Social Disparity and the Economic Gap in *Hard Times* and *Great Expectations*

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Introduction

Typically, the novels of Charles Dickens are characterized by their happy endings – Ebenezer Scrooge rediscovers himself and begins a charitable life in *A Christmas Carol;* the title character of *David Copperfield* marries happily and builds a family; and nearly every main character in *Oliver Twist* enjoys a turn for the better. Novels like *Hard Times* and *Great Expectations*, however, are written later in Charles Dickens's life, and demonstrate an altogether dark tone – effectively, a developed cynicism. Both novels are rife with symbolism decrying the social disparities of Great Britain, and both novels feature bittersweet endings – with lessons learned too late. *Great Expectations* uses economic symbolism to show how far removed the lower class is from monetary concerns, and how the burgeoning middle class can consider nothing else. *Hard Times* focuses more on the situations of the characters themselves to show how powerful and disconnected from real concerns the upper class is, and how the middle class is divided both from the upper and lower classes. These novels reveal Dickens's sense of loathing towards the modern world's departure from human values for the sake of social status and economic well-being, and the world's inability to understand the "human cost" incurred by reckless abandon of human morality in the face of socio-economic facts.

The term "middle class" never actually appears in the novels, but is nevertheless represented by characters such as Josiah Bounderby and Pip. Historically, "middle class" is a term that is difficult to isolate into a single definition. Richard Trainor, in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain: 1840-1950*, defines a class as "a group which shares a similar economic situation, level of prestige and eligibility for key positions: it is not assumed that such a group thinks alike or acts coherently." The middle class specifically "encompassed very considerable contrasts in resources;" a member of the middle class could be a wealthy merchant or a skilled

craftsman of limited economic means (Trainor 674). With this broad difference in available money and level of education, it is clear that the middle class represents a diverse social group. To Dickens, "middle class" is characterized most of all by ambition. Magwitch uses his illicit resources to elevate Pip to upper middle class, and Bounderby constantly positions himself to rise higher in the middle class, even resorting to creating a fiction of how he impossibly rose from the working class. The lower and upper classes, conversely, do not pursue ambition. The lower class exists outside of money in *Great Expectations* and *Hard Times,* and while they actively participate in the economy through their work, they do not receive any monetary or social benefit from it. The upper class is stagnant; they have already inherited their money and have no ambition to earn any more. Havisham lives in Satis House ("Enough House"), a monument to her disconnection from capitalism. Dickens emphasizes the middle class desire to achieve an upper class distinction. While it is impossible to become upper class (as the group is defined by existing money, not earnings), the middle class nevertheless aspires to it. It is this desire and ambition above all else that characterizes the middle class.

The industrial Coketown of *Hard Times* is inhabited by a misunderstood and misrepresented working class. Stephen Blackpool is the martyr of the novel – he is downtrodden by his peers and his social betters, and ultimately, dies as a result of Tom Gradgrind Junior's sins. Throughout the novel, the working class citizens are treated as objects, not people; Dickens deigns to call them "hands" in his narration. Conversely, the upper class representatives of the novel are out of touch with realistic concepts like money. Characters such as James Harthouse flitter in and out of the lives of others like ghosts, relying on no other means but their status to remain relevant; at the close of the novel, he opts to travel the world out of boredom, with no care for what he is leaving behind. Ms. Sparsit is a unique character in that she has lost her

fortune but nevertheless remains relevant. Bounderby keeps her in his service less as a housemaid and more as a possession, as something to wield to visitors to emphasize his own social aspirations. Bounderby himself accumulates objective wealth, but much like Pip in *Great Expectations,* never actually does anything with it. All of these characters in *Hard Times* reveal Dickens's distaste for social maneuvering, whether it is manipulation of the lower class or the scheming of the middle and upper classes.

Great Expectations takes the definitions of working and middle class further and characterizes them through the lens of money and appearances. Until the close of the novel, Pip does nothing with his expectations except accumulate debt – it is only when he finances Herbert's fledgling trade company that he actually accomplishes something. The novel focuses almost entirely on appearances; Pip's very rise to the middle class is brought on by Magwitch's desire to show off his own prowess, to form a construct of a gentleman that will "show them all." Estella, similarly, is the creation of Miss Havisham, who, like Harthouse and Sparsit, exists in an unreal world outside of wealth, where power comes from nothing. The result is the economization of the individual, which Dickens throws his fury against in the novel. Pip's interactions with those around him completely change once he comes into his money. For example, Mr. Pumblechook, a character who regarded Pip as little more than a piece of meat, changes his view on Pip once he learns about the money, and takes every opportunity to shake Pip's hand and offer him hospitality.

The lower class characters of *Great Expectations*, however, are completely divorced from the idea of money. On several occasions, Joe Gargery separates himself from money. Such is the case when Jaggers checks in on Pip and leaves money with him; Joe rushes after Jaggers to give the money back. Similarly, when Joe arrives to Pip's aid at the end of the novel, he removes

Pip's debt; however, the only evidence of Joe's having had any money is the receipt which shows the debt as being paid. Unlike the rest of the novel, the emphasis is not on the money involved in the debt, but rather the forgiveness of it, and the rediscovery of his friendship with Joe. The lower class's embrace of human values over currency serves as a bridge between *Great Expectations* and *Hard Times*. Another bridge is the incapability of the upper and middle classes to understand the human morality of the lower classes. Evidence of this is shown through Havisham's rickety dialogue with Joe, where Pip (now a gentleman) acts as an intermediary. Similarly, Bounderby has no understanding of Blackpool's situation with his wife. He can only rationalize it in terms of money, which is necessary to hire a lawyer; in his view, money leads to justice. Human morality is not a factor to people like Bounderby. The most chilling idea Dickens puts forth in the two novels is this forced divorce between people and their moral values. This is the failing of the middle and upper classes; they operate much in the same way as Bitzer, who at the end of *Hard Times* defines the heart as a biological device rather than a figurative representation of the soul.

This project consists of two halves, each dedicated to a single novel and its contribution toward Dickens's outlook on social conditions in Great Britain in the mid- to late-1800s. Together, the essays reveal that a great deal of Dickens's energy was spent arguing the virtues of the lower class and the failings of the middle and upper classes; and that, perhaps, the dark tone of these two novels provide the necessary contrast from Dickens's earlier, brighter works to highlight important social issues.

"Not Endowed with Expectations Only": Social Disparity and the Economic Gap in *Great Expectations*

Within the first several chapters of Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations,* much is said regarding Pip's upbringing in the working class. Pumblechook goes so far as to imagine Pip, the child raised "by hand," in a potential, alternate reality where he could have been born a pig. He engages Pip with the following: "What would have been your destination?...You would have been disposed of for so many shillings according to the market price of the article...and [the butcher] would have shed your blood and had your life" *(GE* 27). What is telling about this passage is that Pip, as a boy, is compared to a creature of commodity, one that only has value as an article of consumption. However, once Pip realizes and resents what it is to be "common," he obtains his expectations for a better life – and when his hopes are realized through Abel Magwitch's gift, he instantly transforms. He becomes a consumer of commodities. Dickens develops Pip's windfall of good fortune as an overarching argument that affluence remakes a person's social status – and, as a result, generates the previously-overlooked social and economic disparity between the lower and middle classes, and even within the middle class itself.

Pip's origins, prior to meeting Miss Havisham, consist of an existence devoid of any personal economic ambition or gain. The odd jobs that he does do for his neighbors prior to his apprenticeship earn him no money or personal consequence:

> A moneybox was kept...into which it was publicly made known that all my earnings were dropped. I have an impression that they were to be contributed eventually towards the liquidation of the National Debt, but I know I had no hope of any personal participation in the treasure. *(GE* 43)

This is a definitively socialist depiction of labor – the wages earned by Pip are given to his family (and on a larger scale, to the English nation itself), and he does not individually benefit. Beyond this instance, the accrual of money is not mentioned elsewhere regarding the working class's earnings. Mrs. Joe Gargery opposes the socialist society, and laments her placement within this society, and often compares her condition to slavery: "I have for ever been a willing slave to [Pip]" *(GE* 52). Dickens, however, portrays slavery more as want of a better life than an actual fact – in the lower class, seemingly no one owns anything beyond their clothes and shelter, and Mrs. Joe is not a consumer of commodities, who would have some sort of interaction with the economy. (Further evidence of the lack of "slavery", or more accurately, indentured labor, comes from the fact that Joe willingly breaks Pip's apprenticeship for impersonal reasons.) If anything, her view of her situation is only possible with a comparison to the middle class, of which she has merely a dream (as evidenced by her belief in Pip's lies about Havisham; she is drawn in by the lie because it is simply different than her current situation, true or not).

