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Hard Times: Fancy as Practice

Christopher Barnes

The ethos of fact that dominates Hard Times is a disciplinary force within the novel, representing those subject to its domination in ways that encourage conformity and enforce hegemony. In the novel, subaltern characters determinedly, yet indirectly, fight to modify the representations of themselves assumed and imposed by the hegemonic force, whether that force is the middle class, one's teacher, one's father, one's husband, one's employer, or one's trade union. The novel critiques hegemonic systems as forms of power because they are inherently partial and reductive. Sissy, Blackpool, and the circus take positions others interpret to be stubbornly naive, but these positions also serve as specific criticisms of the systems that they confront. Dickens labels this subtle form of resistance fancy. For the destructive paternalism that characterizes industrialism and utilitarianism, Dickens substitutes a positive mutualism based on the fluidity of evolving relationships.

No mere utilitarian spirit, no iron binding of the 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 of 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 (woe betide that day!) can never be extinguished . . . (1)

—Charles Dickens, *Household Words*,
March 30, 1850

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In *Barnaby Rudge*, *Old Curiosity Shop*, *Great Expectations*, and *Our Mutual Friend*, the Dickensian trope of “fancy” plays a role of contrast, innocence, and respite, a haven of imagination opposed to an alienating reality. Dickensian innocents such as Little Nell and Paul Dombey find solace in worlds dominated by poverty or finance. Wemmick in *Great Expectations* builds his own ludic castle in a suburb of London in opposition to the commercial life of the city, Riah in *Our Mutual Friend* allows Jenny Wren and Lizzie Hexam to find a peacefulness in his rooftop oasis of nature, and in *Hard Times* Sissy Jupe and the circus from which she springs embody a fancy that contrasts with the Gradgrindian social, domestic, and economic worlds. *Hard Times*, however, employs *fancy* in a much more forceful way than do any of Dickens’s other novels. In *Hard Times*, *fancy* is a much more active force, not respite and not mere contrast, but a resistant, potent force representing the practices, the intuitions, and the intelligence of the subaltern.

The critical history of *Hard Times* is well known. To summarize: most contemporary reviewers dismissed it as a didactic novel unrelated to Dickens’s “better” work¹. Leftist critics—Gissing, Shaw, G. K. Chesterton, and Raymond Williams—blast his unsympathetic and frankly false depiction of mid-century trades unions; F. R. Leavis in *The Great Tradition* constructed a more positive critical reputation for *Hard Times*, calling it a “moral fable,” a “masterpiece,” and Dickens’s only “completely serious work of art” (227). With notable exceptions,² critics in the second half of the twentieth century tend to use the novel in passing to illustrate a thesis about another of Dickens’s works. Most recently, Alexander Welsh has found *Hard Times* to be a sequel in theme and style to the novel immediately preceding, *Bleak House* (xvi). Countless undergraduate students, meanwhile, have read *Hard Times* in introductory classes primarily because of its (lack of) length.

An interpretation of *Hard Times* on its own terms, however, and in light of the other industrial novels with which it is grouped finds that Dickens is interested, not just in respite or contrast or solely in the industrial problem, but in relations of power across society: relationships between teacher and pupil, parent and child, husband and wife, mill owner and laborer, union leader and union members, governor and governed, and ultimately between the middle and working classes.³ Subaltern characters determinedly, yet indirectly, fight to modify the representations of themselves assumed and imposed by the hegemonic force, whether that force is the middle class, one’s teacher, one’s father, one’s husband, or one’s employer. In “fancy,” Dickens recognizes these more subtle forms of resistance, though his critics have not often given him credit for this level of subtlety.⁴

Historian and social critic Michel de Certeau ascribes a similar oppositional function to the phenomenon he calls *practice*, the activities people engage in every day to shape, modify, and deform the alienating environment in which

they live.⁵ For de Certeau, *practice* has two modes: strategic practice is profound and direct resistance characteristic of demonstrations, strikes, and boycotts; it is organized, articulated resistance of any kind. Tactical practice is also a force for change but is carried out by those who have not the strength to resist directly. Tactical practices present themselves in the guise of non-resistance, as singular and ephemeral actions, without larger social significance and without persistence over time, though in reality, their sum is indeed socially significant and their practice and critique are ongoing, repetitive responses to an alienating social configuration, as Dickens demonstrates in *Hard Times*. By emphasizing the agency of fancy in *Hard Times*, Dickens gives utterance to the critical, native intelligences of the working class.

Many critics find the opposition in *Hard Times* between fact and fancy problematic or simplistic. Patricia Johnson concludes that fancy "can do little more than decorate" the drabness represented by facts (136). Cynthia Malone finds the "rhetoric of opposition in *Hard Times* . . . misleading" (14). She finds the novel's thrust, not in opposition to, but supporting the values consistent with middle-class reform. Dickens does not, Sylvère Monod believes, put forward a "clear, coherent, persuasive thesis," but rather a "kind of sentimental socialism" (451).⁶

Because these critics and reviewers concentrate on the strategic (profound and direct) resistance embodied in fancy, they interpret the resistance in the novel to be, at best, unrealistic, as in Sissy's confrontation with Harthouse, or ineffective, as in the workers' confrontations with their employers. These are important forms of resistance, but they are all strategic (direct) forms of resistance. When tactical (hidden, non-confrontational) resistance is added to our definition of fancy, a more cogent and coherent opposition to the authority of the world symbolized by "fact" emerges.

Fact

The ethos of *fact* that dominates *Hard Times* is a disciplinary force within the novel, representing those subject to its domination in ways that encourage conformity and enforce hegemony. The elder Gradgrind, Thomas, is a comical exaggeration of utilitarianism, emphasizing fact and rationality—the head—above all things. He is inflexible, dry, emphatic, dictatorial, hard set, obstinate, and stubborn. He is the kind of man who confidently reduces any aspect of human nature to "figures, a case of simple arithmetic" (2), but as one critic puts it, "The crude but forceless simplicity of Gradgrind can scarcely be said to represent the complexity and solidity of Bentham's influential contributions to English thought" (Engel 173). Nevertheless, the grounds upon which Dickens attacks utilitarianism are the same grounds

which John Stuart Mill addresses in his *Autobiography*, where he attributes his breakdown at the age of twenty-one to the one-sided nature of his education. Mill comes to understand a need to enrich “the internal culture of the individual” with an attention to one’s own emotions and to the enjoyment of poetry, art, and music (147).

