



Dickens's *Hard Times*: An Indictment for Encyclopaedic Knowledge?

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Abstract – This article aims to answer the question, which is to know whether Dickens's *Hard Times* can be read as an indictment for encyclopaedic knowledge. This question requires an analysis of contrasting opinions on knowledge acquisition through schooling, and a scrutiny of characters such as Gradgrind and M'Choakumchild in comparison to Dickens's predecessors and their characters. The schoolchildren in Dickens's *Hard Times*, caught up in the Victorian educational system known to be Utilitarian and brought about by the Industrial Revolution, could not leave Dickens cold. On the contrary, this provoked strong reactions through his career both as a public orator and prose writer. Indeed, to achieve its objective as regards the reading of this novel as an indictment for encyclopaedic knowledge, this analysis draws on such approaches as historical, moral, formalistic...thereby resulting in the affirmative answer. This paper is divided into three main sections: a retrospect of opinions on knowledge and teaching methods, Gradgrind's school and M'Choakumchild's knowledge as the epitomes of Rabelais's Gargantua and Pantagruel, and Dickens's committed position on knowledge acquisition.

Key words: Hard Times, Encyclopaedic, Indictment, Knowledge, Teaching.

Résumé - Cet article vise à répondre à la question, à savoir si *Hard Times* de Dickens peut se lire comme une accusation du savoir encyclopédique. Cette question exige une analyse d'opinions divergentes sur l'acquisition des connaissances par le biais de l'éducation scolaire, et d'une étude de personnages tels que Gradgrind et M'Choakumchild par rapport aux prédécesseurs de Dickens et à leurs personnages. Les élèves dans *Hard Times* de Dickens, happés dans le système éducatif victorien connu comme utilitaire et provoqué par la Révolution Industrielle, ne pouvait pas laisser Dickens indifférent. Au contraire, cela a provoqué de fortes réactions tout au long de sa carrière tant comme orateur public que comme prosateur. Ainsi, pour accomplir son objectif en ce qui concerne la lecture de ce roman comme une accusation du savoir encyclopédique, cette analyse comprend de telles approches qu'historique, moral, formaliste... ayant ainsi pour résultat la réponse affirmative à la question centrale. Ce travail est divisé en trois sections principales : une rétrospective d'opinions sur la connaissance et les méthodes d'enseignement, l'école de Gradgrind et la connaissance de M'Choakumchild comme exemples parfaits de Gargantua et Pantagruel de Rabelais, et le parti pris de Dickens sur l'acquisition des connaissances.

Mots clés : Temps difficiles, Encyclopédique, Accusation, Savoir, Enseignement.

Introduction

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A century and a half after Charles Dickens wrote *Hard Times*¹, the novel is still reviewed as an indictment of the values of 19th century industrial England, one of those values being knowledge acquisition through schooling. However, beyond this charge, *Hard Times* still raises questions. Such is that of Sylvère Monod during his 1973 lecture, 'Hard Times: an un-Dickensian novel?' Starting in a classroom and ending on children, *Hard Times* proves a novel on education, especially teaching methods. Set in a northern industrial town, the novel also proves an advocacy of imagination, fun and experience against the fact-based, stern and bookish philosophies of the time, as epitomised in the outlook of the novel characters, Thomas Gradgrind and his schoolmaster Mr M'Choakumchild.

Today, one of the debates on the side of educators and teachers as well as on the side of learners is knowledge acquisition and the ability to transmit it to the latter. Oftentimes, when there is such a debate, one soon recalls the 16th century French humanists François Rabelais and Michel de Montaigne: Rabelais (1807, p.74), who wanted, according to Gargantua's letter to his son Pantagruel, the latter to become an "abyss and bottomless pit of knowledge", and Montaigne (1907, p.126), who "would rather commend for having a well composed and temperate brain, than a full stuff head.". Thus, the two opposite objectives of any pedagogy boil down to knowledge on one side, and abilities on the other.

This issue becomes more interesting when more than three centuries later Dickens enters the quarrel with his educational theorist Gradgrind and his schoolmaster M'Choakumchild. If Late Professor Monod wondered whether *Hard Times* was an un-Dickensian novel, it is because of its shortness among Dickens's novels known for their length. Our concern as worded beforehand, is, however, due to the little attention given to Dickens's treatment of the debates on knowledge and teaching theories, in relation to that given to his criticism of Utilitarianism (a theory whose idea was that an action is useful if it achieved the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people).

