral apathy of Jem Wilson's barrister who is quite indifferent to his client's situation. He sees openings in the case as "opportunities for the display of forensic eloquence which were presented by the facts" (MB, 32). It is precisely this lack of human sympathy which both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell find unacceptable. As an institution the law and its principal agents prove drastically ineffectual as means of personal or social improvement. Like Parliament, the law stands as an insentient abstraction, indifferent to the wretchedness of those whom it is meant to serve.

In their portrayals of Parliament both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell emphasize its indifference to the conditions and problems of the People. Dickens, in particular, is merciless in his attack on parliamentary bureaucracy. His experience in Parliament as

a reporter during the thirties, seems to have created in him little faith in governmental procedures. In Hard Times Gradgrind is seen as "usually sifting and sifting at his parliamentary cinder-heap in London (without being observed to turn up many precious articles among the rubbish)" (HT, II, 9). To both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell governmental reforms did little to better the conditions of the working-class. To both, such legislation as the Factory Acts (1833, 1844) or The Ten Hours Act (1847) were insignificant attempts at reconcilation. Similarly, the casual reference in North and South (7, 10) to Parliament's Act to control the polluting smoke of industrial furnaces (1853)[3] stresses the total lack of any real effective reforms. Parliament, on the whole, did little to improve the conditions of the working-class. As David Craig points out, most of the seeming reforms were actually ineffectual:

> The more one looks into the record of reports and inquiries the more dead-letters come to light: the handloom weavers and frame-builders were inquired into -- nothing was done;... under an Act of 1842 women and children were not to work underground in coal pits -- in 1844 it was already a dead-letter since only one inspector had been appointed to enforce it over the whole country. The enlightened efforts of men like Peel and Shaftesbury regularly came to little because the men who had the job of carrying out legislation were often damned if they'd lift a finger unless they were forced to.[4]

In their attempts to castigate the inefficacy of Parliament both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell concentrate on its failings, rather than on any incidental or reluctant reforms.

In Hard Times the caricature of parliamentarians is designed to emphasize both their sterility and their moral deadness, as well as that of the institution itself. As a Member of Parliament Gradgrind is seen as preoccupied with "the noisy and rather dirty machinery" of government. He is

> one of the respected members for ounce weights and measures, one of the representatives of the multiplication table, one of the deaf honourable gentlemen, dumb honourable gentlemen, blind honourable gentlemen, lame honourable gentlemen, dead honourable gentlemen, to every other consideration. (HT, I, 14)

The figure of Gradgrind stands as a grotesque embodiment of the utilitarian mentality. The image of "weights and measures" underlines the reductive nature of his philosophy which would reduce man to an unimaginative and unfeeling bundle of facts. His affinity for abstract statistical knowledge reflects his severance from actual experience and vital life. This detachment is evident in Dickens' image of the "window-less" Observatory:

> As if an astronomical observatory should be made without any windows, and the astronomer within should arrange the starry universe solely by pen, ink and paper, so Mr Gradgrind, in his Observatory (and there are many like it), had no need to cast an eye upon the teeming myriads of human beings around him, but could settle all their destinies on a slate, and wipe out all their tears with one dirty little bit of sponge. (HT, I, 15)

Seen as representative of parliamentary theory, Gradgrind's ignorance of human problems, and human nature for that matter, can be viewed as a major indictment of Parliament as an inhuman, and totally ineffective institution. The mention of governmental "blue-books" (HT, I, 15) is made to draw attention

to Parliament's preoccupation with statistical data and factual detail. Dickens attacks the amassing of irrelevant facts which do nothing to rectify the bad conditions on which they are based. As an agent of human redemption, Parliament is seen as no more than "the national cinder-heap" (HT, II, 11), an ineffectual heap of pointless "odds and ends" (HT, II, 11).