According to Mill,

Bentham’s method may be shortly described as the method of detail; of treating wholes by separating them into their parts, abstractions by resolving them into things—classes and generalities by distinguishing them into the individuals of which they are made up; and breaking every question into pieces before attempting to solve it. (“Bentham” 220)

Bentham’s method is one of “interminable classifications.” This classificatory method comes out of the scientific tradition of Bacon, Hobbes, and Locke but does not necessarily characterize Gradgrind’s methodology. In fact, Mill makes Bentham surprisingly compatible with Dickens’s own methodology:

It is a sound maxim, and one which all close thinkers have felt, but which no one before Bentham ever so consistently applied, that error lurks in generalities: that the human mind is not capable of embracing a complex whole, until it has surveyed and catalogued the parts of which that whole is made up; that abstractions are not realities per se, but an abridged mode of expressing facts. (221)

For Dickens, the problem with Gradgrind is not that he is too factual or methodical, but that Gradgrind does not individualize. He rather generalizes, making his students and his children into models within a system. As statistical representation became prominent in the nineteenth century, Mary Poovey notes, the argument was implied that “every individual is an instance of the same.” However, Poovey continues, “To Dickens, the fact that every individual might be an instance of the same was *not* a matter for celebration” (22–23).

Gradgrind’s students—inert vessels to be filled with facts—are expected merely to receive instruction passively. This manifest lack of independent thought is demonstrated in the classroom exchange where the students try to guess the answer the adult is looking for, crying out “‘Yes, sir’ ” and then “‘No, sir!’ ” when they perceive that “‘Yes’ ” is the wrong answer. The students desire only to conform, as is expected of them. They are students with nominative numbers instead of human beings “in all of their qualitative diversity” and “their historical particularity” (Nussbaum 20). The particular facts of their social situations are ignored: they are abstracted and decontextualized to become mere ciphers in Gradgrind’s model school. Dickens writes, “It was [Gradgrind’s] school, and he intended it to be a model. He intended

every child in it to be a model—just as the young Gradgrinds were all models” (16). In an essay titled “Dullborough Town,” Dickens refers to the ubiquitous influence of utilitarianism as “boyslaughter” (224). These model children are taught to settle everything by means of “addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division.” Therein, Gradgrind believes, “lay the spring of the mechanical art and mystery of educating the reason without stooping to the cultivation of the sentiments and affections” (54).

Sissy best demonstrates the damage inflicted on children living in the Gradgrind household. Her new life with the Gradgrinds is very controlled and disciplined. In the new household, “life in general was opened to her as . . . a closely ruled cyphering-book” (60). At one point, Sissy openly criticizes Gradgrind’s educational system. She speculates that if she had been allowed to follow a more individual course rather than being expected to conform to the system—if she had been “‘allowed to try a little less,’ ” as she puts it—she might have learned more. But Gradgrind disagrees, tautologically invoking the system, “‘No. The course you pursued, you pursued according to the system—the system—and there is no more to be said about it’ ” (95).⁷

Like Tom, Louisa, and Sissy, the workers of Coketown are subjected to a regulated life that leaves no time for wonder, imagination, or fancy. Coketown is a “model” city. As Léon Faucher says of Manchester (the prototype for Coketown), “The town realizes in a measure the Utopia of Bentham. Everything is measured in its results by the standard of utility; and if the beautiful, the great, and the noble, ever take root in Manchester, they will be developed in accordance with this standard” (24–25). The architecture and single-minded efficiency of the city itself exerts a power over its inhabitants, reinforcing the will of industrialists and focusing the city’s resources and energies toward the production of goods. Coketown as a model city is a system constructed to exterminate fancy, a term which Dickens equates with “healthy existence” (31). Fancy can relieve long and monotonous working lives, and according to Dickens, it is unnatural to deny these needs in students, children, or workers.

Systems as Power

Hard Times, however, is not just an examination of utilitarianism; it is a critique of systems in general as forms of power. In *Hard Times*, those in authority—employers, teachers, parents, and the middle class as a whole—have a simplified and caricatured understanding of their subalterns. Both Bounderby and Gradgrind believe that the working classes are “a bad lot altogether.” They believe laborers are ungrateful and disloyal, and “that they lived upon the best, and bought fresh butter; and insisted on Mocha

coffee, and rejected all but prime parts of meat, and yet were eternally dissatisfied and unmanageable" (30). Though Bounderby believes that the workers only want to be "set up in a coach and six, and to be fed on turtle soup and venison, with a gold spoon" (75), the reality is that working-class characters are never shown eating at all.

Louisa is similarly ignorant of the working class. Upon visiting Blackpool's room, "for the first time in her life she was face to face with anything like individuality in connection with [the workers]." For Louisa, the working class is an abstraction: they are the sum of the statistical evidence she has been given about them, a single mass unit without component parts (160–61). Louisa's attitudes emphasize the miscommunication and ignorance resulting from partial, general, and abstract knowledge, from not exploring the specifics and the individuality of the "other." Rachael notes the separate worlds the working and middle classes inhabit: "The like of you don't know us, don't care for us, don't belong to us," she tells Louisa (251).

The various religious denominations or societies for improving social conditions in Coketown also delude themselves with these partial, reductive, and paternalistic attitudes toward labor. E. P. Thompson lists a sample from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries of those who desire to put the "houses of the poor in order," and Dickens must have had in mind very similar sorts of groups. Thompson lists "Hannah More, with her halfpenny tracts and Sunday Schools, the Methodists with their renewed emphasis upon order and submissiveness, Bishop Barrington's more humane Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor, and William Wilberforce and Dr. John Bowdler, with their Society for the Suppression of Vice and Encouragement of Religion" (56). Add to these the Independents, the Baptists, the Congregationalists, and the Unitarians. The bells from the chapels of these denominations, rather than providing comfort, are a "barbarous jangling" that drives the "sick and nervous mad" (29). The laborers, Dickens asserts, avoid these organizations because they treat the workers as if they are infants, as if they are "twenty, thirty, forty, or fifty"-year-old "babies" (54). The laborers are told by these groups, as Louisa is told by her father, never to wonder, but to trust in the reasoning of those in authority. These religious denominations and societies all seek to define narrowly, to represent narrowly, members of the working class in order to simplify, understand, and ultimately control them. The Christian Socialism Charles Kingsley puts forward in *Alton Locke* is an analogously authoritarian system. As a Unitarian, Elizabeth Gaskell in *Mary Barton* opposes the independence and anarchy she finds in the more enthusiastic brands of religion. In order to reinforce middle-class ideals of religious and social conformity, she criticizes the Methodist church—which was widely seen as addressing itself to the needs and point of view of the working class—at a point in history when, in fact, in Manchester at the middle of the century, Methodists comprised a majority of the citizenry.⁸

Because Dickens's primary theme is authority, to the eighteen denominations or improvement societies that vie for control of the Coketown citizenry, one more could be added: the United Aggregate Tribunal. Dickens has Slackbridge deliver to the laborers what Dickens's middle-class readers would understand to be a simplification and an abstraction of the middle and owning class. According to Slackbridge, industrial workers are subject to an "iron-handed and a grinding despotism" from "oppressors" who have "plundered" the families of labor (141). Dickens's middle-class readers would have understood the pretension and exaggeration that Slackbridge represents. Dickens reveals Slackbridge's speech to be so much "froth and fume," and emphasizes that Slackbridge fails in comparison to the workers in honesty, manliness, and "good-humour"; "he substituted cunning for their simplicity, and passion for their safe solid sense" (142). Slackbridge is just as much an uninitiated outsider as Gradgrind, Bounderby, or Louisa, treating the workers as agentless objects to be manipulated.