In the abundant criticism of Dickens's *Hard Times*, which mostly boils down to the opposition of fact to fancy, we can mention Dler Qasm Ahmad's "The Conflict between Fact and Fancy in *Hard Times*" (2016), and Dehane Hala and Mokhtari Chaima's "Reiteration in Charles Dickens' *Hard Times* (Book One)" (2016), which, in their own words, "aims at finding out the motives behind using such a stylistic device (...) reiteration and its subtypes of repetition, synonymy and antonymy" (Abstract). They maintain that using reiteration, Dickens sheds light on certain characters' beliefs, and we know that one of these

¹ *Hard Times* is abbreviated in HT for in-text referencing.



beliefs is Gradgrind's Utilitarianism. On this opposition of fact and fancy, Ferdaous Baroud's "Education in Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*" (2015) especially focuses on the evidences of Dickens's interest in the important subject of education. José Esteban Viera Betancor's "Murdering the Innocents: The Issues of Education and Industrialism in Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*" (2014) explores Dickens's depiction of society, displaying how the Industrial Revolution and Utilitarianism forged new ideas of education and work.

The point Betancor raises, which I find the closest to my work, is his mention of M'Choakumchild murdering the fancy of innocent children (thus giving way to a two-fold interpretation of the chapter's title). However, he did not labour this point and this two-fold interpretation of the chapter's title, as I would have expected him to. Scott Ray's "Reading *Hard Times*: Literature, History, and Education" (2014) follows the same "pathway into Dickens's world of fact and fancy, looking for how a literary work might relate to the fundamentals of human thought and how an examination of *Hard Times* might add to our knowledge of the educational implications of literature." (Abstract).

All these works, including Anna Margrjet Thoroddsen's "The Theme of Facts and Fancy in *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens" (2011), and others, focus, as we have mentioned above, on Dickens's criticism of Utilitarianism, and yet this emphasis on Utilitarianism has most likely distracted critics from revisiting this opposition of fact and fancy in retrospect, that is, in the light of Montaigne's opposition to Rabelais about educational ideas, with a special reference to M'Choakumchild, the metaphor of encyclopaedic knowledge, and from distinguishing Gradgrind, who believes only in the demonstrable fact, and M'Choakumchild, his teacher whose knowledge exceeds the simple demonstrable fact.

In Wikipedia, the online free encyclopedia, we read about the etymology of the word encyclopedia, that two Greek words are misunderstood as one:

The word *encyclopedia* comes from the Koine Greek ἐγκύκλιος παιδεία, transliterated *enkyklios paedia*, meaning "general education" from *enkyklios* (ἐγκύκλιος), meaning "circular, recurrent, required regularly, general" and *paedia* (παιδεία), meaning "education, rearing of a child"; together, the phrase literally translates as "complete instruction" or "complete knowledge". However, the two separate words were reduced to a single word due to a scribal error by copyists of a Latin manuscript edition of Quintillian in 1470. The copyists took this phrase to be a single Greek word, *enkyklopaedia*, with the same meaning, and this spurious Greek word became the New Latin word "encyclopaedia", which in turn came into English. Because of this compounded word, fifteenth century readers and since have often, and incorrectly, thought that the Roman authors Quintillian and Pliny described an ancient genre.

Hence, we come to understand the pedagogical implication in the issue under our scrutiny. We have to give notice from the outset that Dickens was born a century after the breakup of philosophy, the mother of sciences, into several sciences, or the scientific claim for autonomy, had already been



consumed. In other words, Dickens wrote *Hard Times* years after the distinction between reason, which characterises philosophy, and experiment, which characterises exact science, was quite clear. As such, it is a wonder that this issue come back to the point. That is why, with the characterisation of Gradgrind and M'Choakumchild epitomising this return to Gargantuan views and methods on schooling in full 19th century, a question should be raised, that is: Is Dickens's *Hard Times* an indictment for encyclopaedic knowledge?

An overview of this question before further investigation helps us answer in the affirmative, especially when we resort to the historical approach, which will help us examine *Hard Times* primarily in relation to the historical and cultural conditions of its production, and also of its later critical interpretations. This will likely be completed by the Marxist approach to help examine the relationship of this novel to the actual economic and social reality of its time, with Utilitarianism for dominant ideology. We will also have recourse to the moral or intellectual approach, which will help us with our look at the content and values displayed in the novel. Since the proper concern of literary criticism is not with the external circumstances or effects or historical position of a work, but with a detailed consideration of the work itself as an independent entity, the formalistic approach is a must. Relying, however, on one single approach means showing one's weakness. To point out the weakness of each of these approaches if used exclusively, Scott (1962) states:

(...) it is equally foolish to suppose that any critic deserving of continued attention will stay within the confines of a single approach. On the contrary, he is likely to employ that method - or better, those methods in combination - which best suit his knowledge, his particular critical sensitivities, and the work of art before him.
(p. 11)

This paper has three main sections. The first is devoted to the retrospect of opinions expressed on knowledge and teaching methods. In this section, we will show that in writing *Hard Times*, Dickens had but followed the same pathway as such of his predecessors as Rabelais, Montaigne, Francis Bacon, Locke... These thinkers put forwards their opinions on education, from which Dickens doubtlessly took inspiration. The second deals with Gradgrind's school and M'Choakumchild's knowledge as the epitome of Rabelais's Gargantua and Pantagruel. The quantity and quality of teaching, and the quality of learners is what this section especially addresses. The third and last section discusses Dickens's committed position on knowledge acquisition.