Although Gradgrind is evidently one of the novel's "negative" characters, he elicits pity rather than repulsion. Throughout his satire Dickens is careful to stress that Gradgrind is not intrinsically evil, but rather is misguided. In his eventual conversion one may detect a glimmer of optimism: if all men were subservient to Faith, Hope and Charity the world might conceivably be a better place. It is in his characterization of James Harthouse, however, that Dickens delivers his most devastating attack on Parliament. Here Dickens constructs his archetype of the parliamentary mentality:

> Mr James Harthouse, 'going in' for his adopted party, soon began to score. With the aid of a little more coaching for the political sages, a little more genteel listlessness for the general society, and a tolerable management of the assumed honesty in dishonesty, most effective and most patronized of the polite deadly sins, he speedily came to be considered of much promise. (HT, II, 7)

Unlike Gradgrind, Harthouse is characterized by a total want of earnestness. Parliamentary duties are merely an avocation. His stylish indifference is seen as typical of "the national dustmen [who] have only to do with one another, and [who] owe no duty to an abstraction called a People" (HT, III, 9). To

Dickens it is precisely the parliamentarians' lack of a sense of duty which damns the institution of Parliament. Its insularity and professional apathy negate any possibility of social improvement. As in his treatment of the law, Dickens is concerned with the loss of personal contact and the absence of any active sympathy. His attack on Parliament is aimed specifically at the personal values and individual states of mind which make up the social institution. Like Mrs Gaskell he calls for a man-to-man benevolence based on human sympathy and Christian love. As he comments in "On Strike": "political economy is a mere skeleton unless it has a little human covering and filling out, a little human bloom upon it, and a little human warmth in it."[5]

Like Dickens, Mrs Gaskell is concerned to show the need for a more humane form of government. Unlike Dickens, however, she displays a more optimistic attitude toward Parliament. In Mary Barton it is seen as the potential saviour of the working-class. Convinced that Parliament will rectify their situation, the Chartists are confident of success; as John Barton comments:

> "When they hear o' all this plague, pestilence and famine, they'll surely do somewhat wiser for us than we can guess at now...I'll do my best, and yo see now, if better times don't come after Parliament knows all." (MB, 8).

Admittedly this tone of hopeful assurance alters with Parliament's refusal to listen. It is in her portrayal of Barton's recourse to violence that Mrs Gaskell presents a graphic image of what may happen if the working-class is met with continued indifferece.

In contrast to Dickens' outright disillusionment, she maintains a hopeful belief in the possibility of governmental reform. The fact that she presents the public with an image of the violent alternatives suggests her belief that Parliament may still act to better social conditions. Unlike Dickens' total despair her treatment reflects a glimmeringly hopeful, though somewhat desperate and shaky faith in the parliamentary process.

Following the Chartists' failure John Barton remarks to his daughter: "Mary, we mun speak to our God to hear us, for man will not hearken; no, not now, when we weep tears o' blood" (MB, 9). The comment is a significant one, for it pinpoints one of the few means of liberation left available to the working-class. In both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell religious faith is seen as the principal refuge for the oppressed classes. Essentially, it provides an imaginative escape from distressing circumstances. As Stephen Blackpool comments to Rachael: "I will try t' look t' th' time...when thou and me at last shall walk together far awa', beyond the deep gulf, in th' country where thy little sister is" (HT, I, 13). A similar theme is prevalent in Mrs Gaskell; in North and South Bessy Higgins finds comfort in Revelation, rather than in any of the less prophetic books of the Bible. To Margaret's suggestion to "read the clearer parts of the Bible" she answers:

> "I dare say it would be wiser; but where would I hear such grand words of promise -- hear tell o' anything so far different fro' this dreary world, and this town above a', as in Revelations? ....No, I cannot give up Revelations. It gives

> me more comfort than any other book i' the Bible." (NS, 17)

Seen as a personal experience religion stands as a positive redeeming force. In addition to providing imaginative pacification, its biblical precepts are viewed as activating good works and personal happiness. In Hard Times both Stephen and Rachael derive comfort and encouragement from scriptural teachings. To Stephen's despair over his profligate wife Rachael quotes from the gospel of John (8:7): "'Let him who is without sin among you, cast the first stone at her!' There have been plenty to do that. Thou art not the man to cast the last stone, Stephen, when she is brought so low" (HT, I, 13). In both novels Mrs Gaskell stresses the importance of personal religious experience which is unhampered by dogma or orthodoxy. Similarly, Dickens emphasizes the personal basis of true religion. His "practical humanistic Christianity"[6] is divorced from any particular sect or faction, and is strongly anti-institutional in nature. It is in his treatment of institutionalized religion that he delivers his most stringent attack on the institutional oppression of the individual.[7]

One of Dickens' chief targets is the canting enthusiasm which would deprive man of his innocent pleasures. Evangelical austerity is seen as so much humbug which needlessly creates an empty and unimaginative individual. In American Notes his critique of Pennsylvania's "shakers" is characteristic in its outright condemnation of such spartan religiosity: "I so abhor,

and from my soul detest that bad spirit...which would strip life of its healthful graces, rob youth of its innocent pleasures, pluck from maturity and age their pleasant ornaments, and make existence but a narrow path towards the grave" (AN, 15). To Dickens the suppression of the imagination is one of the foremost defects of institutional religion.