The fact that authoritarian positions and abstractions derived from systems can lead to error is demonstrated both by Gradgrind and by Slackbridge. Gradgrind emphasizes fact and provides the illusion that he stands for reason, but he perverts truth, badly twisting his facts to suit his system. After learning that Sissy's father is a performer in Sleary's horse-riding circus, Gradgrind twists this information until her father becomes a "veterinary surgeon, a farrier, and horsebreaker" (11). So concerned is Gradgrind in constructing reality as he wants it to be that he perverts what it is in an attempt to make practice match acceptable representation.

Like Gradgrind, Slackbridge and the United Aggregate Tribunal insist on conformity. Though George Bernard Shaw, F. R. Leavis, George Gissing, Sylvère Monod, and Raymond Williams all point out that Dickens's depiction of trade unions in *Hard Times* is simplistic caricature,⁹ from Dickens's perspective the world-view of labor organizations is simply another representation of the social, and is hence partial, prejudiced, and limited. Slackbridge subverts and manipulates truth (much as Gradgrind did with Sissy's father) to make Blackpool a scapegoat and creates an atmosphere of crisis where before had existed only difference, ignorance, and lack of experience. Because Blackpool is represented by Slackbridge as a "traitor and a craven and a recreant" standing against "Freedom" and "Right," the union feels compelled to shun Blackpool rather than incorporate his objections or simply to acknowledge and tolerate his refusal to join with them (143). These consequences are the result of decisions based on partial and antagonistic points of view. Patrick Brantlinger notes that the "tyranny" of the trade union in *Hard Times* is the "working-class equivalent of Gradgrindian inhumanity" (43). Interestingly, in Dickens's article for *Household Words* describing the actual strike at Preston, Gruffshaw, a name Dickens gives to the orator, is given little credence by the assembled workers.

In the manipulative and partisan Slackbridge, Dickens reproduces the middle-class fear of an organized working class. Brantlinger notes that the "Humanitarian perspective" of many Victorian writers "was flexible enough to include sympathy for the Ten Hours Movement, the agitation against the New Poor Law, cooperative associations, and even 'moral force' Chartism, but it did not include much sympathy for trade unions and strikes" (37). In the guise of fiction, Dickens echoes Carlyle's denunciation of unions in *Chartism* as dogmatic and intolerant fraternities: "What kind of 'wild-justice' must it be in the hearts of these men that prompts them, with cold deliberation, in conclave assembled, to doom their brother workman, as the deserter of his order and his order's cause, to die as a traitor and deserter" (124). In Gaskell's *North and South*, a workman with eight children to feed who is thrown out of work because of a strike, says to a fellow workman, "'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'" (149). The riots in Kingsley's *Alton Locke*, George Eliot's *Felix Holt*, and Disraeli's *Sybil* all depict labor's efforts to combine as existing dangerously on the edge of violence. The difference is that these other middle-class writers cast the middle class in opposition to the working class. The middle class provides a rational corrective. Dickens depicts all systems as partial and reductive.

For Dickens, social change led by an authoritarian group, howsoever well-meaning, cannot be widespread or meaningful unless it is in continuous dialogue with the working class. From Dickens's middle-class point of view, Slackbridge and his union represent such a powerful minority, and in that sense his depiction of them is a caricature, but his point still remains that power impervious to critique represents the working class to be plastic and passive rather than active and intelligent. From Dickens's perspective, Slackbridge is just as impervious to critique as Gradgrind and Bounderby. Slackbridge might as well be saying, in echo of Gradgrind, "'No. The course we pursue, we pursue according to the system—the system—and there is no more to be said about it.'" Like Gaskell's mysterious "gentleman from London" in *Mary Barton* who stirs the workmen to violence, Slackbridge is the outsider, a man of words and theories in a world of experience, practice, and action.

Fancy and Muddle

Dickens employs two terms that help him avoid the quietism of other middle-class Question of England authors: *fancy* and *muddle*. These terms are purposely invested with critical power in *Hard Times*. *Fancy* represents the

critical and moral contrast that Sissy and the circus possess against the system and authority of Gradgrind and Gradgrindism. Similarly, Blackpool's *muddle* cogently and concisely throws bourgeois values and ideals into conflict with the economic base. In *Hard Times*, these two equivocal terms provide a space for subaltern critique and difference, allowing the subaltern to speak.

For Dickens, fancy is important as a distraction and as amusement, but it also serves a political and resistant function as well, providing a utopic and alternative vision to counter one-dimensional systems. Mr. Sleary distinctively makes the case for fancy as amusement. "'People mutht be amuthed,' " he says. "'They can't be alwayth a learning, nor yet they can't be alwayth a working, they an't made for it' " (292). In the voice of the narrator, Dickens agrees. The narrator writes that the "English people are as hard worked as any people upon whom the sun shines," and that for this reason, he "would give them a little more play" (67–68). The people "mutht" be amused because "unrelieved work and study are explosive ingredients in the social mix" (Welsh 193).

In a town dominated by discipline, monotony, and "fact, fact, fact," many, like Rachael, turn to religion. Others, like Blackpool's wife, turn to drink or to opium. Many others, a chaplain complains, "would resort to low haunts, hidden from the public eye, where they heard low singing and saw low dancing, and mayhap joined in it" (29). These amusements are not only responses to the environment the subaltern is asked to live in, but also commentaries on that environment, engaged in, to some extent, because they are forbidden. These amusements associated with fancy—because they have a resistant function—are examples of tactical practices.

Coleridge famously made a distinction between *fancy* and *imagination* in his *Biographia Literaria*. He wrote that *fancy* and *imagination* are "two distinct and widely different facilities," which are not synonymous though they are often understood to be (195–200). For Coleridge, *fancy* is simply the ability to arrange creatively ready-made materials. The *imagination*, on the other hand, is creative and vital; it "dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate" or "to idealize and unify." However, for Dickens, fancy (as embodied in Sissy, in the circus, and later in Louisa) is vital and life-producing. Coleridge writes that the imagination represents "the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM" (202). Dickens, however, also grants this degree of power to fancy. Fancy is life-giving; its existence within an individual suffuses his or her perception of the world and gives to those blessed with fancy a sense of self, a subjectivity that cannot easily be steered awry.

