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Casual Deductive Argument on Charles Dickens "Hard Times"

*Hard Times*, a novel by Charles Dickens, presents an extreme application of the rote education system, as well as the conveyance of factual information. Sissy Jupe, a child character in the novel, holds a different perspective from Mr. Thomas Gradgrind, a staunch believer of the rote system. Primarily, rote memorization refers to a technique where memorization is believed to be a product of repetition ("Rote Learning Vs. Meaningful Learning | Oxford Learning"). The underlying principle is that an individual will hastily be able to remember the meaning of a particular element the more that he/she repeats it. Fundamentally, Sissy understands a horse in an arguably more practical way as compared to the understanding that is learned through rote, one that is declared in the dictionary. Sissy understands what a horse is from her experience with horses, having been raised in a circus. She sees no need defining a horse, and believes that all that she needs to do is see one, ride one, pet one, hear or stroke one. In more basic terms, the meaning of something is obtained from interacting with the concrete world, and not via the accurate definition of concepts and words as Gradgrind would have liked it done.

Chiefly, Sissy provides an alternative to Gradgrind’s teaching technique. Via her experiences, throughout her life in the circus, she gets to acquire wide range of knowledge. Albeit she may fail to provide the exact meaning of a horse as Mr. Gradgrind demanded, with her widespread experience, she certainly have a better understanding off horses, probably more than Gradgrind will ever have. Sissy demonstrated the essence of learning via deeds, not merely through the formal classroom learning. The ironic part is that the unimaginative curriculum of Gradgrind is expected to get children ready in an effective way for the business world, while Sissy’s practical interaction with this world of work has already provided her with an education which she can hardly find in any school. Moreover, as a member of the circus society, Sissy’s early life is comprised of belonging, love and storytelling. Consequently, she finds it challenging to accommodate Gradgrind’s learning ideology. The profundity of her character is exemplified by her failure during the rote memorization, a failure which later safeguards her from experiencing the pitfalls which befalls the Gradgrinds. For instance, her daughter gets into a loveless marriage.

Under the notorious philosophy of Mr. Thomas Gradgrind, the novel demonstrates the height of Victorian utilitarianism with respect to educating the children. For Gradgrind, the most crucial aspect of education or knowledge is its utility value, which implies that it must deliver a concrete purpose. In the presence of such an unbending ideology, there is no space for creativity and imagination, as was recommended by M’Culloch (307). Indeed, Gradgrind did not just rise to riches through the study of art or poetry, but he acquired his wealth by comprehending hard, cold facts. However, Gradgrind is lacking in imagination to comprehend that learning may be deep and broad, permitting various children to nurture their skills and talents through their own personal ways. Just like the larger proportion of adults in this Victorian era, Gradgrind considers children to be little adults, and hence, their minds must be shaped into the proper shape to make them fit for the outside world, a world made of facts. However, the case should be that readings ought to be chosen strategically, to enrich the learners’ knowledge with interesting and applicable facts (Ford and Monod 306).

Dickens speech indicates that the challenges of the Victorian learning reforms by articulating that the education method only eliminated childish creativity (Dickens 310). As a result, children are no longer taught as girls and boys and instead, are not considered to be “little parrots and small calculating machines” (Dickens 310). Essentially, in the novel, Dickens refers to the children as “little vessels then and there arranged in order, ready to have imperial gallons of facts poured into them until they were full to the brim” (Dickens 1). Essentially, the real spirit of rote learning is depicted in the second chapter of the novel, which introduces Mr. Gradgrind, the man of realities, calculations and facts, who always carries with him a pair of scales a rule, as well as a multiplication table. Nonetheless, with his firm believe in his rote philosophy, Gradgrind fails to acknowledge that the human mind is the embodiment of the universal nature of humans (Mill 316). As a result, he deprives himself the capacity to comprehend and appreciate crucial human experiences and conditions.

In essence, the depiction of horses and horse riding represents everything which Gradgrind’s kids are missing in their childhood, which include play, imagination, entertainment, excitement, and with respect to familial culture, belonging, love, support, care and comfort, which makes Sissy appear as a foil to Gradgrind’s children. Dickens establishes such contradiction in his narration of the circus community. He writes, “They cared so little for plain Fact, these people, and were in that advanced state of degeneracy on the subject, that instead of being impressed by the speaker’s strong common sense, they took it in extraordinary dudgeon…” (Dickens 29). The origin of Sissy makes her the greatest symbol of *fancy* and the fiercest critic to Gradgrind’s learning philosophy. Initially, Gradgrind wishes to disappear during the first months with the Gradgrinds. The novel describes the torturous experience of Gradgrinds learning philosophy as he writes, “It hailed facts all day long so very hard, and life in general was opened to her as such a closely ruled ciphering book, that assuredly she would have run away, but for only one restraint” (Dickens 42). Nonetheless, Sissy is coerced to remain due to her hope that her father would be back.

Apparently, Sissy, although just a child, demonstrates that indeed the rote system of education was filled with pitfalls. From the eventuality of Gradgrind’s family, it is clear that Sissy was correct, the memorization that came with the rote education philosophy was not effective when it comes to the real world scenario, and which saw Gradgrinds kids commit gross blunders in their life, such as wrong and unhappy marriage choices, when the time or them came to engage the real world. On the other hand, Sissy develops well, and proves that, indeed, Gradgrind was mistaken.

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