Dickens further solidifies the lower class's lack of any ambition to accumulate wealth through the character of Joe Gargery. At any point Joe is offered money, he declines it or gives it to someone else. Upon realizing that Pip is given two pounds instead of merely one coin by a servant to Magwitch, Joe "ran with [the coins]...to restore them to their owner" *(GE* 79). And again, when Pip is given 25 pounds for his service to Miss Havisham, Joe concocts a lie to say it was intended for Mrs. Joe, who happily accepts the money, because she aspires to a middle class life. Pip's 25 pound ends up being used in part for a feast among all their friends, which is again reflective of the importance of society over money within the lower class: "What [Havisham] giv'," Joe says, "she giv' to [Pip's] friends" *(GE* 103). He also discards money by paying Pip's debts at the end of the novel. (Pip, as narrator, never saw the transaction: "Enclosed in the letter

was a receipt for the debts and costs on which I had been arrested...I had never dreamed of Joe's having paid the money; but, Joe had paid it, and the receipt was in his name" *(GE* 472). Joe indeed settles the debt – but the actual existence of the money is merely implied. This further illustrates how disconnected Joe is from currency.) Through Joe, Dickens shows how the absence of money relocates value towards morality, friendship, and community. When Joe and Pip are confronted by Jaggers with the proposal to move to London, Jaggers views Pip as Joe's property and offers compensation. Conversely, Joe prefers to think of Pip as a friend rather than an apprentice (property): Joe states, "If you think as money – can make compensation to me – fur the loss of the little child – what come to the forge – and ever the best of friends" *(GE* 141). Joe is unable to attach a value to Pip, whereas someone like Jaggers is more than willing to set a price upon him – returning to Pumblechook's sermon on pigs, Jaggers is the butcher who can evaluate anyone's worth. Joe is incapable of this, and it confuses Jaggers, who is unable to see that Joe truly assigns no value to Pip, and subsequently implies that Joe is either simple-minded or merely bargaining for a better deal.

The treatment of money in the novel divides social classes further – there are lower class individuals who do not speak of money and there is the middle class that is empowered by money. However, Dickens does not seem to be condemning money per se. Rather, he makes a distinction between money that is being put to use, and money that is in stasis, effectively cleaving the middle class into two. Herbert and Pip, when they first meet, do nothing with their money. Herbert is interested in becoming an overseas trader, but he explains his progress upon meeting Pip: "I haven't begun insuring yet...I am looking about me" *(GE* 184). This "looking about" involves working in a counting-house and accumulating debt with Pip. In a true sense of accomplishing nothing, Pip and Herbert decide to "look into [their] affairs" *(GE* 275), which

really means ordering "something rather special for dinner" *(GE* 275), followed by a storm of pens on paper, and Pip's advice to Herbert to "look the thing in the face. Look into your affairs. Stare them out of countenance" *(GE* 276). Pip has perverted his world view to the point where he sees his debts as people that he can merely outclass with his gentlemanly charm. Essentially, Pip believes the problems of his being upper middle class will be solved simply by being upper middle class. However, Pip changes this harmful pattern when he helps Herbert start his business. Ultimately, this becomes his salvation, when his fortune is seized by the law. By partnering with Herbert at the end of the novel, he becomes a working middle class gentleman, and he has left the realm of middle class economic stasis. This middle versus upper class division continues throughout the novel and correlates with Dickens's sense of morality among the middle class; characters are good-hearted when their capital is in use building business or improving lives, and neutral or even evil when merely hoarding their money.

Susan Walsh argues that Miss Havisham is "an economic 'figure' – both as symbol and participant" within her essay "Bodies of Capital: *Great Expectations* and the Climacteric Economy" (Walsh 75). Early in the novel, Pip's encounter with Havisham is also his first encounter with economy itself. Her body and the surrounding Satis House impact him greatly. Walsh argues that Havisham's body, in its decaying form, is symbolic of deficit, despite her affluence. This is because "the social body is constituted like the human body. Coin and all representative currency...provide the economy's nutrition, mimicking the blood's nourishing action" (Walsh 78). Havisham's body is failing, and her brewery is no longer generating money (although she has enough currency to support herself without it). She is in economic stasis, losing money instead of making it, much as Herbert and Pip are until the overseas trading business starts up. Havisham "is a cold-blooded anti-monitoress who seems to atomize rather

than harmonize the competing interests of covetous men" (Walsh 90). Effectively, she is a disruptive force within the economies of the middle class. She goes beyond distancing herself from the lower classes by distancing herself from the middle class as well. She is the definition of stagnant wealth within the middle class that Pip initially and unintentionally mimics. As Walsh states, "her climacteric barrenness and her relentless hostility towards the family enterprise are closely related pathologies, each warning of a downward slide into socio-economic depletion and death" (Walsh 93). Havisham embodies all the vitriolic ideals of the "other middle class;" the contingent of people that do not effectively use money.

Michael Hollington, in his essay "Wemmick's Pig: Notes on the Recycling Economies of *Great Expectations*," uses the recurring theme of pigs throughout *Great Expectations* to contextualize the novel's economy as a whole; and through this, also presents an explanation for the class struggles present in the text. Consider Pumblechook's pig sermon – as stated before, this is foreshadowing into Pip's transition from lower to middle class, and into a consumer of commodity. Hollington addresses this moment by stating that "the idealized cornucopian rural pig-recycling economy we glimpse at the novel's outset is here travestied, or at least transformed, as market-driven forms of commodity production and consumption are now emphasized" (Hollington 54). This moment is the first entrance of personal economy into the text, and sets up Pip's forthcoming transition. What Pip leaves behind is not a monetary economy, but a "recycling economy." The lower class, practically pre-monetary society he lives in produces commodities which are used by its creators. London and its middle class rejects this idea of the recycling economy and is, in contrast, wasteful.

Hollington opts to use the recurring symbol of "grease" as a misused product to show London's literal filth and therefore perverse economy. Another example, which Hollington does

not use, is that of the Debtor's Door when Pip first arrives in London, he narrates that the minister of justice offered him "a full view of the Lord Chief Justice...mentioning that awful personage like waxwork, and presently offering him at the reduced price of eighteenpence" *(GE* 165). He goes on to witness

> Debtor's Door, out of which culprits came to be hanged: heightening the interest of that dreadful portal by giving me to understand that 'four on 'em' would come out at that door...to be killed in a row. This gave me a sickening idea of London: the more so as the Lord Chief Justice's proprietor wore...mildewed clothes, which had evidently not belonged to him originally, and which, I took it into my head, he had bought cheap of the executioner. *(GE* 166)

This is the economy of London and therefore the middle class. Debts – essentially "fake money," as it is the opposite of an earning – are accumulated. Although these are not literal economic debts that are predicating the executions, they are debts of justice to society, which manifest themselves in economic terms (reference Jaggers, who thrives off of the conversion of justice into money). Once the debtors are stopped, the ultimate act of wastefulness is committed: they are killed, and the minister of justice wears their clothes. (Ironically, the minister purchases the clothes from the executioner, who in turn take the articles from men who buy the clothing by accumulating debt – "fake money"). This is a perverse version of the recycling economy of the lower class. Money is not earned, but constantly shifted from one person to another into debt. People do not live off of debt in *Great Expectations*; they die from it, and their ill-gotten gains are spread to the highest bidder.

Wemmick is a hybrid of both lower and middle class, at times expressing contradictory thoughts depending on what setting he is in. Walworth, as Wemmick's home, is seemingly self-

sufficient; Wemmick's post in Jaggers's office, however, is a land dominated by commerce. The opposition of relationship valuation and money between classes is chiefly expressed in Wemmick's two contradictory personalities. At Walworth, Wemmick is outside of economy much like the Gargery family; regarding his home, he states, "I am my own engineer, and my own carpenter, and my own plumber, and my own gardener, and my own Jack of all Trades...it's a good thing [...] it pleases the Aged" *(GE* 207). Within this passage, Wemmick not only shows that he has applied talent (similar to Joe and his forge), but also is intent on "pleasing" his family, which ties back to the value of relationships found in the lower class. In London, Wemmick is solely interested in the upkeep of Jaggers's enterprise by counting money. His speech uses words and phrases that consistently relate to money – for example, he classifies Jaggers's time as "being valuable." The idea of value in London is different than Walworth – economic value is placed over people. The disparity between Wemmick's "sentiments" – monetary versus relational – are exemplified through the advice he gives to Pip concerning Herbert's enterprise. In London, Wemmick gives the following advice to Pip: "pitch your money into the Thames...and you know the end of it. Serve a friend with it, and you may know the end of it too – but it's a less pleasant and profitable end" *(GE* 291). The word "profitable" here relates to a strictly selfish economic viewpoint; because Pip cannot reap any direct monetary benefits from investing in Herbert, Wemmick sees it as a foolish move. Once at Walworth, his sentiments change: "Well, you know Mr. Pip, I must tell you one thing. This is devilishly good of you" *(GE* 296). The idea of "profit" has been replaced by the word "good." Wemmick, when surrounded by his family and possessions, is able to see the value in Pip's gesture towards his friend. The morality of the situation carries more weight, and the middle class notion of being smart with money is

discarded. In London, Wemmick advises Pip to value his money; at Walworth, Wemmick encourages Pip to help his friend.

Hollington argues that Wemmick is a part of the positive recycling economy that does not exist within London's middle class. At Walworth, he is able to make "a living out of animate and inanimate flotsam and jetsam" by remaining self-sufficient and operating in the pre-monetary, socialized way the lower class lives. The castle itself walls off Wemmick's family from the middle class – the fortifications are "allegorical bulwarks of Wemmick's suburban private life, designed for defensive repulse of contaminating intrusions and encroachments from...the workaday city world of crime and fraud" (Hollington 58).