Sissy Jupe is most closely associated with fancy, with the circus, and with values resistant to those of Gradgrind. Mr. M'Choakumchild declares Sissy

to be an obstinate student. She learns general concepts—about the globe, for instance—but takes the “smallest conceivable interest in its exact measurements” and is very slow at learning dates (60). She feels herself to be a “‘stupid girl.’” She complains to Louisa, “‘All through school hours I make mistakes. Mr. and Mrs. M’Choakumchild call me up, over and over again, regularly to make mistakes. I can’t help them. They seem to come natural to me’” (61). Though she is considered stupid within the Gradgrindian system, Dickens constructs her obtuseness to be pointed, critical, and resistant. When asked, for example, “‘What is the first principle of [Political Economy]?’” she quotes the golden rule: “‘To do unto others as I would that they should do unto me.’” In this fashion she, and Dickens, have pointed to a contradiction between political economy and bourgeois ideology. Likewise, she reports to Louisa that in a discussion of “‘National Prosperity,’” she could not say whether a nation was prosperous or not until she knew how that prosperity was shared among the people (62). Sissy reduces the abstraction of “national” to the level of individual prosperity with which she can empathize. She brings to the Gradgrindian curriculum an honest and a class-based perspective that highlight the limited nature of Gradgrind’s system. In a discussion of this conversation between Sissy and Louisa, Alexander Welsh writes that Sissy “‘innocently turns the laugh upon her masters in the school’” (196).

Sissy’s reluctance to alter her perception of the world to suit the Gradgrindian system is a form of resistance that presents itself under the guise of the perverse, dense, and stupid student. This guise reinforces the prejudice Gradgrind already possesses concerning this child of the circus, yet her “‘stupidity’” is not merely ironical, but pointed and critical. In this way, Sissy’s “‘denseness’” is tactical practice. She refuses to be the vessel to be filled with unconnected, passionless facts. In consequence, Sissy has her positive effect, criticizing the system without directly confronting it. After telling Sissy how disappointed he is in her for not adjusting herself to the system, Gradgrind, even so, becomes “‘possessed by an idea that there was something in this girl which could hardly be set forth in a tabular form’” (95). She forces him to doubt the comprehensiveness of his system.¹⁰

For Jenny Wren in *Our Mutual Friend*, fancy provides the strength to endure poverty, an alcoholic father, and a diseased body. Her misshapen body and the fantasy world represented by the elaborate dresses she makes for the dolls of the rich symbolize her alternative perception that enables her to provide love, support, and sympathy for others who deserve her care. Her instinctual judgments of people divide the characters of the novel into those who are worthy from those who are selfish and manipulative. The simple-minded Barnaby Rudge with his pet mockingbird provides a similar yardstick in the novel named for him, as does Smike in *Nicholas Nickleby*. Fancy

provides these characters with strength to endure and innocence with which to judge, but they are not often endowed with the power to oppose to some effect, as is Sissy.

Fancy enables Sissy to resist the educational demands of Gradgrind's system, to confront and frustrate Harthouse, and to affect for the better those with whom she is in close contact. In her confrontation with Harthouse, much is made of her resolution, her strength of character, her sense of self-knowledge, and the fact that she is the daughter of a stroller (232–37). Her early exposure to fancy has given her a "something" that is empowering. On her deathbed, Mrs. Gradgrind understands, "'But there is something—not an Ology at all—that your father has missed, or forgotten, Louisa. I don't know what it is. I have often sat with Sissy near me, and thought about it'" (201).

Margaret Oliphant contrasts the too harsh yet practical educational system championed by Gradgrind with the "perfectly opposite system of no education at all, save the natural growth of the sentiments and affections" that she believes characterizes Sissy. Oliphant writes that, for Dickens, this education, unbelievably, "produces angels, not only of goodness, but of wisdom and judicious courage almost unparalleled" (453). Sissy, however, has not bloomed unnurtured. In the circus, she has been shaped by the values of charity, generosity, mutual aid, and mutual dependence. This education she brings to bear upon the opposing values embraced by utilitarianism, Gradgrind, and Harthouse.

Tom and Louisa show evidence of a resistant fancy as well. Their peeking at the circus satisfies their curiosity, of course, but it is also an act of defiance to their father's system. After they are caught, they are unapologetic. Though there was "an air of jaded sullenness in them both," Louisa looks at her father with "boldness," while Tom gives "himself up to be taken home like a machine" (19). Louisa is more openly resistant, and it is this resistance that gives her a degree of a sense of self. Tom does not physically or openly resist like Louisa. For the moment, his resistance is, ironically, in his excessive nonresistance. In true tactical practice fashion, he pretends to cooperate, but his cooperation is exaggerated: he is machine-like. His excessive submission makes a public show of his submission, which sends a message not only to his father, demonstrating his disagreement, but also, importantly, to his sister, telling her that he is not the model child and student his father demands him to be. He has a self independent of his father's representation of him. A character who is primarily adjusted—that is, someone who accepts the definition given to him by those in authority, like Bitzer—would not have transgressed in the first place or would have been chagrined to have transgressed.

Louisa also engages in a form of tactical practice in her resistance to the demands of her marriage. In her marriage, Louisa consistently, and ironically,

embraces the cold reason idealized by utilitarianism in order to distance herself from Bounderby and from the role of wife assigned to her. Harthouse, for instance, notices that she has refused to take any interest in decorating her and Bounderby's home: "No graceful little adornment, no fanciful little device, however trivial, anywhere expressed her influence." The house is "cheerless" and "comfortless" (132). Bounderby too complains that Louisa has never been dutiful and submissive, that he was never treated as "'Josiah Bounderby of Coketown ought to be treated by his wife'" (241). Louisa's behavior simultaneously illustrates the powers brought to bear on an individual to conform and that individual's ability to resist that conformity.

Like Tom's machine-like conformity when caught peeping at the circus, Louisa's resistance can also be hidden in outward conformity. When Louisa's father first broaches the subject of Bounderby's marriage proposal, Gradgrind prepares her, reminding her of the principles of dispassionate "reason and calculation" that he has taught her. Then, he tells her of the marriage proposal and waits for her to speak or react. When he remarks on her silence, she answers "without any visible emotion whatsoever," saying, "'I hear you father. I am attending, I assure you.'" Gradgrind reacts favorably, realizing that she is performing the values of dispassionate reason and calculation that he has taught her. Gradgrind cannot fault his daughter for her evasions because she is not being directly resistant. Instead, she has gathered to herself the values of Gradgrindism and has exaggerated them, has interposed them in just the time and place when Gradgrind has a lesser expectation of their appearance. Nevertheless, he is made uncomfortable by her reactions: "Strange to relate, Mr. Gradgrind was not so collected at this moment as his daughter was. He took a paper-knife in his hand, turned it over, laid it down, took it up again, and even then had to look along the blade of it, considering how to go on" (99). In order to emphasize more fully that the marriage is her father's will, Louisa's manner and voice remain as level and uninflected as possible:

"Father," pursued Louisa in exactly the same voice as before, "do you ask me to love Mr. Bounderby?"