1. A Retrospect of Opinions on Knowledge and Teaching methods

Since the end of the Middle Ages, scholars have opined on knowledge acquisition through schooling. The Renaissance claims to be a break-up with the Dark Ages and a restoration of Antiquity, but contemporaries



continue to privilege the quantity of schooling to the detriment of its quality and assimilation. Therefore, Rabelais and Montaigne put the teaching of their era in the dock.

In Rabelais's ideas, there is a negative part, which is the criticism and condemnation of medieval pedagogy, and a part that consists in developing the learner's body. However, above all, he aims to fill the latter's mind with new science that is found in the ancient books. He wants to develop the real scientific mind in his learner. That is why he puts them in touch with reality, compels them to look up at the sky and nature. Concisely, Rabelais wants the learner to do everything, be a sort of Somerset Maugham's "Mr. Know-All", and know even the useless thing. Rabelais does not care either for the learner's aesthetic training, or for the taste development. The moral training of the learner is none of his business, and this looks as though he trains his learners to spend their life in books and remain students for life. Rabelais's learner would probably become a scholar, but would likely lack taste, keenness, and moral force.

When Gargmelle gave birth to Gargantua, instead of crying like a normal baby he shouted "Some drink, some drink, some drink" The baby was so thirsty that no nurse could satisfy him. He had 7913 cows produce milk for him. In the letter Pantagruel receives from his father, Gargantua, he is warned that the circle of life goes on, as was deemed by God, and as parents die their children live on to have children of their own and so on. Gargantua commends his son on his pursuit of knowledge, and then provides him with a long list of all of the things he wishes his son would learn. He also wants Pantagruel to be skilled in many sciences, including politics and warfare as well. Gargantua knows that his son will carry his name and his legacy, so he asks Pantagruel always to act nobly, pursue God, and be just. After reading the letter, Pantagruel becomes even more dedicated to his studies, as he desires to fulfil all his father's wishes.

Indeed, like his father, Pantagruel reaches a pleasant point in his life where he has immersed himself in education, but he is yet to be truly tested outside the world of academia. Thus, he can take part in all of these intellectual pursuits, be they legal cases or philosophy, because at this point he really has nothing to lose. As we will see Gradgrind's orders to M'Choakumchild further below, they resemble, to much extent, these words from Gargantua's command to his son Pantagruel:

Now, in matter of the knowledge of the works of nature, I would have thee to study that exactly, and that so there be no sea, river, nor fountain, of which thou dost not know the fishes; all the fowls of the air; all the several kinds of shrubs and trees, whether in forests or orchards; all the sorts of herbs and flowers that grow upon the ground; all the various metals that are hid within the bowels of the earth; together with all the diversity of precious stones that are to be seen in the orient and south parts of the world. Let nothing of all these be hidden from thee. Then



fail not most carefully to peruse the books of the Greek, Arabian, and Latin physicians, not despising the Talmudists and Cabalists; and by frequent anatomies get thee the perfect knowledge of the other world, called the microcosm, which is man. And at some hours of the day apply thy mind to the study of the Holy Scriptures; first in Greek, the New Testament, with the Epistles of the Apostles; and then the Old Testament in Hebrew. In brief, let me see thee an abyss and bottomless pit of knowledge. (Rabelais, 1807, p.74)

From this, one can easily draw a parallel between Pantagruel and M'Choakumchild not only as chips off the old block, but also and more as two erudite persons. Even if he is not Gradgrind's biological son, M'Choakumchild is his philosophical son.

In his *Essays*, Montaigne, however, thinks that a learner should avoid books to some extent. He has to read them, not to learn them, but to train his mind. In Montaigne's view, instead of teaching sciences to learners, which are vain, a teacher should try hard to train their judgement and critical mind. As one can see, Montaigne focusses on the development of the learner's personality. So, Montaigne does not believe in the efficiency of schooling, which reduces to few things, and which is not concerned with the training of the child's will.

Montaigne's pedagogy is a pedagogy of common sense. Whereas Rabelais claims to develop all skills and puts all studies, arts and sciences on the same framework, Montaigne, on his side, asks to choose between various knowledge. He preferably recommends those sciences with sound judgement. We can say that Rabelais is the first, who knew the importance of scientific education, which enlightens intelligence whereas Montaigne was rather concerned with practical education, the one that consists in training judgement, and conducting will. Rabelais wanted to develop speculative skills, and Montaigne wanted to develop practical skills. Science attracted Rabelais the most whereas Montaigne was seduced by conscience. We see how these opinions on education had impacted philosophers and writers, over the next three centuries, hence the Age of the Enlightenment, which is a European intellectual movement of the late 17th and 18th centuries emphasizing reason and individualism rather than tradition.