In The Old Curiosity Shop his treatment of Little Bethel concentrates on the "unnaturalness" of the evangelical chapels. Kit's peevish attitude toward the Bethelite precepts stands as an effective satire on their purposeless severity:

> "Do I see anything in the way I'm made, which calls upon me to be a snivelling, solemn whispering chap, sneaking about as if I couldn't help it, and expressing myself in a most unpleasant snuffle? On the contrairy, don't I see every reason why I shouldn't? Just hear this! Ha, ha, ha! An't that as nat'ral as walking, and as good for the health? Ha, ha, ha! An't that as nat'ral as a sheep's bleating, or a pig's grunting, or a horse's neighing, or a bird's singing? Ha, ha, ha! Isn't it, mother?" (OCS, 22)

As in his use of the pastoral, Dickens' natural imagery is designed to underline the "anti-life" aspects of evangelism. His description of the chapel itself incorporates a calculated use of diminutives which stress the paltry character of both the preacher and his teachings. Little Bethel is seen "with a small number of pews, and a small pulpit, in which a small gentleman (by trade a Shoemaker, and by calling a Divine) was delivering in a by no means small voice, a by no means small sermon" (OCS, 41). The drowsiness induced by the homilist

likewise emphasizes the lack of vitality and spontaneity which, to Dickens, are essential to a fulfilling life.

Although hardly as contentious as Dickens, Mrs Gaskell shares a common belief in the personal nature of religious experience. In North and South she exhibits a definite stand against strict denominationalism, and is emphatic in her sympathy for Mr Hale and Frederick -- both of whom reject their inherited religion for a more personally suitable form of belief. Like Dickens, however, her religion is one of active works rather than dogmatic faith. As in the former, "true religion" constitutes a voluntary personal beneficence, a Christian charity which transcends the labels of any particular faction. Like Dickens she proposes a personal experience of love, kindness, and Christian sympathy in contrast to religious institutionalism. It is such individual activity which makes up true blessedness. As she comments of George Wilson in Mary Barton: "though 'silver and gold he had none,' he gave heart-service, and love-works of far more value" (MB, 6).

In his treatment of Dickens, Orwell remarks: "If you hate violence and don't believe in politics, the only remedy remaining is education. Perhaps society is past praying for, but there is always hope for the individual human being, if you can catch him young enough."[8] In Mrs Gaskell there is little mention of formal education, only a passing reference in North and South to Hale's private practice. With Dickens, however education is a major thematic concern. In his analysis of the

educational process he stresses the need for a cultivation of the imaginative, as well as of the rational faculties. Like Wordsworth he emphasizes the value of non-rational, non-discursive, and natural experience. Through such a "proper" education of the whole individual, society, in time might conceivably be improved. Hence, in terms of its very potential education is seen as one of the most powerful of social institutions.

As a socially remedial force, however, contemporary education is seen as drastically inadequate. In The Old Curiosity Shop the portrayal of Mrs Wackles' "Ladies Seminary" stands as a strong censure of existing theories of education. Its manner of instruction is as follows:

> English grammar, composition, geography, and the use of the dumb-bells, by Miss Melissa Wackles; writing, arithmetic, dancing, music, and general fascination, by Miss Sophy Wackles; the art of needle-work, marking, and samplery, by Miss Jane Wackles; corporal punishment, fasting, and other tortures and terrors, by Mrs Wackles. (OCS, 8)

The Wackles' episode is explicitly designed as a farcical background in the development of Dick Swiveller. Nevertheless, the mention of irrelevant subject matter, as well as the use of corporal punishment, points out some of the real defects of such an educational system. It is against this mode of education that Dickens presents the character of Mr Marton, the kind schoolmaster. Characterized by sympathy and genuine interest in his charges, he is Dickens' embodiment of the perfect teacher. Unlike M'Choakumchild of Hard Times he reveals a sense of humane

benevolence. In contrast to the former's aggressive suppression of feelings and emotions, Marton acknowledges the worth of natural spontaneity and youthful exuberance. Although he has asked his pupils to "not be noisy", their "joyous whoop" is met with a kind and understanding sympathy: "'It's natural, thank Heaven!' said the poor schoolmaster, looking after them. 'I am very glad they didn't mind me!'"(OCS, 25)