"My dear Louisa, no. No. I ask nothing."

"Father," she still pursued, "does Mr. Bounderby ask me to love him?"

(99-100)

She asks questions in as dispassionate a manner as possible in order to demonstrate the disparity between herself as an object of desire and her own lack of desire. She becomes the epitome of Gradgrindism and finesses it into a criticism of her father and of his system. In this way, she has used his own principles against him, to make him uncomfortable, to emphasize the fact that he and Bounderby are imposing their wills on her and that this marriage

is not her desire, but theirs. She enacts the absence of her desire in order to emphasize their own desires.

In *Hard Times*, all marriages are relations of power that elicit tactical practices. The Gradgrinds' marriage is also destructive, at least for Mrs. Gradgrind. Her unhappiness with a marriage based not on emotional need but on Gradgrindian principles can be inferred from her own tactical practice, her own withdrawal from her spousal role into a sickness and pain caused, Dickens implies, as much by psychological factors as by physical ones. She tells Louisa, "'I hope your health may be good, Louisa; for if your head begins to split as soon as you are married, which was the case with mine, I cannot consider that you are to be envied'" (105). Mrs. Gradgrind's mysterious illness had its genesis with her marriage. It was her way of distancing herself from the role of wife expected of her, a way of distancing herself from the demands and expectations of her husband and of his system. Richard Fabrizio writes, "Marriage kills off Mrs. Gradgrind, Mrs. Blackpool, Mrs. Jupe, and to all intents and purposes Mrs. Bounderby" (63). The unifying thread of all these subaltern characters—Sissy, Louisa, Tom, Mrs. Gradgrind—is that they indirectly resist the expectations those in authority have of them. Their resistance is tactical practice and is closely associated in the novel with *fancy*.

Circus Fancy

The circus represents a different model of society from that of the industrial paternal model or the Gradgrindian model. The circus expresses what F. R. Leavis calls the "vital human impulse" (232). E. P. Thompson writes that "Those who have wished to emphasize the sober constitutional ancestry of the working-class movement have sometimes minimized its more robust and rowdy features" such as the nineteenth-century music hall and "Dickens's circus folk" (59).¹¹ In a discussion of working-class broadsides, Martha Vicinus notes, "Humour proved to be the backbone of a developing class consciousness" (38). In *Dombey and Son*, Dickens provides a similar juxtaposition of fact and fancy to that of *Hard Times* when he contrasts Dombey's offices to the nautical instrument-maker's shop, the Wooden Midshipman. Dombey's is a world of "banker's books and ledgers, dominated by the cash nexus and the supremacy of reason and fact." Solomon Gills's world represents a "serene outpost" against commercialism (Lecker 22). In *Hard Times*, the "horse-riding" fulfills a need in people for excitement and variety, but it also, though it is "frowned upon as frivolous and wasteful by Gradgrind and malignantly scorned by Bounderby," "brings the machine-hands of Coketown (the spirit-quenching hideousness of which is hauntingly

evoked) what they are starved of. It brings them, not merely amusement, but art, and the spectacle of triumphant activity" (Leavis 232). The circus does bring variety, amusement, and art to the workers of Coketown, but also, importantly, a vision of masterful activity indicative of ascendancy. Like the Biblical and historical ennobling myths that are told and re-told by the working class in *Alton Locke*, the circus keeps the possibility of triumphant activity alive and, in reminding the laborers of its existence, marks its absence from their work-a-day lives.¹²

In 1839, an anonymous penny-issue novel, *The Factory Lad: or, The Life of Samuel Smike* was published as an attack on factory conditions. In the novel, the evil mill owner, Mr. Thorneycroft, recounts his manipulative munificence in giving his employees a half-day's holiday every quarter to enjoy bullbaiting, a "fine old English sport," he says. It is the sort of "intellectual pleasure" that he "delights to propagate" because he feels it forestalls political activity among his workers. He says he would rather have one bullbait than "ten Mechanics' Institutes," though "some of [his workers] yet will run after books, and hanker after newspapers" and talk politics (James 139). But Thorneycroft's belief characterizes the point of view of the owner, not of the worker. The day's holiday for Thorneycroft's employees does not make their poverty and labor tolerable. In spite of Thorneycroft's hopes, the workers continue to seek education, reading material, political solutions, and unionization. The bullbait as described by Thorneycroft are different from the status of the circus in *Hard Times*. The bullbait is something given, not taken. In contrast, the circus is not supplied by the bourgeois forces of Coketown, but rather stages itself in opposition to and in spite of Gradgrindism and the demands of middle-class work discipline. The circus emphasizes the deficiencies in the otherwise disciplined, rationalized lives of the workers.

Within a culture increasingly dominated by efficiency and work discipline, the circus is a locus of resistance. Bounderby tells Childers, "'we are the kind of people who know the value of time, and you are the kind of people who don't know the value of time'" (36). The circus is a place where aesthetic considerations are paramount, and utility is of secondary importance. Where the town is dominated by monotony and by uniform, sooty brick, the circus is magnificently gaudy, full of light and color. The circus is consciously alternative, rejecting middle-class cultural expectations and proprieties. Bounderby and Gradgrind embody these middle-class expectations and proprieties, but their power and prestige depend on a community in which they possess the power of law and employment; therefore, Kidderminster can respond angrily to Bounderby and Gradgrind's condescension because his living is independent of place.

D. A. Miller refers to the way in which novels (and one could include other aspects of culture like the music halls) devalue the policing function of

the police, that is, celebrating their incompetence or powerlessness, in order to hide the complicity of wide social discipline with the policing function (3). When the police withdraw, the policing operations are superseded by the operations of another, informal, and extralegal principle of organization and control. Miller defines these principles as authoritarian forces, controlling those subject to them. However, the extralegal forces of the Gradgrindian society—peer pressure, middle-class propriety, and religious dictates—are powerless, Dickens demonstrates, in the face of fancy. They are ineffective, ignorant, and myopic. Sissy maintains her opposition to Gradgrindism despite examples to the contrary from other students; neither does Blackpool bow to the wishes of his fellow workers. Middle-class propriety is a foreign power in the novel, powerless to help Blackpool or to control the circus, and religious organizations are laughably impotent, reduced to the eighteen denominations that provide Dickens with a mystery: "Who belonged to the eighteen denominations?" Dickens asks. "Because, whoever did, the labouring people did not" (29). Society, Dickens seems to say, does not have to be defined as totalitarian and can rather be defined as a body that exists in tension between discipline and desire, between representation and tactical practice.