Arlene Young's essay "Virtue Domesticated: Dickens and the Lower Middle Class" explores the idea of Wemmick's personality as contradictory to the typical middle class of London. Young resolves the problem of Wemmick's status as subservient to Jaggers, as residing in his membership among the "lower middle class." As Young states, "Wemmick accepts with equanimity the difference in social status between himself and his employer" (Young 496). This difference exists in the workplace (as Wemmick is a clerk to Jaggers), but more importantly, at his "freehold." Wemmick's property is different than that of Pip or Havisham, "mourning rings and brooches, mementoes of departed former clients, with which he adorns his person in a most un-middle-class manner" (Young 496). The fact that Wemmick owns property that carries sentimental value shows his ability to relate to the valuation of people not as commodities, but as personalities.

Familial legacy is another issue that is present within the middle class but seems sadly impossible with the lower class. An example of legacy in the middle class comes when Mr. and Mrs. Matthew Pocket are introduced into the story. Mrs. Pocket does not come into expectations

like Pip; she is born with them, as she was "brought up from her cradle as one who in the nature of things must marry a title" *(GE* 189). This obligation is due to the fact that her father was knighted "for storming the English grammar at the point of the pen" among other things *(GE* 189). The idea of enduring praise in the form of titles (which equates to a type of currency to be used in advancing one's expectations) is unknown to the lower class, but is prized by the middle class. Joe praised his father's virtues, and wanted to engrave an epitaph praising his father's morality. However, due to his station as a craftsman, he is illiterate and therefore incapable of engraving the tombstone himself, and he cannot afford to hire someone else to perform the task for him. The words themselves were free because Joe created them "like striking out a horseshoe complete" *(GE* 47). The way Joe phrases his predicament is crucial: "Poetry costs money, cut it how you will, small or large, and it were not done" *(GE* 47). Joe is referring to the cost of hiring a literate person to engrave the poetry for him, but he correlates "poetry" and "money" directly, as if the words themselves are middle class. Joe was "never much so surprised in all [his] life" when he wrote the couplets for his father's gravesite *(GE* 47), indicating that elegant speech is the property of the middle class.

Joe's intended epitaph and the story of Mrs. Pocket's father intersect as they both involve language. In the middle class, adequate usage of language equates to education, which in turn results in economic wealth or expectations, as Mrs. Pocket's father becomes a knight based on his ability to write. However, with the lower class there is no such language. The result is a striking barrier. The most poignant clash between lower- and middle-class speech comes when Joe and Miss Havisham meet. Joe cannot say a single word to Miss Havisham; instead, he talks through his intermediary, Pip. Havisham understands the situation perfectly, while Pip struggles to grasp why Joe can't communicate with Havisham directly: she "glanced at [Joe] as if she

understood what he really was, better than I had thought possible, seeing what he was there" *(GE* 101). The solitary instance in the story where Joe writes involves analogies to blacksmithing: "Joe now sat down to his great work, first choosing a pen from the pen-tray as if it were a chest of large tools, and tucking up his sleeves as if he were going to wield a crowbar or sledge-hammer" *(GE* 464). Because Joe is confined to the mindset and education of a craftsman, he approaches writing and speaking in a completely different manner than the middle class. Language, the domain of the wealthy, is also used by Dickens to illustrate the disparity between Magwitch and Pip. Magwitch asks Pip to read to him in a foreign language, and "while [Pip] complied, he, not comprehending a single word, would stand before the fire surveying me with the air of an Exhibitor, and I would see him...appealing in dumb show to the furniture to take notice of my proficiency" *(GE* 339). The irony of Magwitch's accomplishment of making Pip into a gentleman is that he himself cannot truly view all the benefits.

The idyllic world of the working class life is shattered once Pip meets Miss Havisham. The economics of Havisham's life are in a state of decay and disuse. She lives in a mansion at a brewery that is no longer in use since her betrothal was broken, and her wealth lies scattered around her, unused: "some other jewels lay sparkling on the table. Dresses, less splendid than the dress she wore, and half-packed trunks, were scattered about" *(GE* 57). What truly turns Pip from lower class to an aspiring gentleman is his being rebuffed by Estella. Until he meets her, he cannot realize that his clothing is poor, and that he speaks and acts like a working class person. It is the contrast between himself and his new surroundings that makes him self conscious; and it is Estella's scolding that makes him ashamed of what he is, and wishful for a different life. He doesn't realize the need for economic wealth until he is shown that he doesn't have it: now, he ponders ideas such as "I was a common labouring-boy; that my hands were coarse, that my boots

were thick; that I had fallen into a despicable habit of calling knaves Jacks; that I was much more ignorant than I considered myself last night, and generally that I was in a low-lived bad way" *(GE* 65). He is horrified by Havisham and her surroundings, and wants nothing to do with her wealth – but, he is enthralled with Estella's beauty, and when she criticizes him, he takes it to heart. He begins to want to be a gentleman, which means he also wants to be wealthy and well-educated. If he had remained ignorant of the idea of wealth, and the resulting disparity between lower and middle classes, he never would have wanted to leave his life with Joe and Biddy, nor would he have temporarily lost his ability to relate to others in a non-economic way.

Martina Sciolino's essay "Woman as Object of Exchange in Dickens' *Great Expectations* and Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*" explores the idea of Estella as currency throughout the novel. Sciolino uses a literary Marxist viewpoint to argue that Pip's first realization of his "low-lived bad way" is based upon the overvaluing and fetishizing of Estella: "his infatuation for her is equivalent to his belief that money makes the man. Estella is, for Pip, a sign of social success" (Sciolino 100). The reason that Pip even glimpses Estella is because Havisham wishes her to be an instrument of revenge. Sciolino states that Estella is a commodity; she is "a construct of Havisham's psychological transactions" (Sciolino 102). This is undoubtedly true as Havisham continually highlights Estella's value to Pip in an effort to increase it. At one point, she "took up a jewel from the table, and tried its effect upon her fair young bosom and against her pretty brown hair" *(GE* 60). The symbolism of money matched with Estella continues when Pip fights Herbert and he is given a kiss as a reward, "given to the coarse common boy as a piece of money might have been, and that it was nothing" *(GE* 93). Sciolino's argument that Estella is a commodity traded between Havisham and suitors as retroactive revenge can be extended further – Estella becomes a debt to Pip which he desperately tries to pay throughout the rest of the novel.

His sole purpose for accepting assets from Jaggers and leaving Joe is for Estella. The creation of the rift between lower and middle class in Pip's mind can be laid upon Havisham's employment of Estella to tempt him; as Pip narrates, Havisham "looked at me, with a searching glance that seemed to pry into my heart and probe its wounds. 'How does she use you, Pip [. . .]?'" *(GE* 302). Consequently, Dickens utilizes Estella as an object of economic value, through which Pip and the reader are introduced to the disparity between social classes, and the middle class's pervasive treatment of people in economic terms.

While Estella is the creation of Havisham's desire for revenge against men, Pip is essentially the creation of Magwitch's desire for revenge against gentlemen. Pip comments on Satis House by saying that "in the progress of time I too had come to be a part of the wrecked fortunes of that house" *(GE* 395). Effectively, he has become a commodity much as Estella did. Estella is used as a sort of currency to purchase Havisham's revenge, and Pip is a commodity that Magwitch purchased to impress: "from the judge in his wig, to the colonist a stirring up the dust, I'll show a better gentleman than the whole kit on you put together!" *(GE* 332). This section of the story is concerned with a lower class man using money to imitate the methods and outlook of penetrate the middle class. In his excitement at seeing his success with Pip, Magwitch even creates a name for their relationship: "I'm your second father. You're my son." He doesn't exactly specify why this is so, but in the very next sentence Magwitch states that he's "put away money, only for [Pip]..." implying that the relationship is founded entirely upon money *(GE* 320). There is no limit to for what Magwitch believes money can buy, and he lists off other things: "[Estella] shall be yourn, dear boy, if money can buy 'em. Not that a gentleman like you, so well set up as you, can't win 'em off of his own game; but money shall back you" *(GE* 321). Pip is terrified, but

what Magwitch is stating is correct – Money is the sole reason Pip could fuel his expectation to successfully transition from lower to middle class.

The catharsis that Magwitch experiences from his accomplishment disturbs Pip profoundly – when Herbert asks if he will continue to accept money, Pip replies, "How can I? Think of him! Look at him!" *(GE* 342). The phrase "look at him" is crucial – with this exclamation, Pip draws attention to how Magwitch is a lower class individual through his appearance. There is no leg iron to classify him as a convict, but nevertheless, Pip is able to see him as a person unworthy of being a benefactor – not on the same level as Pip, and therefore, lower class. Though they are bound to each other, Magwitch's accomplishment has created a social division between himself and his beneficiary. Convict and lower class are seemingly interchangeable at this moment in the story. Pip states his dissatisfaction with Magwitch again when he speaks to Havisham and Estella, telling them that finding out his patron is "not a fortunate discovery, and is not likely ever to enrich me in reputation, station, fortune, anything" *(GE* 359). Magwitch is out of place in middle-class environs no matter what he attempts: "The more I dressed him and the better I dressed him, the more he looked like the slouching fugitive...from head to foot there was Convict in the very grain of the man" *(GE* 337). There is a certain immutable quality about the lower class that nothing except money combined with expectations can hope to change. Pip says the same about Joe during his London visit: "Why should [Joe] suppose it necessary to be purified by suffering for his holiday clothes?" *(GE* 222). Joe is content with being lower class, but takes on the trappings of a middle class citizen so that he can enter Pip's realm; Pip sees through this because he lacks the mannerisms associated with the middle class. Similarly, Magwitch is not driven to raise his own social status, and chooses to

elevate Pip with his money instead; because of this, he loses his own ability to become middle class.