Opinions on knowledge were not only expressed in France, Dickens had a preceding fellow-countryman like Sir Francis Bacon, an English statesman and philosopher who believed in the power of knowledge. Bacon wrote a series of essays in the late 1500s to the early 1600s. One of those essays was called "Of Studies." In this essay Bacon (1908, p.233) states his depiction of education and learning. He stated that "to spend too much time in studies is sloth; to use them too much for ornament, is affectation; to make judgment wholly by their rules, is the humour of a scholar." Education can be taken to extreme by spending excessive time studying. Bacon feels that those who only study and never actually use their knowledge are lazy. Education is meant to be preparation for



the real world. He tries to show that people should not use education to show off and make themselves appear superior to others. Some people make judgments solely on information acquired from books. However, a true scholar would filter that information acquired from books and apply it to their own life experience where it will be useful.

Another of Dickens's predecessor on the issue is John Locke whose *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* began as a series of letters to his friend, Sir Edward Clarke, advising him on how best to raise his son. Written while Locke was in exile in Holland during the same period he was writing the final draft of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, they were first published in 1693.

Locke's theory of education drew comments from authors such as Swift, Goldsmith and Richardson. It is not unusual to find contemporary authors acknowledging his status as "the father of modern education in England" or claiming that the *Thoughts* may have been Locke's most practically influential work (Smith, 1962, p.403; Wood, 1983, p.20). The *Thoughts* challenged both the received wisdom concerning the psychology of children and the standard educational practices of the day. Taken alone, the *Thoughts* represents a major contribution to modern theories of education.

In presenting his educational theory, Locke reveals his sense of humanity and his love of children (Axtell, 1968, p.11). He admonishes parents to wake their children gently from their sleep, for example. He reminds them that fear is inconsistent with learning; instructing a trembling mind is like writing on shaking paper. Locke (1880, p.26) always remembers to "consider them as children." First and foremost, Lockean education aims at developing character. What matters is not what the child learns, but who he becomes. Locke presents this advice on education as the counsel of reason.

Locke (1880, p.171) concludes his discussion of the young gentleman's studies by remarking that the business of the tutor "is not so much to teach him all that is knowable, as to raise in him a love and esteem of knowledge and to put him in the right way of knowing and improving himself, when he has a mind to it." Once again, Locke strikes Rabelaisian educational theory, and a surprisingly modern note familiar in contemporary progressive education: he seeks to create "independent learners."

In concluding the *Thoughts*, he (1880, p.177) summarised his approach:

The great business of all is virtue and wisdom. . . Teach him to get a mastery over his inclinations and submit his appetite to reason. This being obtained, and by constant practice settled into habit, the hardest part of the task is over. To bring a young man to this, I know nothing which so much contributes as the love of praise and commendation, which should therefore be instilled into him by all arts imaginable. Make his mind as sensible of credit and shame as may be; and when you have done that, you have put a principle into him which will influence his actions when you are not by, to which the fear of a little smart of a rod is not comparable, and which will be the proper stock whereon afterwards to graft the true principles of morality and religion.



Of all Dickens's predecessors in matters of knowledge, teaching and learning, we thus realise that Rabelais is the only one who has a different opinion. This difference of opinion does not nevertheless mark out Rabelais's Pantagruel and Dickens's M'Choakumchild, who parallel each other as erudite persons, as we will see below.

2. Gradgrind's School and M'Choakumchild's Knowledge as the Epitomes of Rabelais's Gargantua and Pantagruel

When reading Gargantua's letter to Pantagruel and Gradgrind's verbal orders to M'Choakumchild, we can all the same draw a parallel between these characters holding them to be like father and son. Gargantua's wishes produced the learned Pantagruel, and Gradgrind's training school produced the learned M'Choakumchild. Dickens describes M'Choakumchild as the new type of schoolmaster that appeared in the mid-19th century and that was admitted to one of the newly built training schools in 1851, graduating from it in 1853, one year before he wrote *Hard Times*. Factually, M'Choakumchild was a product of the educational reform in the 1840's and 1850's England. Dickens was obviously aware of some educational problems associated with those training schools.

By the end of Chapter One, we read that Gradgrind, M'Choakumchild, and the third grown person present, "all backed a little, and swept with their eyes the inclined plane of 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" (p.2). Dickens's metaphorical use of 'little vessels' to mean learners, shows their passivity in the learning process, whereas today's learning method is a learner-centred one. By opposing Gradgrind's facts to learner's fancy, Dickens was thus forerunning today's learner-centred approach to teaching. He also uses the exaggerated phrase 'imperial gallons of facts' to fill learners to the brim, which has the same meaning as Rabelais's making Pantagruel an "abyss and bottomless pit of knowledge."