As an alternative to the middle-class domestic sphere, the circus provides an example of a positive, mutually sustaining community. For Catherine Gallagher, the circus in *Hard Times* is simply one more example of a negative family grouping that mirrors the dominant and paternal metaphorical social structure. The families in the novel, she believes, are all destructive—Gradgrind's, Blackpool's, and Bounderby's—or irrelevant—Sissy's family at the end or the self-contained, insular circus as family. Gallagher writes that Dickens destroys the family as social metaphor by showing its absurdity (155). D. A. Miller believes that the families in *Hard Times* are "internally incoherent" and thereby fall apart (102). But Dickens does not mean to destroy the family as social trope but rather to refine it. The families not connected to the values of the circus are indeed mutually destructive, but Sissy's family at the end and the circus itself are built on relationships that are mutually sustaining rather than destructive. Significantly, the members of the circus are introduced as a whole, not in terms of individual family groupings: "There were two or three handsome young women among them, with their two or three husbands, and their two or three mothers, and their eight or nine little children" (41).

Sleary offers his company of performers as a surrogate family of fathers, mothers, and sisters for Sissy if she stays in the circus. The circus can offer sustaining and emotionally rich relationships for the orphaned girl, and Sissy carries this empathetic model of family with her into Gradgrind's world. She is a sustaining companion for Mrs. Gradgrind and is protective and pitying of Louisa (106). The Gradgrinds' youngest daughter, Jane, is an unusually happy child, especially in comparison to Louisa and Tom. Jane attributes it

to “ ‘Sissy’s doing.’ ” Gradgrind notices the difference. He tells Louisa, “ ‘though your sister’s training has been pursued according to—the system, . . . it has necessarily been modified by daily associations [with Sissy] begun, in her case, at an early age. I ask you—ignorantly and humbly, my daughter—for the better, do you think?’ ” (226). He has realized the positive effect an emotionally sustaining relationship in opposition to his system has had on his younger daughter. Dickens underlines that this positive influence has come from a “ ‘stroller’s child’ ” (228). Sissy later marries and Louisa becomes a welcome member of Sissy’s family with “ ‘happy Sissy’s happy children loving her.’ ” From Sissy, Louisa learns to value her “ ‘fellow-creatures,’ ” and to value “ ‘beauty, imagination, graces and delights’ ” (228). These are the values Sissy and the circus stand for, and these are eventually the values embraced by Gradgrind and by Louisa.

Ironically, Gradgrind’s, Blackpool’s, and Bounderby’s families are all modeled on ideal and illusory representations. Gradgrind constructs his on the principles of utilitarianism, Blackpool upon the expectations of middle-class proprieties, and Bounderby upon his self-made-man fantasy. The circus-as-family, in contrast, has a more fluid construction, one that responds to the needs of individual relationships.¹³ Like acrobats, members in the circus can reconfigure themselves to become surrogate mothers or fathers as the need may arise. Signor Jupe, as a father, can even cease being a father in order to meet the perceived needs of his child.¹⁴ When Jupe can no longer provide the emotional and financial sustenance his daughter needs, he hopes that an education in an ideologically privileged, stable middle-class environment will. Because he is able to view normativity in an unconventional manner, he is able to provide her with the middle-class normativity that a Gradgrind can supply, little suspecting Gradgrind’s utilitarian perversity. For the destructive paternalism that characterizes industrialism and utilitarianism, Dickens substitutes a positive mutualism based on the fluid exigencies of evolving relationships. As Richard Fabrizio writes, “ ‘Only the circus family is uninhibited by the mores that bind and distort reality and thus the psychic condition of all the others’ ” (85).

Blackpool’s Muddle

Stephen Blackpool functions in the novel to define himself in opposition to both the alienating, inhumane policies of Bounderby and the factory and to the unthinking loyalty demanded by Slackbridge and the union. His function is parallel to Sissy’s opposition to Gradgrind’s utilitarian family and school, with one significant difference: Blackpool predominantly engages in direct, strategic actions, not in disguised tactical practice. His confrontations with

the trade union and with Bounderby demonstrate the bankruptcy of the bourgeois ideal of the autonomous individual.

In *Question of England* novels, unions are repeatedly associated with violence and irrationality. In *Mary Barton*, Gaskell's description of the oath taken to assassinate Harry Carson hints that the oath was one of many oaths in which unions regularly engage. These "fierce, terrible" oaths, she says, are taken for "any given purpose." That is, she implies that union members take these dangerous oaths when they merely pledge to support each other through a strike or when they elect delegates to bargain with the employers. The men at Gaskell's union hall are also "uncouth," are bestially concerned with and easily bribed by bodily gratifications of tobacco and beer, have "little regard for temper and principles," and are easily swayed to violence. One reports he could kill his own son if "'he took part wi' the masters'" (236–37).¹⁵

Dickens's description of the union meeting and the subsequent decisions of the workers is a good example both of his middle-class perspective and of working-class resistance to such a middle-class representation. The result is an ambiguity that attempts to depict both sides honestly. Though Dickens cannot explain the workers' attraction to the union, except to point out that working conditions must be bad for such a man to be persuasive, he allows room for such actions on their part. This contradiction between Slackbridge's message, which rings true for his audience, and his personal absence of authority is resolved if one understands that Dickens's object of satire is neither the working class nor the middle class, but rather those who would simplify, those who would substitute the abstraction of a prejudice, a tabular conclusion, or the mandates of a system for the specificity of individual relationships. Subalterns, when confronted with a representation of themselves and forced to articulate their objection, respond by pointing to the disjunction between the representation that the powerful group operates from and the experience in which the subaltern group is immersed.