Bruce Robbins explores the idea of the lower class, penniless criminal as benefactor within his essay "How to Be a BenefactorWithout Any Money: The Chill of Welfare in *Great Expectations*." The focus of the essay is on how Pip's good fortunes are complicated by the fact that they are, essentially, ill-gotten gains. Magwitch's gift has is a criminal source, but put to work through Pip, it becomes purified; particularly, when Pip funds Herbert's mercantilism. Pip is "a benefactor without money of his own, a benefactor with other people's money" (Robbins 188). Magwitch, therefore, sees no personal benefit from this money, but rather, a sort of benefit through proxy. He remains lower class despite the fact that he has accrued his own capital, and the reason he does not become elevated is because of his selflessness. Robbins states: "If property comes from Magwitch, then the acquisition of property cannot be what upward mobility is about...this selflessness expresses itself in a peculiar form: by valuing a more equitable circulation of property over the personal possession of property" (Robbins 189). This argument can be extended to state that Magwitch's ambition is to see his money put to work, rather than to become a gentleman himself. This idea of the lower class manipulating the middle class can certainly be applied to Pip's endorsement of Herbert's business; the money is a "lower class" source, manipulating Herbert's middle class enterprise.

Robbins continues his essay by providing contemporary Victorian examples of class mobility. One such example comes from Mary Poovey's *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*, which describes the elevation of nurses to a more respected status, which subverted doctors but also provided increased economical space for nurses (and women in general). The effect is, as Robbins states, that "a narrative of upward

mobility could be held to involve, at least to some degree, reaffirming loyalty to one's origins rather than forsaking them" (Robbins 190). The nurses that Robbins cites from Poovey's text are not necessarily benefiting themselves, but future generations of nurses. The same can be said of Magwitch's actions. Pip is elevated, but returns to his origins. He attempts to rescue Magwitch at the end of the novel "for a *second* time," as Robbins states (Robbins 190), coming to value him again as a person and not as a source of economic benefit, just as he did originally in the marshes. However, in so doing he also returns to the relationships he had before. He returns to the Kent marshes with the intent to marry Biddy, and his musings before the fact (and before he realizes she is already married) illuminate his thoughts on his origins: "I hope I am a little worthier of you than I was" *(GE* 472). The idea that Pip's "worth" has increased supports Robbins's claim that class mobility is a circular process. While Pip cannot become lower class again, his return to his origins show that he has placed value in those he originally left behind; that he has become "worthier" in the sense that he has lost his fortune but retained his capital in relationships (which is the chief currency of the lower class throughout the novel).

Throughout the novel, clothing is symbolic of a person's affluence and social status (or lack thereof). Aprons are Dickens's symbol of the working class, as Pip, Mrs. Joe, and Joe are all seen wearing them at the beginning of the novel. (In fact, Mrs. Joe made it "a powerful merit in herself, and a strong reproach against Joe, that she wore this apron so much" *(GE* 8). When they deviate from these norms to impress the middle class, the outcome is a series of wardrobe oddities. For Joe, when he dressed "in his holiday clothes...nothing he wore then, fitted him or seemed to belong to him; and everything that he wore then, grazed him" *(GE* 23). Pip, being Joe's companion, suffers from the same displacement when wearing strange clothing for equally special occasions. When meeting Miss Havisham, Pip "was put into clean linen of the stiffest

character, like a young penitent into sackcloth, and was trussed up in my tightest and fearfullest suit" *(GE* 53). In both the passages quoted, Pip and Joe are not in control of their appearances; Pip feels uncomfortable and like he is being punished, while Joe wears clothing that makes him appear as a "scarecrow," something utterly inhuman *(GE* 23). In comedic fashion, when Mrs. Joe goes to town with Joe and Pip in preparation for their journey to Satis House, she was "leading the way in a very large beaver bonnet, and carrying a basket like the Great Seal of England in plaited straw, a pair of pattens, a spare shawl, and an umbrella, though it was a fine bright day" *(GE* 99). With these images of clothing early in the novel (and repeated again when Pip sees Joe in London, and at the funeral for Mrs. Joe), Dickens is establishing that the lower class is as ignorant of the middle class as the middle class is of them. Mrs. Joe carries a satchel of unnecessary clothing because she feels they add importance to her character, or an air of affluence; as Pip comments, "I rather think they were displayed as articles of property – much as Cleopatra or any other sovereign lady on the Rampage might exhibit her wealth in a pageant or procession" *(GE* 99-100). Joe wears his holiday clothes, presumably, because he is supposed to (or expected to) wear them. Once in London, the theme of clothing comes to a pinnacle as Joe declares,

> "Diwisions among such must come...it ain't that I am proud, but that I want to be right, as you shall never see me no more in these clothes. I'm wrong in these clothes. I'm wrong out of the forge, the kitchen, or off th'meshes. You won't find half so much fault in me if you think of me in my forge dress." *(GE* 224)

It is important to note the use of the word "divisions," as it is serving a dual purpose within this passage – Joe's dress is divided between his blacksmith apron and holiday clothes, and Joe and Pip are divided by their class distinctions. Joe decides, at this point in the novel, he can no longer

see Pip, and uses the narrator's own device of describing Joe's holiday trappings as ill-fitting. The idea that social mobility is enabled by expectations fueled by money is supported by the fact that clothing, regardless of quality, cannot mask the individual's social standing.

Scent is another theme Dickens employs to emphasize the divisions between lower and middle class. Within "The Smell of Class: British Novels of the 1860s," Janice Carlisle states that "there are no smells evoked in the novels of the 1860s that are not linked to the specific class positions of either those who emit them or those who perceive them" (Carlisle 3). Throughout the text, the people who perceive scents are middle class, while the lower class emanates these scents. This is indicative of the fact that the lower class is constantly at work producing commodities, while the middle class merely uses them. Carlisle states that Pip "consistently equates artisans with the odors of their products" (Carlisle 5), such as with Hubble and Pumblechook ("somehow, there was a general air and flavor about the corduroys, so much in the nature of seeds" *(GE* 54)). Characters like Herbert Pocket have no scent whatsoever, according to Pip's narration, even when they are smoking cigars – "they smoke cigars that are wholly inodorous, but they notice as explicitly rank the cigars of half-pay soldiers and betting men" (Carlisle 5). Carlisle classifies Jaggers as having a "lowly status in the legal hierarchy" because of his liberal application of soap after trials (and Pip's recognition of this scent), but this in fact classifies Jaggers as middle class. Pip narrates, "he washed his clients off, as if he were a surgeon or a dentist. He had a closet in his room fitted up for the purpose, which smelt of the scented soap like a perfumer's shop" *(GE* 210). The implication is not that Jaggers is a lower class tradesman (with the reference to the perfume shop), but rather, that he is elevated above his clients. Whenever he is finished with a client, he wishes to erase any involvement he had with

them, in a symbolic manner, by washing his hands of their scent. Therefore, he is (effectively) distancing himself from the lower class through this act.

Throughout the novel, Jaggers overpowers anyone lower class, primarily because of his elevated station and ability to value nearly everything in economic terms. His formal introduction to the story comes at a time when Wopsle is characteristically impressing his community with his intellectual skills. Jaggers upstages him by presenting the lack of conclusive evidence in the case Wopsle provides, and eventually, everyone was “deeply persuaded that the unfortunate Wopsle had gone too far, and had better stop in his reckless career while there was yet time” *(GE* 136). He then goes on to “purchase” Pip from Joe (offering Joe compensation "for the loss of [Pip's] services") *(GE* 141). His experience with Molly, Estella, and Miss Havisham unfolds in a similar, economic manner. He trades legal protection for Molly in exchange for Estella, for Jaggers "held a trust to find a child for an eccentric rich lady to adopt and bring up" *(GE* 413). His obligation is to fulfill a transaction mandated by Havisham (and presumably, one that is profitable to him). He later refers to Estella as "the subject of those 'poor dreams' which have...been in the heads of more men than you think" *(GE* 414). The use of the word "poor" implies that desire for Estella is empty and has no value. In fact, the mere notion that he tells the tale is because he learns from Pip of Wemmick's private life. He provides the commodity of knowledge in return for knowledge. This is the mind of Jaggers – he does not value personal relationships like the lower class, but purely as exchanges of capital.