Mr M'Choakumchild is only one perfect example of those full stuff heads produced by those training schools, but Dickens seems not to criticise Gradgrind's school building, in spite of its alarming description, and its teaching method of simultaneous instruction. It is the schoolmaster, M'Choakumchild, and his lessons that Dickens criticizes harshly. This means that Utilitarian teachers, because they were trained in Gradgrind's way, spoilt learners with their bookish knowledge. That is why by the end of the passage below, Dickens wishes M'Choakumchild learnt a little less to teach better:

'Now, if Mr M'Choakumchild,' said the gentleman, 'will proceed to give his first lesson here, Mr Gradgrind, I shall be happy, at your request, to observe his mode of procedure.' Mr Gradgrind was much obliged. 'Mr M'Choakumchild, we only



wait for you.' So, Mr M'Choakumchild began in his best manner. He and some one hundred and forty other schoolmasters, had been lately turned at the same time, in the same factory, on the same principles, like so many pianoforte legs. He had been put through an immense variety of paces, and had answered volumes of head-breaking questions. Orthography, etymology, syntax, and prosody, biography, astronomy, geography, and general cosmography, the sciences of compound proportion, algebra, land-surveying and levelling, vocal music, and drawing from models, were all at the ends of his ten chilled fingers. He had worked his stony way into Her Majesty's most Honourable Privy Council's Schedule B, and had taken the bloom off the higher branches of mathematics and physical science, French, German, Latin, and Greek. He knew all about all the Water Sheds of all the world (whatever they are), and all the histories of all the peoples, and all the names of all the rivers and mountains, and all the productions, manners, and customs of all the countries, and all their boundaries and bearings on the two and thirty points of the compass. Ah, rather overdone, M'Choakumchild. If he had only learnt a little less, how infinitely better he might have taught much more! (p.7)

With the character of Gradgrind, *Hard Times* appears as a parody of Rabelaisian Gargantua. The first chapter of the novel opens on authoritarian Gradgrind giving M'Choakumchild, the schoolmaster, such firm orders:

NOW, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir! (...)
'In this life, we want nothing but Facts, sir; nothing but Facts! (p.1)

It is true that these instructions are full of Utilitarianism as evidenced in the sarcastic chapter title 'The One Thing Needful', but this goes first through a moral lesson taught to learners. This way of driving the point home on Facts, ostensibly betrays either strengths or weaknesses of the opposite entity, which is nothing but Fancy. Man is a double being in that he has a body and a soul, which enables him to reason. Dickens grew up in industrial England, and in front of such industrialisation of his world and its seamy side, could not help calling human sole reliance on science into question. Gradgrind is a metaphorical characterisation of those educators who believe only in the demonstrable fact.

Gradgrind sees children in general like pots in which he intends to plant facts. To him, they are not recognized as individuals, but as merely "vessels" or "little pitchers" to be filled. Dickens makes this sense of objectifying children stronger by having Gradgrind address Sissy Jupe as "Girl number twenty" (p.2). He also looks at his own daughter as "his metallurgical Louisa" (p.10) and his son as "mathematical Thomas," (p.10) viewing his own flesh and blood only in reference to some scientific subject. Gradgrind himself is compared to "a kind of cannon loaded to the muzzle with facts, and prepared to blow them clear out of the regions of childhood at one discharge" (p.2). What he says to his schoolmaster, shows that he brings up



his children, in a grim materialistic atmosphere that will, as it is the case below, adversely affect their entire lives.

This G-unit (not the American Rap band) of Gargantua and Gradgrind has, in theory, positively influenced their children, but in practice, has negatively affected Gradgrind's Tom and Louisa. The children for whom he prides himself upon bringing them up factual principles, fall victim to their father's educational dogmas. Tom never realises the origin of his discontent, and thus seeks revenge on his father through self-destruction. Louisa senses that something essential is missing from her life. Whereas to err is human, Louisa claims, "Mr. and Mrs. M'Choakumchild never make any mistakes themselves, I suppose, Sissy?" "O no!" she eagerly returned. "They know everything" (p.50). Because of her father's pet precepts, she has no choice and feels therefore attracted by the circus and Sissy's warm character.

As the French saying goes, Gradgrind spits into the wind, it only ends up back on his own face. This is what Dickens is trying to show as the division titles for the three parts of the novel indicate ("Sowing," "Reaping," and "Garnering") with Gradgrind and Coketown reaping and garnering what they sow. Dickens's repeated questions (Did Louisa see this? Such a thing was to be) in the final chapter, on the outcome of Gradgrind's philosophy or Benthamism², is a way of poking fun at the Gradgrinds. In fact, faced with the effects of his rigid attitudes on the lives of his son and daughter, Gradgrind comes to accept the emptiness of his pet precepts.