Dickens posits Stephen Blackpool as a subaltern figure who is able to criticize this simplifying tendency of the owning class. He obviously is not interested in venison and gold spoons. He says to Bounderby,

"Deed we are in a muddle, sir. Look round town—so rich as 'tis—and see the numbers o' people as has been broughten into bein heer, fur to weave, an' to card, an' to piece out a livin', aw the same one way, somehows, 'twixt their cradles and their graves. Look how we live, an' wheer we live, an' in what numbers, an' by what chances, and wi' what sameness; and look how the mills is awlus a goin, and how they never works us no nigher to ony dis'ant object—ceptin awlus, Death. Look how you considers of us, and writes of us, and talks of us, and goes up wi' yor deputations to Secretaries o' State 'bout us, and how yo are awlus right, and how we are awlus wrong, and never had'n no reason in us sin ever we were born." (153)

Blackpool is not confused. He does not throw up his hands and say defeatedly that all is a muddle. He is not, as Sylvère Monod insists, possessed of an "ignorant mind and a muddled brain" (445). Instead, as a close examination of the above passage will demonstrate, he understands that social relations are contradictory. He understands that ideologies reinforcing the value and rewards of hard work and loyalty as well as paternalistic claims of the industrialist and of the government to see to the welfare of the common man are in conflict with practices. Blackpool understands, as demonstrated in his preceding speech, the concept of surplus labor as industry attracts a labor pool that it cannot support during down market cycles; he understands the alienation of the repetitive labor demanded of them; he understands that labor is consumed and cast aside when no longer useful; he understands the demands of capitalism to increase productivity and the hours worked to increase its accumulation of wealth; he understands the hegemony and egotism of the bourgeoisie believing itself to be the universal class; and finally, he understands the paternalism of the middle class that treats the working class as devoid of reason. These contradictions between the bourgeois cant and the reality he lives are what he summarizes in the term *muddle*. Consequently, his recognition of the muddle is not a sign of his "ignorant mind and a muddled brain" but is instead a cogent analysis and a call for reform.

George Gissing, in his study *Charles Dickens* (1898), believes Blackpool to be unrepresentative of working-class resistance. He attributes this weakness of Blackpool's character to Dickens's ignorance of "the 'free-thinking' workman." Gissing feels this ignorance a "noticeable omission from his books." Gissing continues,

This great struggle, going on before [Dickens] all his life, found no place in the scheme of his fiction. He shows us poor men who suffer under tyranny . . . ; but never such a representative wage-earner as was then to be seen battling for bread and right With adequate knowledge of a manufacturing town, he would never have written so unconvincingly Stephen Blackpool represents nothing at all; he is a mere model of meekness (280)

Gissing is correct that Blackpool does not represent the workmen who were engaged in strategic resistance, but he is not correct to dismiss Blackpool as representing nothing at all, nor is Stephen a mere model of weakness. Blackpool rigorously accommodates the ideological strictures of the larger society and calls on the industrialists and the government to honor their promises, but is rebuffed. Blackpool suffers the hypocrisy of the bourgeois promise of a fair and just society, and he brings the fact of this hypocrisy forcefully and courageously to his employer, knowing he will suffer consequences if he is not convincing. It is important to note that Blackpool attempts to work within the system. The ideology of the bourgeois public sphere maintains that grievances should be brought to the attention of those in power, and discussion

will ensue in order to ensure that justice prevails. This ideology, in other words, privileges strategic practices, that is, practices that directly seek redress from those in power. Dickens is demonstrating that the bourgeois emphasis on strategic, open debate is a fiction to enforce discipline. Blackpool's encounter with Bounderby demonstrates the bankruptcy of the paternal, authoritarian model.

Likewise, when Blackpool brings his case to the union, rather than engaging him in debate, the union summarily ostracizes him. Dickens demonstrates that rational debate is in actuality an exercise in rhetoric and drama, skills which Slackbridge has mastered but that Blackpool cannot counter with mere sincerity. F. R. Leavis insists that Blackpool is too consistently the martyr, too much of an "Uncle Tom" of the working class (205). This criticism is to be granted, but Dickens's intent is not to be representative. Dickens advances Blackpool as the anomaly within the system, the embodiment of practice within the representation, that must be accounted for. Though Dickens proffers no specific economic solutions, he does expose "foolishness, stubbornness, and blind partisanship" (Welsh 166). The reaction to exclude, whether by Bounderby or by Slackbridge, is a form of blindness and obstinacy. The criticism of the paternal model comes full circle when Bounderby summons Blackpool and tries to elicit criticism of the union that has just ostracized him. Blackpool refuses and is subsequently "ostracized" from Bounderby's employ. The paternal models on the left and the right thus collapse into one bankrupt model.

Brantlinger writes that the solution offered by Dickens to the problem posed by unionism in *Hard Times* is a rejection of its "inhuman discipline" (45). But this conclusion misses the connection between the problem posed by unionism and the problems posed by other representations of the subaltern. As Gradgrind says, the "'system'" is inviolable, but any system is merely a partial representation of the wishes those in authority want us to hold and can be modified by practice. In Dickens's text, characters repeatedly reduce complex relationships by grinding them through a system. The laws of England are representations of desired conduct, but do not provide a remedy for Stephen Blackpool's specific marital situation. Gradgrind's blue books are statistical representations of society, but are incapable of helping Louisa or Tom make specific decisions. For the rigidly utilitarian Gradgrind, a need for imagination is incomprehensible and frivolous, but for Dickens, fancy, imagination, or some unnamable desire and need are natural.¹⁶ Blackpool's independence demonstrates the intolerance of the union, but it also demonstrates the caprice, the injustice, and the abuse of power of the owners, represented by Bounderby.

The enforcement of uniformity in the name of the collective good by Slackbridge is a practical application of power in order to carry the argument,

though his actions are ultimately destructive, according to Veljko Korac, of the collective good. Korac writes in "In Search of Human Society" that for Marx "*the freedom of each individual becomes the condition for the freedom of all*" (10; Korac's italics). Korac notes that "ideologists with bureaucratic-state" tendencies have interpreted this statement to mean that the personality of the individual must be submerged in the collective, forgetting that this "'collective' interest ceases to be collective as soon as the individual or personal interest is excluded" (14). The humanist Dickens would seem to agree with Korac. A community created by exclusion is not a healthy community.

Hence, Blackpool is not a confused child who needs to be led and directed; his analysis proves him to be an adult with a critical intelligence capable of functioning in and modifying his world. "'Who can look on't, Sir,' " Blackpool asks, "'and fairly tell a man 'tis not a muddle?' " (153). He discerns the contradiction in the system that advertises itself as supremely logical. As Richard Fabrizio writes, "Blackpool may not be a realistic description of the contemporary factory worker, but he is an effective symbol of the dilemma, psychic and social, which the working man of Coketown knew: the 'muddle' " (85). Unlike Elizabeth Gaskell, who imposes the Golden Rule; Charles Kingsley, who imposes Christian Socialism; George Eliot, who insists on moral force Chartism; or Thomas Carlyle or Benjamin Disraeli, who invoke a mythic, paternal, beneficent, hierarchical past; Charles Dickens understands the tensions between the inadequacy of represented hegemonic structures and the practices of everyday life. Blackpool's criticism is parallel to Sissy's innocence and presumed ignorance. Both take positions others interpret to be stubbornly naive, but both take positions that are also specific criticisms, on Dickens's part, of the systems that they confront.