Justice is an economic theme throughout the novel, and it carries with it the opposition between Magwitch and Compeyson. When brought to trial, Magwitch and Compeyson are given "separate defences, no communication" *(GE* 350). The lawyer describes Compeyson as "the younger, well brought up, who will be spoke to as such" and Magwitch is "the elder, ill brought

up, who will be spoke to as such" *(GE* 351). The lawyer isn't asking the jury, prosecution, and judge to consider these notions, rather, he is stating facts as if they are already understood. By speaking to each defendant "as such," the defense attorney is classifying them. Magwitch is "always wi' his guilt brought him with him," as if he cannot escape being cast down with the lower class *(GE* 351). The dichotomy of Magwitch and Compeyson throughout the description of the trial is indicative of a difference in class. The authorities don't even care to dredge up Compeyson's corpse, but the Jack's "interest in its recovery seemed to me to be much heightened when he heard that it had stockings on" *(GE* 446), indicating that it is not Compeyson himself that is valuable, but his symbols of wealth. Throughout the novel, people without station and money are denied legal justice. When Pip first meets Wemmick and Jaggers, he is witness to the concept that people who have paid Jaggers will receive justice in return. The repeated question "Have you paid Wemmick?" is analogous to justice *(GE* 168). The description of Molly's case involves a transaction as well – a child for innocence. Once she delivers her payment, her justice is guaranteed. The fact that justice hinges on the presence and trading of valuable commodities adds to the chasm between the lower and middle classes.

John Lindberg's essay titled "Individual Conscience and Social Injustice in Great Expectations" develops the idea that morality is the most powerful and redeeming capital in the novel; and subsequently, the essay shows how Pip's movement from lower to middle class involved a loss and regaining of conscience. Lindberg cites Mrs. Joe as an example, since she is not content with her life and takes her frustrations out on Pip and Joe. Once she becomes disabled by Orlick and is unable to speak, her redemption begins. Before her death she "mutters a pathetic request for forgiveness, because she has come to understand that her discarded protective image...was a cruel imposition on her household" (Lindberg 119-120). Lindberg

relates Mrs. Joe's redemption to Pip's reawakening after losing Magwitch and recovering from his fever. The notable difference is that Pip incorporates the theme of economy. After these events, Pip "resolved to insure a proper moral economy throughout the rest of his life" and he has "adjusted himself to expectations of a greater value than is found in the marketplace" (Lindberg 122). Once Pip loses his financial means and discards his expectations, he remains middle class, but regains the morality of the lower class. As Lindberg states, this morality transcends money. This is precisely why a character like Joe is able to remain pure (as he is impervious to the idea of money), and also why someone like Jaggers is ambivalent to the concept of good or evil (as he rarely operates without being paid, or mentioning money). Although Pip is still middle class at the end of the novel, he is able to recover the value system of the lower class. This sense of regained morality correlates with the division between the middle class of economic stasis versus productive capitalism.

Pip's regeneration at the end of the novel signals a shift of value from straight currency to strong relationships. Once Pip connects with Magwitch on an emotional, human level, he is able to contextualize his failings (of accumulating debt and shunning his past relations), and embrace "what his heart used to be" (by applying his intellect to earn his money, and by paying his respects to Joe and Biddy). As Pip states, his experiences with Magwitch "put into my mind what I might not otherwise have thought of until too late: That [Magwitch] need never know how his hopes of enriching me had perished" *(GE* 447). And although Pip is forever a part of the middle class, he is no longer in trapped in the middle class's economic viewpoint, and he is no longer putting aside his lower class relations. He is "enriched" because he is rich in heart. But only through experiencing the tribulations that he did, could Pip come to this realization. The fact of the matter is that, to Dickens, people like Compeyson and Bentley Drummle are very much a

reality of London's middle class. At the end of the novel, it is Pip who is saved; not London. As the narrator states, "all swindlers upon earth are nothing to the self-swindlers, and with such pretences did I cheat myself" *(GE* 225). With the generation of the concepts of debt accumulation and economic valuation of life's every detail come the fallacies of the middle class, and its subsequent distancing from the lower class.

"Dusty Little Mills:" Social Subjugation and Dominance in *Hard Times*

Hard Times, published seven years prior to *Great Expectations,* contains a more general approach to the issue of social class. While *Great Expectations* focuses on economic symbolism and the class division created by the middle class's monetary treatment of class and personal relations, *Hard Times* more broadly addresses the actual character traits, ideologies, and roles that separate the lower, middle, and upper classes. The earlier novel represents an effort by Charles Dickens to provide a complete view of societal disparities; it is not until later, with *Great Expectations,* that Dickens hones in on the specific phenomenon of economic influence on social class.

Hard Times separates classes not only with physical barriers – such as monetary means and occupation – but also according to emotional disparities. From the beginning of the novel, Thomas Gradgrind Sr. preaches that "facts alone are wanted in life" (*HT* 9). To people like Gradgrind, facts are unchanging quantities that serve to simplify the world and place every object and person into a certain category. These very facts are what the middle class ascribes great value to, while the lower class focuses on matters of the heart. Gradgrind seeks to educate Sissy Jupe but fails, because as a member of the lower class, she lacks the faith in facts over emotions that the middle and upper classes hold to. There is no better example of this ideological gulf than the end of the novel, where Gradgrind is searching for his son and is accosted by Bitzer, a former student. Bitzer tells Gradgrind, "I am sure you know that the whole social system is a question of self-interest" (*HT* 277), which is supported by the rest of the novel, but thanks to Sissy's entreaties, Gradgrind now realizes the importance of sympathy and emotional considerations. His counter-argument to Bitzer involves an emotional plea, but this is contrary to heartless factuality; what Gradgrind realizes he wants is a balance between fact and fancy, but

the novel responds by leaving this issue unresolved and unchanged. The ending is an anti-climax; Thomas Gradgrind Jr. merely escapes from justice, Stephen Blackpool, the sympathetic worker of the novel (and analog of Joe Gargery), suffers a martyr's death. The result is a dark ending, matching Dickens's equally dark, later social outlook. The novel as a whole exposes the failure of the lower, middle, and upper classes to communicate and interact on equal terms; and while the novel, through Gradgrind's revelation, shows the power of what might be, the portrait of the system that currently exists exposes seemingly irreconcilable differences.

The problem among the social classes begins with Gradgrind's education of his children and students. Through his influence, Bitzer becomes a man of pure logic and selfishness, Louisa becomes trapped in a loveless marriage created out of economic convenience rather than love, and Gradgrind Jr. becomes a thief, pursuing wealth regardless of the human cost (which is ultimately Stephen Blackpool's life). The overlying issue with Gradgrind's family and students, as a microcosm of the middle class, is that they do not value individuals, or indeed individuality. When asked to define a horse, Bitzer quickly replies "Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth," listing the physical attributes of every horse (*HT* 12). Conversely, Sissy Jupe is unable to comply with the request, presumably because such a generalization cannot be made when she has grown up among horsemen and seen so many distinct horses. Lower class characters like Sissy Jupe distinguish among individuals and find it impossible to generalize; middle class characters like Gradgrind and Bitzer cannot see past narrow definitions that cover large groups. In Louisa's case, she even loses her own individuality. Because of her upbringing, she sees no reason why she should not marry Bounderby, because Gradgrind, in his education, never accounted for personal taste:

> Perhaps he might have seen one wavering moment in her, when she was impelled to…give him the pent-up confidences of her heart. But, to see it, he must have overleaped at a bound the artificial barriers he had for many years been erecting, between himself and all those subtle essences of humanity which will elude the utmost cunning of algebra until the last trumpet ever to be sounded shall blow even algebra to wreck. (*HT* 99)

These artificial, quantitative barriers are what prevent the middle class from appreciating individualism, and Dickens maintains that in the end, these barriers are superficial, not indicative of the qualities of society or people that really matter. This idea of the incalculable emotional connections between people eludes the entire middle class throughout the novel. Several times in the novel, Sissy Jupe has difficulty finding clear definitions (such as with horses as a group) and hard figures to quantify social issues. Gradgrind, through Dickens' narration, even admits that "he was not sure that if he had been required, for example, to tick her off into columns in parliamentary return, he would have quite known how to divide her" (*HT* 92). Much like how Dickens identifies a glimpse of individuality in Louisa, Gradgrind realizes that Sissy resoundingly rejects categorization. This tendency to create generalizations is something that Gradgrind indoctrinates his children with, but Dickens indicates that it is simply unsustainable given human nature.

Catherine Gallagher explores the concept of Gradgrind's family as representative of middle class society in her essay "Family and Society in *Hard Times*." The connection is not completely parallel; Gallagher states that the novel "emphasizes thematically the very thing [it] cannot achieve structurally: the integration of public and private life" (Gallagher 173). The novel metaphorically relates family to society, but at the same time, distances the two by emphasizing the importance of family over society; nevertheless, Gallagher states, "the novel questions the

very enterprise of making metaphors in a world where connections, when they are possible, are almost always destructive" (Gallagher 174). This statement is undoubtedly true of Gradgrind when he attempts to categorize by broad definitions instead of appreciating individuality. The analogy between family and society begins with the school children, but then transitions to the conflicts of adults, namely Bounderby against Blackpool and Louisa against her father. Bounderby fails to view Blackpool as a person, and instead, quantifies the problem in terms of law (interchangeable for Gradgrind's "facts"). Similarly, Gradgrind views Louisa's marriage as a calculation rather than an emotional union, stating that "it is not unimportant to take into account the statistics of marriage" when convincing Louisa to marry (*HT* 98). According to Gallagher, the parallel between "workers and daughters" succeeds because "both were believed to be perpetual children who never develop completely separate interests" (Gallagher 178). It is certainly true that throughout the novel Louisa endures the same subjugation as the working class underneath the middle class. However, this metaphor between family and society disappears when the Gradgrind family is at last united by common emotions at the end of the novel; the family "ostensibly comes to embody the virtues of loyalty and compassion, and thereby takes a necessary step toward becoming an appropriate model for society" (Gallagher 179). However, this mending of the Gradgrind family occurs with no change to society itself. The family achieves solidarity only when it breaks away from the rest of society; symbolically, this is achieved by Gradgrind's revelation about the importance of human emotion at Sleary's circus, his daughter's escape from her marriage, and his son's subsequent escape from the law. The family stops mimicking society and becomes a private entity. As Gallagher states, "the novel actually presents a series of separations: separations between the family and society, and

separations within the family itself" (Gallagher 184). While the family may end up with a somewhat hopeful ending, society itself is left unchanged.