During the Dickens Fellowship-Spring Conference held on June 9th 2007 at Tokyo University of Science, Karen Oshima submitted a paper entitled "The Muddled State of Education and Family Relationships in *Hard Times*" in which he wrote:

The repetition of "nothing" as in "nothing but" and "nothing else" emphasizes Gradgrind's absolute adherence to fact alone. In addition, Dickens' capitalization of the word "Fact" lends the sense of it being almost god-like to Gradgrind. Dickens shows the devastating effect that the muddled state of education has on the family, and, by extension, society itself. (p.19)

For Brook (1970, p.42) these "initial capitals are used to indicate over-emphatic speech." In addition, Quirk (1974, p.1079) maintains that "capitals are used to indicate spoken prominence for the words so specified." Gradgrind's children, Adam Smith and Malthus, are both named for well-known political economists. Adam Smith (1723-90) whose work *The Wealth of Nations*, is often

² Jeremy Bentham (1747-1832) was an English philosopher, jurist, and social reformer regarded as the founder of modern Utilitarianism. Bentham defined as the "fundamental axiom" of his philosophy the principle that "it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong." Wikipedia.

considered the father of laissez-faire capitalist thinking, and Thomas Malthus (1766-1834) is best known for his work on the question of overpopulation, the 1798 *Essay on the Principle of Population*, a controversial work that caused a public reaction against political economy. Dickens features prominently among those objectors since he adamantly opposed such economic systems from the outset of his career. I have, in an earlier paper³, discussed this reaction against Malthusians, whom Dickens terms, 'experimental philosophers' in *Oliver Twist*.

Critics have often failed to notice how thoroughly Gradgrind's view on knowledge acquisition contrasts with M'Choakumchild's. The former believes only in the demonstrable fact, with no mention anywhere in the novel that he is all-knowing, whereas the latter is a kind of omniscient teacher, who has successfully answered "volumes of head-breaking questions" on factual topics ending in "ography," "ology," "osody," or "onony," echoed by Mrs. Gradgrind's instruction to her children to go away and "be somethingological directly" (p.15). We see that M'Choakumchild was not only an exact scientist, but also equipped with literature credentials, which would have been beneficial to his learners. Maurois maintains that both science and literature are indispensable (1968, p.55) when he argues, "Science gives man increasing power over his environment; literature helps him to keep order in the world within." The literary part is, unfortunately, what Gradgrind's children and M'Choakumchild's learners lacked.

As a writer who really wanted to persuade his audience that they could not only rely on the demonstrable fact to bring up their children, Dickens could not escape what Abrams (1999, p. 58) sees as "the inescapable reliance on rhetorical figures." These figures of persuasion are devices that pervade Dickens's career both as a public orator and prose writer. We see how he introduces Gradgrind in the opening of the second chapter with anaphora and humour:

THOMAS GRADGRIND, Sir. A man of realities. A man of fact and calculations. A man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four, and nothing over, and who is not to be talked into allowing for anything over. Thomas Gradgrind, sir- peremptorily Thomas- Thomas Gradgrind. With a rule and a pair of scales, and the multiplication table always in his pocket, sir, ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to. It is a mere question of figures, a case of simple arithmetic. (p.7)

He uses anaphora 'a man', which is a figure of addition or repetition, to characterise Gradgrind in the plural, thereby showing the encyclopaedic nature of the latter. This intermixture of anaphora and humour is used to show how ridiculous Gradgrind is. Dickens also holds M'Choakumchild up as

³ Armel Mbon. "Dickens's Humour in *Oliver Twist*." *Mbongui : Revue Pluridisciplinaire de Recherche*, ISSN 2075-5228, N^o 10 Janvier 2013, pp. 37-51.



an object of ridicule with another figure of repetition, epiphora, as it goes in this passage:

Fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the material aspect of the town; fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the immaterial. The M'Choakumchild school was all fact, and the school of design was all fact, and the relations between master and man were all fact, and everything was fact between the lying-in hospital and the cemetery, and what you couldn't state in figures, or show to be purchaseable in the cheapest market and saleable in the dearest, was not, and never should be, world without end, Amen. (p.20)

However, this humour proves more serious when one realises that Dickens, in doing so, takes his anger out on Gradgrind, whose moral theories tend to murder innocent children. This humour for which Dickens gained fame, reveals his position on knowledge acquisition.

3. Dickens's Committed Position on Knowledge Acquisition

Dickens's position on knowledge acquisition is revealed in his characterisation of Gradgrind and M'Choakumchild. He characterises them as laughingstocks. Since he wrote about this pedantic teacher in *Hard Times*, the name 'Gradgrind' has come to be associated with one who relies solely on scientific measurements and observable facts without taking human nature into consideration. Like all those hated Dickens's characters, he cannot help escaping the author's well-known caricature, as evidenced by this passage on Gradgrind's classroom visit and speech:

The scene was a plain, bare, monotonous vault of a schoolroom, and the speaker's square forefinger emphasized his observations by underscoring every sentence with a line on the schoolmaster's sleeve. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's square wall of a forehead, which had his eyebrows for its base, while his eyes found commodious cellarage in two dark caves, overshadowed by the wall. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's mouth, which was wide, thin, and hard set. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's voice, which was inflexible, dry, and dictatorial. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's hair, which bristled on the skirts of his bald head, a plantation of firs to keep the wind from its shining surface, all covered with knobs, like the crust of a plum pie, as if the head had scarcely warehouse-room for the hard facts stored inside. The speaker's obstinate carriage, square coat, square legs, square shoulders- nay, his very neck- cloth, trained to take him by the throat with an unaccommodating grasp, like a stubborn fact, as it was- all helped the emphasis. (p.1)