In Hard Times Dickens' treatment of education concentrates on the vital worth of "Fancy". As Philip Collins has shown, "'Fancy'...can mean to Dickens anything from colourful jollity and fun, to that imaginative sustenance which should nourish in both children and adults a wisdom of the heart."[9] To Dickens it is an imaginative, rather than strictly rational, interpretation of life which constitutes a genuine humanity. In their suppression of the imagination Gradgrind's educational theories are viewed as essentially anti-life. Such dictates as "Never wonder" (HT, I, 8) limit the mind to a purely mechanical approach to life. The reduction of human nature to a measureable parcel of "simple arithmetic" (HT, I, 2) produces a stunted and unfeeling individual incapable of vital experience. In his portrayal of the Gradgrind children Dickens emphasizes the destructive effects of their father's system:

> There was an air of jaded sullenness in them both, and particularly in the girl: yet, struggling through the dissatisfaction of her face, there was a light with nothing to rest upon, a fire with nothing to burn, a starved imagination keeping life in itself somehow, which brightened its expression. Not with

> the brightness natural to cheerful youth
> but with uncertain, eager, doubtful flashes,
> which had something painful in them, anal-
> ogous to the change on a blind face groping
> its way. (HT, I, 3)

The eventual failures of both Tom Jr and Louisa reinforce the ineptitude of the Gradgrindian system. Like Bitzer's motto of self-interest (HT, III, 8), Tom's selfish exploitation of his sister reflects the inhumanity bred by an unimaginative, rationalistic, and unsympathetic education. As Mrs Gradgrind comments to her daughter, "there is something -- not an Ology at all -- that your father has missed, or forgotten, Louisa" (HT, II, 9).

To Dickens education is ideally the principal means of social improvement. Through a careful guidance of the individual's natural qualities, society, in time, might conceivably become happier and more harmonious. As a social institution however, education ignores the basic needs of the individual, and produces only self-oriented and unfeeling entities. As usual Dickens proposes no real alternatives to existing structures, but rather he suggests the need for an alteration of individual behaviour. In his critique of institutional education he can propose only a more humane personal intercourse, one which embodies "those imaginative graces and delights, without which the heart of infancy will wither up, and [the] sturdiest physical manhood will be morally stark death" (HT, III, 9).

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In their critique of society both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell concentrate on the individual, personal effects of industrialization. To both the dissolution of the old, agricultural England signalled the end of a society held together by human bonds. Urbanization, mechanized labour, the formation of laissez-faire capitalism all combined to produce a society run on self-interest and monetary greed. Within its confines the individual was isolated, dehumanized, and depersonalized. In their critical recommendations both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell attempt to provide a means by which society and its individual members may be humanly, and morally, redeemed. To both it is through a practical Christian humanitarianism that the individual might regain his fallen "innocence", and re-create the old world sense of harmony, integration and social happiness. It is by means of a "thoughtful heart", "help and sympathy" that men may "stand as brothers, side by side, united" (MB, 15).

In The Moral Art of Dickens Barbara Hardy makes the following comment:

> What distinguishes Dickens' moral questionings... is his combination of social despair and personal faith, his capacity to distrust both society and social reform while maintaining and perhaps deepening a faith in the power of human love.[10]

Throughout his novels Dickens is at pains to emphasize the restorative powers of such human virtues as love, sympathy, and personal benevolence. Though his good characters rarely alter the social structures which hem them in, their personal virtues act as an insulating buffer which allows individual happiness

within an oppressive society. As far as governmental reform is concerned, society is past praying for; government being such a ludicrous affair in Dickens' view. Rather, it is through personal and moral goodness that human society might be improved. In Hard Times Sleary's final dictum embodies Dickens' personal belief: "there ith a love in the world, not all thelf-interetht after all" (HT, III, 8). As Humphrey House comments of Dickens' benevolent characters: "If everybody were like this, Dickens seemed to say, the complex evils of the world would automatically be cured, the nostrums unnecessary."[11]