James Harthouse is a fantastical creature, much like Miss Havisham in *Great Expectations*; and like that novel, *Hard Times* is depicting the upper class, and the upper reaches of the middle class that are merging into it, as utterly disconnected from the issues and concerns of the lower and middle classes. When his attempted affair with Louisa fails, he merely leaves, writing a short letter – "Dear Jack. All up at Coketown. Bored out of the place, and going for camels. Affectionately, JEM" (*HT* 229). The fact that he can relocate so easily is disturbing, especially in the face of Stephen Blackpool's dramatic exit from Coketown, where he is ostracized by both his peers and Bounderby. He appears almost supernaturally in the lives of the other main characters. Bounderby and Gradgrind bring him into the fold purely because he is a gentleman, and for no other reason: "they went about recruiting; and where could they enlist recruits more hopefully, than among the fine gentlemen who, having found out everything to be worth nothing, were equally ready for anything?" (*HT* 124). The reason why Gradgrind and Bounderby would "employ" someone only for their social status is left unexplained. The implication, however, is that upper class gentlemen have their own innate worth, without actually performing a task, or at least that none is required of them by a middle class otherwise devoted to facts. Their reaction bears a certain resemblance to the fascinated worship of the upper and upper middle classes by characters like Pumblechook in *Great Expectations*. Dickens writes that the school "liked fine gentlemen; they pretended that they did not, but they did. They became exhausted in imitation of them; and they yaw-yawed in their speech like them…there never before was seen on earth such a wonderful hybrid race as was thus produced" (*HT* 124). Rather than admiring what Harthouse is capable of, they appreciate his aesthetic and social qualities;

gentlemanly qualities that the lower class has no clear concept of, and the middle class wants but does not have (and, like Bounderby, tries unsuccessfully to imitate). The hands of *Hard Times* work and are criticized; characters like Harthouse do not work, and are rewarded. Dickens uses this inverse relationship to emphasize the disparity between the classes.

People like James Harthouse are capable of representing themselves; but as much as the upper class is looked up to, the lower class is misrepresented by others, and apparently powerless to correct the misrepresentation. Throughout the novel, different parties foist their belief systems upon the Coketown workers: others were always

> indignantly petitioning for acts of parliament that should make these people religious by main force…the Teetotal Society…proved at tea parties that no inducement, human or Divine (except a medal), would induce them to forgo their custom of getting drunk. Then, came the chemist and druggist, with other tabular statements, showing that when they didn't get drunk, they took opium. (*HT* 29)

The defining characteristic of the lower class throughout the novel is that they are continually, incorrectly defined by their social betters, much as the lower class is misunderstood by the middle class figures in *Great Expectations*. Slackbridge, the union representative, is not in fact representative of his subjects. He aims to incite rather than sponsor, telling the workers that "the hour is come, when we must rally round one another as One united power, and crumble into dust the oppressors" (*HT* 137). His mistake is in taking away the individuality of the workers. Although his agenda is beneficial to the "hands," it is not their own agenda; much like the middle and upper class oppressors he names, he is using the workers to pursue a political agenda of his own. Because of his ill intent, Dickens states that he "contrasted most unfavorably" with the workers around him, and "in great many respects, he was essentially below them" (*HT* 137).

Instead of being treated as individuals, the lower class is labeled by their most important body parts – they are "hands," not people. Upon introducing the term, Dickens describes them as a "race who would have found more favour with some people, if Providence had seen fit to make them only hands" (*HT* 66). Again, the middle and upper classes are depicted as selfish; they see the "hands" as economic capability rather than a social responsibility. Stephen Pulsford, in his essay "The Aesthetic and the Closed Shop: The Ideology of the Aesthetic in Dickens's *Hard Times*," argues that the struggle of the lower class to identify itself is ultimately an aesthetic issue. Middle class representatives such as Gradgrind and Bounderby oppose the aesthetic throughout the novel, arguing in favor of facts. Conversely, Sissy, representing the lower class, champions the aesthetic by appreciating art and emotion. Her place of origin, Sleary's circus, stands in complete opposition to the Coketown atmosphere, and subsequently, Gradgrind's belief system. As Pulsford states, "Though Sissy is not allowed to justify her aesthetic preferences, she, in her salvation of Louisa, and the circus, in its effects on the population of Coketown, become part of Dickens's defense of his own aesthetic" (Pulsford 150). It requires aesthetic taste to see through the practical application of the working class to their personal worth. The middle class is continually rejecting the aesthetic perspective, and in turn, preventing the lower class from asserting itself as a group of individuals. Louisa realizes the mistake of the middle class when she visits Stephen Blackpool: "She knew of their existence by hundreds and by thousands" but at the moment of meeting Blackpool in his home, "for the first time in her life, she was face to face with anything like individuality in connexion with them" (*HT* 155). Suddenly, the differences that separate the middle and lower classes become less distinct to Louisa, and she begins to appreciate individuality. As Pulsford states, Louisa and Gradgrind's appreciation of the lower class by the end of the novel exemplifies "the power of the aesthetic to critique autocratic

middle-class political discourse that is unsympathetic to the real situation of the working class it regulates" (Pulsford 154). Divorcing the aesthetic from the lower class results in a situation not unlike Pumblechook's description in *Great Expectations* of Pip as a pig led to slaughter; in both novels, treating the lower class as a commodity and not as individuals dehumanizes them.

Appreciation of the aesthetic is an ideal that separates the lower class from everyone else. Efraim Sicher, in his essay "Dickens and the Pleasure of the Text: The Risks of *Hard Times*," argues that "Gradgrind's statistical account of society contradicts the lived life of individuals" since it is a perspective that does not account for personal tastes (Sicher 318). Gradgrind's world view (shared by people such as Bounderby) inappropriately narrows the lives of the lower class – the middle class, by extension, limits the social space of the lower class. Dickens emphasizes this limitation through symbolism, particularly in his description of Sleary's circus. It is a place of pure fancy that Gradgrind cannot comprehend, while he crushes his children's furtive attempts to comprehend and enjoy it. The circus is portrayed by Gradgrind as the opposite of his schoolhouse – a negative, useless place. It is ironic, then, how the circus ends up saving Gradgrind's son through its imaginative qualities, by utilizing a plan involving a trained dog and horse to distract Bitzer and deliver Gradgrind Jr. to safety. As Sicher states, "Dickens's novel presents a defense of fancy as useful labor, and its representation of Fancy is performative in its imaginative work" (Sicher 326). Thus, the aesthetics and emotional capacity of the lower class are useful in their own way; Dickens is arguing that the middle class, by discounting an aesthetic and emotional point of view, is denying the lower classes a great deal of cooperative potential, and dooming itself to unhappiness. Gradgrind, in marrying his middle class ideals with lower class ingenuity, is able to resolve his problems happily.

Josiah Bounderby is a character who consistently miscommunicates with the lower and upper classes. Stephen Blackpool and Bounderby, upon discussing a potential divorce between Blackpool and his wife, are unable to come to an understanding based on their completely different moral systems. Blackpool's strategy is to ask Bounderby for help in finding a law that will help him escape his marriage, but Bounderby contradicts this with his assertion that "there's a sanctity in this relation of life…and it must be kept up" (*HT* 76). He agrees that there is a law that could help Blackpool escape his situation, "but it's not for you at all. It costs money" (*HT* 76). Much like characters such as Jaggers, Bounderby sees the world not only in terms of fact (his adherence to the law) but also in terms of money. He realizes that someone like Blackpool has no money available, but more than that, the law simply does not apply to Blackpool because of his lack of affluence and status. Blackpool laments his helpless situation, and Bounderby refutes this: "don't you call the institutions of your country a muddle…the institutions of your country are not your piece-work, and the only thing you have got to do is mind your own piece-work" (*HT* 77). It is clear by this statement that Bounderby is unable to empathize with Blackpool; he believes that since the social classes are segmented into different roles, their mindsets should be as well. Being a member of the country is not enough; you must have status in order to affect your situation, and as a working class person, Blackpool is unable to do anything. Bounderby chooses to chastise Blackpool once more when he is exiting the house – he, very confusingly, brings Ms. Sparsit into the conversation, calling her a "born lady" and stating that she "has had her own marriage misfortunes to the tune of tens of thousands of pounds – tens of Thou-sands of Pounds!' (he repeated with great relish)" (*HT* 77). He then accuses Blackpool of trying to take money that he is not entitled to, using his repeated accusation of "turtle soup, and venison, and gold spoon" (*HT* 77). The difficulty with Bounderby throughout the novel is

that he has no concept of "human" ideals. The most important aspect of this situation to Blackpool is how miserable his life is because of his wife's mental illness; to Bounderby, the most significant issue is a number – Sparsit's tens of thousands of pounds. Described another way, Bounderby's issue is insensitive to individual circumstances, whereas Blackpool sees his situation as unique; again, the group versus individual mentality that separates the middle and working classes. To Dickens, this obsession with quantifiable wealth as a sign of status is a defining feature of the upper middle class, and ultimately a selfish one – after Blackpool leaves the house, Bounderby is described as "swelling at his own portrait on the wall, as if he were going to explode himself into it" (*HT* 78).