NOTES

1. Notwithstanding, Ruskin found the novel aesthetically pleasing and thought it the greatest Dickens had written (48).
2. Edgar Johnson praises *Hard Times* as a stark, formalized, and allegorical moral drama. John Holloway argues that the novel can retain our attention if we are "enticed by problems but indifferent to art" (171). In an attempt to explain away the book's faults by making them virtues, A. E. Dyson writes that Dickens emphasized Fact by de-emphasizing his art (187).
3. Philip Collins persuasively makes the case that Dickens was not intimately knowledgeable of industrial areas of the country (652–53). Dickens had for years been promising to address the industrial question, but *Hard Times* neglects many of the central issues surrounding industrialism: child labor, the ten-hours bill, worker

- safety. Interestingly, before publication, Dickens deleted a passage from chapter 13 of book one of *Hard Times* in which Stephen graphically alludes to the maiming of Rachael's sister by having “her child arm tore off afore thy [Rachael's] face.” Editor Kate Flint reproduces the omitted passage in the Penguin edition of the novel. In the scene, Stephen also criticizes the millowners for resisting government-mandated safety measures they deem too expensive (309).
4. Razak Dahmane demonstrates that Dickens also endorses fancy in his manipulation of metaphorical language. Dickens “articulate[s] his alternative to the hard-fact faction” by emphasizing the imaginative and figurative abilities of, especially, the narrator while denying figurative license to those opposed to fancy. The literal-mindedness of Gradgrind, Bounderby, and Bitzer weakens the philosophy to which they attach so much significance. “[M]etaphorical proficiency,” Dahmane writes, is a “linguistic badge of moral decency and imaginative health” (137–38).
 5. This definition of *practice* is from Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*. De Certeau writes that everyday practices are, simply put, the “‘ways of operating’ or doing things” by consumers of culture. These activities are “commonly assumed to be passive and guided by established rules,” but de Certeau strives to demonstrate the active and critical dimensions of these activities (xi).
 6. Dickens's contemporary critics agreed. See, for instance, reviews in *Athenaeum* 1398 (12 August 1854): 992; *Gentlemen's Magazine* 42 (September 1854): 276–78; *British Quarterly Review* 20.40 (October 1854): 581–82; *Rambler* 2.10 (October 1854): 361–62; *Westminster Review* 6.12 (October 1854): 604–06; and *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 77.474 (April 1855): 453–54.
 7. In contrast to Tom, Louisa, or Sissy, Bitzer embraces the Gradgrindian system. He accepts its definition of him as an entity motivated simply by reason and self-interest, to Thomas Gradgrind's eventual regret.
 8. In *Manchester in 1844: Its Present Condition and Future Prospects*, Léon Faucher notes that Methodists were the largest religious group in Manchester at mid-century. Of the 137 places of worship in Manchester in 1844, only thirty-nine belonged to the Church of England while forty-three were Methodist. Only five were Unitarian (23).
 9. See Monod 470; Gissing 18; Leavis 245–46, 248; Frank Smith 108; and Williams 93, 96.
 10. In “Wonderful No-Meaning,” Richard Fabrizio characterizes this “something” as an “absence” that defines the sum of Gradgrind's actions and philosophy, but the “something” is not mere absence (68); it has a direct and manifest, material effect within the novel. Like Florence and Paul Dombey, Sissy is one of the Dickensian innocents who sheds light on a mechanistic, anti-humanitarian, and economic reality. Sissy is the good but inadequate subaltern and cannot renounce her upbringing within the circus—the locus of fancy within the novel—to embrace the demands of Gradgrindism.
 11. Significantly, Monod omits from his thirty-page discussion of *Hard Times* any mention of *fancy* or of the circus.
 12. Triumphant activity can, of course, be conservative, championing the status quo against anarchy, but triumphant activity can also champion the subaltern against

authority that is popularly regarded as illegitimate. The figure of the policeman, for instance, was a frequent target of abuse, satire, and sarcasm in the nineteenth-century music halls (Kift 24). The subaltern that prevails over an authoritarian figure is a qualitatively different sort of hero from, say, a national hero like Wellington. Where Wellington's triumph at Waterloo inspired national pride and sanctioned existent power relations, a subaltern hero challenges the status quo. Vicinus records the conservatism of music hall content but, at the same time, points to its encouragement of class solidarity, pride in the accomplishments of working-class performers, vicarious pleasures, and the luxury of sarcasm and of poking holes in the pretentiousness of the upper classes (239, 259–62).

13. Dickens's emphasis on the marriage theme in *Hard Times* can be attributed, in part, to the history of his own marriage. He was separated from his wife in October of 1857, somewhat more than three years after the serialization of the novel in *Household Words*. However, in January of 1855, just five months after the end of the serialization, Dickens wrote to John Forster about his dissatisfaction with his marriage, and Edgar Johnson, in his compelling and complete biography of Dickens, reports long-standing unhappiness on the parts of both marriage partners: "Over and over again in these years [before 1857], Dickens said, Catherine had suggested that they would be happier separated" (454).
14. Miller writes, "What brought carceral institutions into being in the first place were lapses in the proper management of the family" (59). Miller is discussing *David Copperfield* at this point, but in *Hard Times* an opposite movement, in fact a parody of this movement, occurs. Signor Jupe cannot "manage" his family, abandoning Sissy to the "carceral" institutions of Gradgrind's school and home where, far from the problem being rectified, the inadequacies of middle-class discipline are emphasized, and the alternative model of the circus as family presents itself as much more adaptable.
15. According to Louis James, *The Red Cross Warrior* (1843) provides a contrasting view of trade unions. Set in the eleventh century when Saxons were resisting Danish invaders, the narrative depicts initiation rites that James describes as "interestingly close to trade union and freemason ritual" (205). The brave warrior, Herman, is initiated into the Order of Benevolence by taking part in an allegorical journey through a series of doorways representing humility, patience, brotherhood, and trust, until finally the doorway of truth opens onto an assembled meeting of the members (205–09). This ceremony emphasizes not violence, blind commitment, and secrecy, as Gaskell would have us believe, but rather Christian ideals. Historical romance, James maintains, provided a model for working-class values and organization in the nineteenth century.
16. Dickens assumes that nature opposes a regimented structure like utilitarianism, but one should not get bogged down in which actions are natural and which are materially determined or socially constructed. What is natural is the resistance to structure (and the simultaneous desire for structure) (Goffman 319). The forms this structure and this resistance to structure take are all materially determined. A labor union that discerns the specific experiences of the workers within the local industrial economy and organizes the workers to help them address these issues garners far more authority with the working class than a Gruffshaw or

Slackbridge, with their abstract talk of oppressive and plundering capitalists (as correct as these accusations may have been). The truth of organized labor practices in the nineteenth century reflects an emphasis on communication between national and local organizations and an emphasis on bottom-up leadership (Thompson 508–21, 675–76). However, middle-class fear and prejudice against concerted working-class action gave rise to the Slackbridges and the “gentlemen from London” that populate the fiction of this period.

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