In Mrs Gaskell, personal virtue is seen as the basis of human redemption. Like Dickens' her recommendation is purely moralistic, one which calls for a change of spirit rather than a change of structure. In Mary Barton "the gentle humanities" stand as one of the last hopes of the working class. As Kathleen Tillotson points out, Job Legh's story of his London experience with the young Margaret Jennings (MB, 9) provides an effective contrast to Barton's embittered hatred of the upper-classes. Like Barton's, Job's experience "shares the common ground of poverty...but its un-embittered tone supplies an unconscious corrective, a suggestion of values beyond the frustration of political action. And because it is something past and safely lived through, it stands for hope".[12] Similarly, in North and South, Thornton's conversion to a personal, sympathetic relationship with his men underlines the importance of humane virtues. Although the social structures remain unchanged, his turning to moral goodness initiates an alleviation of individual suffering.

In his treatment of Dickens, Monroe Engel remarks:

> If a radical is one who goes to the root of things, then Dickens is a radical, and that preoccupation with the condition of man's heart that is sometimes held to be an indication of his political unreality is in fact the proof of his radicalism.[13]

The passage is equally applicable to Mrs Gaskell. In their criticism of industrial society both authors stress the need for a fundamental alteration of the personal values, attitudes, and states of mind which predominate in their society. To both it is a practical Christian humanitarianism which stands as the only means of human redemption. Admittedly criticism has its points against both authors. In contrast to theorists such as Marx or Engels they may appear naive, or to borrow a phrase of James Harthouse, they seem the "sorts of humbugs [who] profess morality" (HT, II, 10). But if their political knowledge proves to be inferior, their preoccupation with the "conditions of man's heart" reflects a profound awareness of the efficacy of personal virtue. To both authors the practice of Christian charity is sufficient to activate a personal and social improvement in the quality of life in industrial society. As Orwell comments of Dickens, he is "not a humbug, except in minor matters... Dickens is not in the accepted sense a revolutionary writer. But it is not at all certain that a merely moral criticism of society may not be just as 'revolutionary' -- and revolution, after all, means turning things upside down -- as the politico-economic criticism which is fashionable at this moment."[14] It is in their

call for a more Christian relationship between men that both Dickens and Mrs Gaskell deliver a truly "revolutionary" critique of a society based on brutal indifference and exploitation. Both express in their novels the concerns found in "The Divine Image" by William Blake:

> For Mercy has a human heart,
> Pity a human face,
> And Love, the human form divine,
> And Peace, the human dress.
>
> And all must love the human form,
> In heathen, turk, or jew;
> Where Mercy, Love & Pity dwell
> There God is dwelling too.

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Footnotes Chapter III

[1]Charles Dickens, "Letter to Rev. R. H. Davies", 24 December 1856, in Forster, The Life of Charles Dickens, vol. 2, p. 380.

[2]Orwell, "Charles Dickens", p. 121.

[3]See Dorothy Collin, ed., North and South, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1970), p. 532n: "An act to abate the nuisances arising from furnaces...in the metropolis...16 and 17 Victoria, C. 128 was passed on 20 August 1853 to take effect on 1 August 1854."

[4]David Craig, ed., Hard Times, (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 327-28n.

[5]Charles Dickens, "On Strike", in Miscellaneous Papers, p. 435.

[6]House, The Dickens World, p. 131.

[7]Dickens' aversion to any form of Established Religion is evident in his personal correspondence. His dislike of theological dogma is evident in a letter to Macvey Napier (16 September 1843), the editor of the Edinburgh Review. Discussing the possibility of his writing an article on the Ragged Schools, Dickens mentions that he would have "to come out strongly against any system of education based exclusively on the principles of the Established Church". He believes that "mysteries and squabbles for forms must give way...as to include all creeds." (in Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens, p. 463) Similarly, in a letter to his son Edward (? September 1868) Dickens stresses the "truth and beauty of the Christian Religion, as it came from Christ himself." Dogma and pious ritual are seen as little more than "mere formalities" (in Forster, Life, pp. 379-80). In the novels, however, Dickens offers little criticism of the Established Church. Rather, his religious criticism concentrates on the smaller evangelist sects which are seen as representatives of hypocrisy, false piety, and unnecessary austerity. In such characters as the Bethelite preacher in The Old Curiosity Shop and Mrs Cruncher in A Tale of Two Cities Dickens displays a conscious choice of a "safe target" by which he may deliver a criticism of "organized" religion. The fact that such chapels were readily available to the urban poor also contributes to Dickens' savage handling of the evangelical sects.