Selfishness is a governing characteristic of Bounderby, and in turn, the upper middle class. At the end of the novel, his lie about his past is revealed, and he is "detected as the bully of humility…in his boastfulness [he] had put the honest truth as far away from him as if he had advanced the mean claim (there is no meaner) to tack himself on to a pedigree, he cut a most ridiculous figure" (*HT* 254). What Dickens is claiming here is that in Bounderby's attempt to portray himself as something he is not (an up-jumped working class orphan), he is perpetrating the greatest crime of all; he is denying his own class. This is something that no other character does in the novel; the rarity of this behavior (and its reprehensive characterization) shows how desperate the social disparity is. Characters such as Stephen Blackpool and even Bounderby cannot aspire to be any more than what they are. The governing characteristics of the classes are immutable, and any attempt to change them results in ridicule, the worst possible outcome for a self-absorbed character like Bounderby.

Ms. Sparsit is often used as a point of reference for Bounderby's arguments; many times in the novel he uses her to conclude a discussion, citing her high birth as evidence of moral high

ground. Bounderby tells Harthouse that he is "the proprietor of this female," as if she is a possession (*HT* 180). She is a "prominent figure in attendance on Mr. Bounderby's car;" as if her mere presence builds Bounderby's own social station (*HT* 46). The subjugation of an upper class female is exciting to Bounderby, whose sole purpose in the novel is to rise high in social circles, in an impressive fashion. It is much like how he attaches himself to Harthouse; by being associated with him, he raises his own station. However, Sparsit is merely a part of Bounderby's collection of ill-gotten gains that dissolves at the end of the novel. He obtains a young wife in Louisa (whom he proudly refers to in conversation with Harthouse as "Tom Gradgrind's daughter," instead of using her actual name), and he buys a foreclosed country house that reflects his gentlemanly aspirations (and promptly loses it when he divorces Louisa). He even collects a false heritage by claiming to have risen from abject poverty into middle class wealth. Sparsit is very much a part of these false possessions. Bounderby thinks that he owns her because he pays her to be a housekeeper, but she betrays Bounderby at the end of the novel by accosting Bounderby's mother, who exposes his true upbringing. Like Harthouse, Sparsit is described as an uncontrollable, freely moving agent throughout the novel. Dickens describes Sparsit, after her brief combat with Mrs. Pegler, as an "unlucky female…fallen from her pinnacle of exultation into the Slough of Despond, [who] was not in so bad a plight as that remarkable man and self-made Humbug, Josiah Bounderby of Coketown" (*HT* 254). The statement claims that despite her bizarre behavior, Sparsit retains her immutable social status, and her embarrassment is temporary and overshadowed. Bounderby discharges Sparsit and appropriately remarks that in his house, "there's hardly opening enough for a lady of your genius in other people's affairs" (*HT* 284). He also admits that he has "stood in [her] light so long" (*HT* 285). This is not at all a relationship of

command. Bounderby realizes in the end that he cannot control someone who exists in a higher social standing than himself.

Stephen J. Spector, in his essay "Monsters of Metonymy: *Hard Times* and Knowing the Working Class," argues that Dickens extends his representations of the working class too far, to the point that they are no longer realistic. As Spector states, "Dickens' confidence, and ultimately his failure, rests upon his implicit faith in the power of language, and more specifically upon epistemological assumptions embedded in the rhetoric of realism" (Spector 366). However, what this essay does not account for is the fact that the narration is a product of middle class society. Dickens uses metonymy to denote the working class as "hands," just like his characters do in dialogue. While the novel spends a great deal of time describing the working class, it does not claim to succeed in this fact, and in fact serves to expose the generalizations of the middle class. When Dickens narrates, he is not acting the part of an objective observer; instead, he is taking a political stance much like what a reformed Gradgrind at the end of the novel would take. Once Dickens does this, he creates his own character in the novel. Therefore, a great deal of his proselytizing about the working class turns into opinion rather than supposed fact. A passage like the following is suspect: "Set anywhere, side by side, the work of God and the work of man; and the former, even though it be a troop of Hands of very small account, will gain in dignity from the comparison" (*HT* 71). This statement is pure opinion; it has no more proof than Bounderby's denouncement of workers as seekers of "turtle soup" and "golden spoons." In fact, it most accurately represents Mrs. Pegler's wholesale belief in the goodness of the working class: "I must kiss the hand," she says, after meeting Blackpool and merely learning basic facts about him (*HT* 80). This point of view is just as condescending as Bounderby's; it presumes a personality using only basic information concerning the person's social status.

Spector concedes that “no matter how carefully Dickens reports the workers’ conditions, he recognizes the severe limits of his knowledge” (Spector 375), but the essay claims this is a failing rather than a success; by admitting his own inability to fully understand the working class, Dickens, a middle-class narrator, is accusing Gradgrind and Bounderby of this same offense. This is a departure from a novel like *Great Expectations;* Dickens spends a majority of his time moralizing in *Hard Times*. When Bounderby asserts, “show me a dissatisfied hand, and I’ll show you a man that’s fit for anything bad,” the reader is more apt to understand this as a symptom of the overall misrepresentation of the working class that takes place throughout the novel (*HT* 179). Spector is correct in his analysis only if he presumes that “Dickens the narrator” as a middle-class character is standing in a privileged position in the novel. Dickens indirectly admits through *Hard Times* that no one truly understands (or ever will understand) the working class as a unified body of people.

Thomas Gradgrind’s improbable shift from middle class indifference to lower class compassion and aestheticism is an appropriate panorama of the problems of social class and how they might be solved, and perhaps looks forward to Pip's synthesis of the two class views in the later novel. At the beginning of the novel, Gradgrind is described as a cold, uncaring person, many times over: his “fundamental principle” is that “everything was to be paid for. Nobody was ever on any account to give anybody anything, or render anybody help without purchase” (*HT* 278). This idea of providing aid only in return for value is an idea that is not completely developed in *Hard Times*, but is a primary theme of *Great Expectations;* by alluding to this issue, Dickens firmly establishes the philosophy of middle class commerce as Gradgrind’s very own. The result is that Gradgrind views the world through extremes: he “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* 95). Dickens is stating in this passage that Gradgrind is committing a fallacy throughout his life; he sees things in terms of fact, which makes them incredibly simple. A group of people is indivisible in Gradgrind's mind; he accounts for the quantifiable, but leaves no room for the intangible. People like Sissy Jupe, however, complicate the world with emotions, which in turn expresses a degree of individuality. For example, she mistakes "national prosperity" for "natural prosperity," and then states: "I thought I couldn't know whether it was a prosperous nation or not…unless I knew who had got the money, and whether any of it was mine" (*HT* 60). It is a perspective of equality not shared by Gradgrind and Mr. M'Choakumchild. Regarding poverty, Sissy claims "I thought it must be just as hard upon those who were starved, whether the others were a million or a million million. And that was wrong, too" (*HT* 60). This disparity in philosophy is exemplified throughout the actual events of the novel—as an example, the conflict between Bounderby and Blackpool regarding the concept of divorce is a difference of fact and emotion. At the end of the novel, Gradgrind becomes aware of the value of emotions; he makes "his facts subservient to faith, hope, and charity" and no longer tries to "grind that Heavenly trio in his dusty little mills" (*HT* 286). Gradgrind is no longer interested in the dominance of facts over compassion, and as a result, breaks away from the role of the middle class and moves towards an understanding of people as individuals rather than statistics.