Such a portrayal of Gradgrind displays many figures of speech, but we can focus only on one of these: repetition, which is more relevant to what may be inferred from this description. Dickens repeats the word 'Square' as an attribute of Gradgrind at each tip of these sentences. In fact, used as slang, 'Square' may mean many things when referring to a person or in common language. It is often used to speak of a person who is regarded as dull, rigidly conventional, and out of touch with current trends. This term is very commonly used to describe people that are social conservatives that go along with traditional gender roles, moral values, and so on. From this, one can understand why he



insistently orders Mr. M'Choakumchild, his schoolmaster, to 'plant nothing else, and root out everything else' (p.1).

To science for science's sake, Dickens opposes wisdom. He denounces the perversity of encyclopaedic schooling for which knowledge becomes a purpose for self, whereas knowledge matters less than what people do with, the know-how and manners. Teaching, according to Dickens, aims for the acquisition of knowledge and its transformation by learners according to their judgement. Pantagruel's letter to his son Gargantua proposed an exhaustive and excessive syllabus, it is because it concerned a giant. Then the letter continued with this piece of advice that Montaigne would not disapprove of, "knowledge without conscience is but the ruin of the soul." (1807, p.75) Conscience, that is honesty or morality is the last purpose of any teaching. It is what remains, when one has digested, when one has almost forgotten everything.

The biblical conclusion Rabelaisian thinking leads to is nothing but the fancy-related recommendation of Montaigne and Dickens. It is, therefore, a kind of disillusionment for him as well as for his Gargantuan successors like Gradgrind. Here goes Rabelaisian thought derived from the Bible (Prov. 2.10):

Wisdom entereth not into a malicious mind, and that knowledge without conscience is but the ruin of the soul, it behoveth thee to serve, to love, to fear God, and on him to cast all thy thoughts and all thy hope, and by faith formed in charity to cleave unto him, so that thou mayst never be separated from him by thy sins. Suspect the abuses of the world. Set not thy heart upon vanity, for this life is transitory, but the Word of the Lord endureth for ever. Be serviceable to all thy neighbours, and love them as thyself. Reverence thy preceptors: shun the conversation of those whom thou desirest not to resemble, and receive not in vain the graces which God hath bestowed upon thee.

Mr. M'Choakumchild, the schoolmaster, is essentially a briefly seen caricature, as indicated by his unrealistic name, but aspects of his name and personality refer to contemporary figures and philosophical debates. The Scottish "M" (more familiarly rendered as "Mc") at the beginning of his name underscores the degree to which educational theory at the time, as well as Utilitarian thought, was derived from Scottish thinkers. The second chapter of *Hard Times* is entitled "Murdering the Innocents", which is nothing but the official policy of Mr. Gradgrind assisted by a teaching quality assessor, Mr. M'Choakumchild. Both, they murder the learners' fancy in their Coketown School filling them with facts thereby preventing them from thinking as human beings, as evidenced in Chapter 8 entitled 'Never Wonder'. As we read them, these names arouse our enthusiasm for scrutinising them. Respectively, the radical 'Choak' in M'Choakumchild, and the suffix 'grind' in Gradgrind are both a mechanical (with reference to Industrial Revolution) expression for child spoilage. They choke and grind children's faculty of imagination. Sonstroem (1969, pp. 523-24) shows how suggestive of destruction these names are:



We find opposed to the images of life those of destruction, and usually violent destruction. In reading *Hard Times* one senses a pervasive violence which the action of the book cannot completely account for-which can be explained only in terms of the book's imagery. The names of the antagonists point the way to Dickens' intentions: grind in Gradgrind (...) choke in M'Choakum-child (...) But we hardly need the names to appreciate the destructiveness of Fact and its practitioners: Gradgrind is a "cannon loaded to the muzzle" (p. 2); the "third gentleman" was a "professed pugilist" who was "certain to knock the wind out of common sense" (...) M'Choakumchild will either "kill outright the robber Fancy" or "only maim him and dis-tort him" (...) Mrs. Gradgrind, frequently "stunned" by "collision" with some Fact, habitually "dies away" (...) Destruction includes self-destruction. Even as Gradgrind chokes off Fancy in the little children, he is himself throttled by his own necktie, "trained to take him by the throat with an unaccommodating grasp."

Names are extremely significant in Dickens. Frequently the names are portmanteau words - meaning they are combinations of two or more actual words that sound good in combination. There don't seem to be any words actually hiding in those syllables, like with Gradgrind and M'Choakumchild, but still the name gives us clues into the character. Mr. M'Choakumchild is not much of a character, but right away we know everything we need to know about him as a teacher as soon as Dickens introduces him.