[8]Orwell, "Charles Dickens", p. 93.

[9]Philip Collins, Dickens and Education, p. 191.

[10]Hardy, The Moral Art of Dickens, p. 3.

[11]House, The Dickens World, p. 56.

[12]Kathleen Tillotson, Novels of the Eighteen-Forties, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 217.

[13]Monroe Engel, The Maturity of Dickens, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1959), p. 70.

[14]Orwell, "Charles Dickens", p. 97.

Appendix

In his attempt to fulfil the demands of weekly publication for The Old Curiosity Shop Dickens was obliged to delete a substantial amount of manuscript material. In a letter to Forster on 4 October 1840 he remarked: "In number thirty there will be some cutting needed, I think. I have, however, something in my eye near the beginning which I can easily take out."[1] The thirtieth number contained Chapters 43 and 44 of the novel, as we now have it.[2] The particular deletion which is here provided contains some basic themes which are developed throughout the novel, and which are essential aspects of the social criticism in The Old Curiosity Shop.

The contrast of town and country underlines Dickens' use of the pastoral image in the novel. His emphasis on the physical filth of the working-class ghetto recalls his portrayal of the physical filth of the London slums in Oliver Twist, and accentuates his concern to show the physical deprivation suffered by the poorer classes. Similar to his editorial writings in Household Words and All the Year Round, the passage reflects Dickens' intention to show the ease with which physical degradation may lead to moral deterioration. The deprecatory mention of Parliament displays his life-long distrust of that institution as a means of social improvement. The image of the "portly gentleman" points toward the damning characterization of Miss Monflathers (OCS, 31),

a disarming caricature of upper-class indifference.

This passage was intended to continue from paragraph five of Chapter 44, directly following, "...which increased their hopelessness and suffering", and ending just before, "The child had not only to endure...".[3] The passage is taken from Angus Easson's "Notes" to The Penguin English Library Edition of The Old Curiosity Shop, (Harmondsworth, 1972), p. 705.

They had been used to stop at cottage doors, and beg a drink of water; and though these cottages were poor and small, they were often shaded by green trees, always in the fresh air, open to the sun and wind, and gay with the song of birds. How different the sties, which the working townsmen, women, children, babies -- they all worked here -- huddled together, and had their sickly homes! In courts so numerous as to be marked in every street by numbers of their own, for names for them could not be found -- in narrow, unpaved ways, exhaling foetid odours, steeped in filth and dirt, reeking with things offensive to sight, smell, hearing, thought; shutting out the light and air; breeding contagious diseases, big with fever, loathesome humours, madness, and a long ghastly train of ills -- in places where, let men disguise it as they please! no human beings can be clean, or good, or sober, or contented -- where no child can be born, but it is infected and tainted from the hour it draws its miserable breath, and never has its chance of mirth or happiness -- in such noisome streets they, by tens of thousands, live and die and give birth to others, tens of thousands more, who live and die again, never growing better, but slowly and surely worse, and whose depraved condition -- whose irreligion, improvidence, drunkenness, degeneracy, and most unaccountable of all, whose discontent, good gentlemen reprobate in Parliament tide, till they are hoarse; devising for their reformation Sabbath Bills without end (they would have General Fastings, but the name is awkward), and building up new churches with a zeal whose sacred fervour knows no limits.

"Misery!" said a portly gentleman, standing in the best street in the town that very night, as he went home from dinner, and looking round him. "Where is it? A splendid Town Hall -- a copy from the antique -- the finest organ in Europe, a Museum of Natural Curiosities, a Theatre, some capital inns, excellent shops were every luxury may be purchased at very little more than London prices; an elegant market-place, admirably supplied -- what would they have? Misery! Pooh, pooh! I don't believe a word of it."

Footnotes Appendix

[1]From The Letters of Charles Dickens, The Pilgrim Edition, vol. 2; 1840-1841, eds., Madeline House and Graham Storey, (Oxford: The Clarendon Press), 1969, p. 131.

[2]Stephen Wall, Dickens: A Critical Anthology, p. 530.

[3]See Madeline House and Graham Storey, The Letters, p. 131n.

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