Robert E. Lougy, in his essay "Dickens' *Hard Times*: The Romance as Radical Literature," comments on the social rules captured by the bleak ending of the novel. Lougy argues that *Hard Times* is a romance filled with destructive elements. Realism is discarded for a sublime hopelessness that extends even to the setting. The environment of Coketown, with its smoke and bricks, evokes a hellish atmosphere that is a fitting environment for the hopeless class

struggle that exists between the workers and middle class. The natural beauty that someone such as Sissy Jupe appreciates is crushed by the cold industrial climate supported by Coketown and its residents. The essay focuses primarily on the ending of the novel, which embodies Dickens' darkest perceptions of society; for example, Stephen Blackpool's death, which "marks the shift of power within *Hard Times* from a tradition that looked toward love and compassion as effectual powers of social change to Dickens' private vision of civilization per se as corrupt" (Lougy 242). Blackpool's death is the only possible outcome of his situation. After being alienated by his peers and denounced by the middle class (specifically, Bounderby), Blackpool has no voice with which to redeem himself, and must die in order to resolve the tensions of the novel in some manner. Lougy points out that "in a world where merely the attempt to assert one's individuality evokes such disastrous consequences, it is perhaps optimistic to assert that one can still die a human death" (Lougy 244). Blackpool's death is a statement by Dickens that to profess one's individuality as a lower class individual is to irrevocably break the rules of society. Furthermore, it cements the notion that these tenets of society are unchangeable, and while Dickens deplores the current state of affairs in England, he nevertheless concedes that there is nothing that can realistically be done to improve class relations. Bounderby himself encapsulates the social struggle – "he is at once both [civilization's] victim and perpetrator" (Lougy 246). His presumed social prowess enables him to consort with characters such as James Harthouse, but at the same time, he is discovered for breaking the rules of society by attempting to be an ascended lower classman. When he is caught, he "cuts a most ridiculous figure," possibly the worst type of denouncement in a middle class built on appearance (*HT* 254). As Lougy states, "Bounderby's fictionalized past arises out of an adult mind wholly attuned to the values of an industrialized society and thus is a binding rather than a liberating force" (Lougy

247). Bounderby's romantic story of his rise to power is unbelievable and inevitably discovered, because it can only happen when imagined by a man who understands society fully. Rising in social class is a dream that can never be realized.

Divisions of class are also depicted by divisions of setting in the novel. Nature represents the lower class in the novel, with Sissy Jupe as its champion. For example, when asked to name what she would wallpaper a room with, she answers that she is "very fond of flowers" (*HT* 13). The circus, her home, represents the natural—a departure from the bleak industrialism of Coketown. Lougy refers to the circus as the work's "symbol of life," and it acts as the opposite of Coketown (Lougy 249). Where Coketown is filled with industrial imagery, the circus is filled with men such as E.W.B. Childers, who is described as "the Wild Huntsman of the North American Prairies" in one of his acts, accompanied by a child with "curls, wreaths, wings, white bismuth, and carmine" (*HT* 35). The work itself in the circus differs from Coketown; manual labor is replaced with spectacles like dancing horses. It is a space in which the lower classman can be represented as an individual without reprisal; someone as "wild" as Childers is never encountered in Coketown. Lougy describes the circus people as "artists in the psychological sense that they assert themselves against the outside world dominated by reason and the reality principle" (Lougy 250). It is largely a romantic device in which Dickens visualizes an impossible utopia. It makes sense, then, that the ending of the novel occurs at the circus, in which Gradgrind discovers the value of emotion, and his son is saved. In these two instances, the rigid rules of society are broken, but with a pessimistic subtlety, Dickens chooses the setting of the circus – a world of fancy that exists separately, in opposition of Coketown. The use of the circus in the final chapters is a signal that the only positive events of the novel cannot occur in the world of reality, Coketown.

Earle Davis, in his essay "The Social Microcosmic Pattern," attempts to ascertain a unifying theory about Dickens' social opinion given the several different plotlines of the novel. Davis states that throughout the novel, "Mr. Gradgrind conducts all business practically, because this is the way one gets ahead, makes money, and becomes financially and socially successful according to Victorian standards" (Davis 70). It is by these standards that the different plots of the novel are judged. Dickens connects the different threads of the plot into a single thesis, which "encompasses criticism of the educational system, the caste system, and divorce laws" (Davis 72). By fracturing the plot into different pieces, Dickens is also showing how the problems that affect society are multifaceted. The divorce laws are failing because people such as Blackpool must pay to receive proper justice and people like Louisa are trapped in loveless marriages; the educational system suppresses emotion and creates amoral citizens such as Bitzer and Tom Gradgrind Jr.; and the caste system is flawed for many reasons, chief among them Bounderby's subjugation of Blackpool, and his overall undermining of the lower class by trying to infiltrate it with a false history.

Hard Times is, in every regard, a novel of division, and the symbolism of contradictions leads back to the irreconcilable social divide. The domination of middle class characters such as Bounderby over workers like Blackpool is made clear, and while there are glimpses of what might be (mostly coming from Sissy Jupe), they are tempered by the pessimistic ending of the novel. Dickens offers no solutions for the subjugation of the working class, but he does expose the issues that must be resolved. At times, his findings are farcical – one of the truest statements of the novel comes from none other than James Harthouse:

> All sorts of humbugs profess morality. From the House of Commons to the House of Correction, there is a general profession of morality, except among our people; it really is

> that exception which makes our people quite reviving…Here was one of the fluffy classes pulled up extremely short by my esteemed friend Mr. Bounderby. (*HT* 198)

Harthouse refers to Blackpool as the "humbug" and "fluffy class," but really, his words are true of the middle and upper classes. Throughout the novel, there is no morality in Coketown because it is dominated by the middle class. Harthouse refers to Blackpool as a member of the "fluffy class," but in fact, Bounderby is the fluffiest of anyone in the novel – he inflates his personality with his false past, and is responsible for pulling himself extremely short in his endeavor to climb the social ladder. But perhaps the greatest sin of the previous passage is that Harthouse, like all middle and upper class people in the novel, considers Blackpool an interchangeable part of a bigger group, rather than an individual. The passage is extremely dehumanizing, much like the rest of the novel. Dickens emphasizes how middle class and lower class are completely unable to communicate and co-exist equally; and while the problems are identified, they are never resolved. Gradgrind cannot turn back – he has already reaped what he has sown, and his realization at the end of the novel does little to change the hearts and minds of the people around him he helped shape.

Conclusion

Great Expectations and *Hard Times* end with the different social classes in complete disarray. The direct issues of the specific characters are resolved, but the future for society is left untouched. Pip and the Gradgrinds exist in a discomforting empty social space. Pip finds himself back among his working class family and friends, but he is irrevocably changed by the experience; as he tells Biddy, "I have forgotten nothing in my life that ever had a foremost place there. But that poor dream, as I once used to call it, has all gone by" (*GE* 508). He lacks the innocence to return to the working class, but also lacks the money and the "dream" to remain comfortably middle class. The Gradgrinds find themselves in a similar predicament. Outside of society at Sleary's circus, Thomas Gradgrind renounces his categorizing of people, and opts to embrace individualism, and a viewpoint more tailored toward emotion than fact. For this, he ends the novel "much despised by his political associates" and while his own thoughts have changed, the rest of the middle class is "quite settled that the national dustmen [the middle class] have only to do with one another," giving no hope of lower and middle class cooperation (*HT* 286).

To Dickens, the most discernable attribute of all middle class people is ambition to better themselves. This ambition, however, does not address the human cost. At a cursory glance, Magwitch's gift to Pip is generous; but the intentions of that gift are driven by vengeance. Bounderby aspires to become something that he is not—a fictional upper class gentleman created from a working class child. A primary reason he fails is because he cannot see the needs of the individuals around him. Louisa is never "Louisa" to Bounderby; she is "Tom Gradgrind's daughter," more of a possession than a partner. Stephen Blackpool, as a representative for all workers, is an economic liability rather than a business associate to Bounderby. This view of

reckless ambition pursued at the cost of all other people is possibly the bleakest message Dickens delivers.

The sense of category versus individual leads to a great deal of suffering in both novels. As Gradgrind grinds people into categories in his "dusty little mills," he and his middle class are subjugating the lower class. The "Hands" are appreciated for their physical ability as a workforce, but never as individuals. Bounderby, when encountered with Stephen Blackpool, cannot see him as an individual and instead sees him only in terms of his class and the problems they bring. Without even knowing Blackpool, Bounderby sees "traces of the turtle soup, and venison, and gold spoon" in his personal request (*HT* 77). What Dickens values as important in relationships is morality and consideration, something that a character like Bounderby is incapable of.

Communication remains one of the biggest social issues highlighted by the two novels. The few situations in which the lower and middle classes actually talk to each other are marked by inequality. Miss Havisham and Joe have a bizarre conversation in which Joe uses Pip as an intermediary; he knows that he cannot relate to Miss Havisham in any way, so he uses Pip as the subject of each sentence he speaks. Stephen Blackpool is able to talk directly to Bounderby, but it is Bounderby who resorts to using a point of reference in the form of Ms. Sparsit, citing her "tens of thousands of pounds" to somehow put perspective on Blackpool's situation. The few opportunities that workers have to converse with the middle class exemplify the inequalities that exist.

Dickens does not provide a map to successful lower and middle class cooperation, but he does show individuals who succeed despite a harsh, misunderstanding world. When Pip returns to Joe and Biddy, he has the benefit of both humility and experience. When Pip helps Magwitch

attempt to escape at the end of the novel, he has returned to his working class mindset that he was in at the beginning of the novel, when he originally helps Magwitch. Pip sees his benefactor once again as an individual. It is only when Pip is cast away from his middle class peers that he discovers a "moral economy" as John Lindberg calls it. Similarly, Thomas Gradgrind is moved by his children's individual plight and resolves to appreciate their individual desires rather than categorizing them generically among all other middle class children. The man who does not account for individual taste and arranges his daughter's marriage is gone at the end of the novel. Perhaps through his depictions of individual successes in spite of the surrounding society, Dickens is suggesting that change comes first in the minds of individuals; that if one school teacher or one man with expectations can change, perhaps someday, many more can as well.

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