Hard Times is an indictment for encyclopaedic knowledge because the novel title is in itself a keyword in that Coketown, the town in which the novel is set, is invested with a 'hard', inflexible, dogmatic character, which Gradgrind embodies and of which he is the intellectual arbiter. His educational system is Utilitarian, aggressive, dictatorial and destructive for those in whom he has to instil his knowledge of facts through M'Choakumchild. Like Sonstroem's, Chappell's (2011, p.13) comments on these names emphasizes their effects on learners:

What M'Choakumchild finds in the child Sissy Jupe - and labours, indeed, to choke - is a natural propensity for open rather than closed deliberation. In analytic moral philosophy classes all over the world right now, that same propensity is being carefully drilled out of students by their tutors' expositions of trolley problems, cave problems, transplant problems, rescue problems and the rest of the usual applied-ethics diet of hard-case thought experiments.

Moreover, Dickens may have had two Scotsmen—both named McCulloch—in his crosshairs as loose models when he chose the name M'Choakumchild for his character. The lesser-known, J.M.M. McCulloch, was a headmaster at an Edinburgh school and wrote practical and dry textbooks. The second, J. R. McCulloch, was a well-known political economist and statistician. Sonstroem and Chappell's allegations are supported by Gilmour's criticism of political economy in the classroom (1967, p.223), which reads:

The political economists in education, like their fellow utilitarians in other fields, were engaged in what was, in effect, a campaign of containment. The end of their labours was to give the working-class child an education which stressed as its dominant principle not the potentialities of life but its inevitable limitations' and 'no provision was made for their most crying need of all - simple diversion from the crushing oppressiveness of their lot.



According to Poovey (1998, pp. xxiii-xxiv), in the wake of the public dismay after the publication of Thomas Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population* (1806), McCulloch:

embarked on a lifelong campaign to improve the public image of political economy. By rewriting the history of the discipline, creating a canon for political economy, making reliable texts of the *Wealth of Nations* available for the first time, and placing political economy at the center of countless educational schemes, McCulloch sought to popularize the science that Malthus had rendered so disagreeable. McCulloch was not completely successful in resuscitating political economy, of course; opponents of the manufacturing system, like Dickens and Carlyle, simply turned their venom from Malthus to McCulloch and continued to lament the end of moral knowledge.

As we read Dickens's criticism of Utilitarian knowledge, we can infer that he wants to propose a series of educational methods that flow from the principle of respect for the child. The education should be adapted to the individual temperament of the child. Dickens wants to advise that Gradgrind as the tutor, should make the child see the usefulness of his or her studies, approach him or her with sweetness and tenderness, so that he will be motivated to learn. What goes on in *Hard Times*, instead, demotivates the learner. Dickens's educational methods are comparatively gentle - habituation, praise and blame, learning by example, respect for the child - and strikingly modern. Today, we would call his approach "child-centered education."

The tutor is also the source of the child's education in breeding, which cannot be learned from books, as M'Choakumchild did. The child will learn good breeding through observation of the tutor's conduct. Breeding is conducting oneself always with self-respect and respect for others. This mutual respect is a universal quality that is essential for civility and social harmony in any society. Manners, on the other hand, are an expression of good breeding that vary from place to place and are secondary in importance. True good breeding is not a matter of the forms of politeness and courtesy; it flows from humility and good nature and is the capacity to make others comfortable in their interactions with us. Dickens wants to make clear that it is far better that your son be a good and wise man than a great scholar like M'Choakumchild. Moreover, if he is not a good man, learning can make him more foolish, worse, and more dangerous. Because he wants to kill a mockingbird, that is, destroy the innocent children, he is Dickens's laughing stock:

Say, good M'Choakumchild. When from thy boiling store, thou shalt fill each jar
brim full by and by, dost thou think, that thou wilt always kill outright the robber
Fancy lurking within- or sometimes only maim him and distort him! (p.7)

This simply shows that M'Choakumchild and his master Gradgrind, in spite of their ability to fool their learners, cannot choke and grind their fancy all of the time. It would be like making a human being only a carnal being, and not a spiritual one.



Conclusion

This article was premised on showing whether Dickens's *Hard Times* could be read as an indictment for encyclopaedic knowledge. After a review of the related literature, the question raised at the outset has come under scrutiny before being answered. The affirmative answer provided right away in the hypothesis can now be confirmed on the basis of the preceding arguments: Dickens's *Hard Times* is an indictment for encyclopaedic knowledge. It is true, according to Bacon, that knowledge is power, but misused, it can lead, as Rabelais concludes, to the ruination of the soul. In *Hard Times*, Dickens shows the dangers of an educational system, which emphasises the memorisation of facts to the exclusion of fancy or the faculty of imagination. Through what happens to the Gradgrinds, Dickens wants to show that fancy enables learners to think independently as well as solving breakdowns in communication, and the inability to understand others. It then helps them develop a sense of right and wrong. Gradgrind's teaching theories bring about sickness, discord, and alienation between family members. Through the character of M'Choakumchild, Dickens wants us to look at how we are educating our children. The issues he addressed in *Hard Times* are just as relevant today as they were in his day.

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