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**The Industrial Revolution and Charles Dickens' Social Criticism in
Oliver Twist and *Hard Times***

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Abstract

This text focuses on the analysis of the Industrial Revolution through Charles Dickens' novels *Oliver Twist* (1838) and *Hard Times* (1854). By analysing the historical developments and accomplishments during the course of the 18th and 19th centuries, it can be seen how both novels depict with irony and satire the way in which society used to live and think. Dickens used his own life experiences to show how workers were exploited until death without any compassion and how this great revolution mainly favoured the middle and upper classes in Britain. Industrialization made people move from the rural areas to the cities in search of new opportunities. However, the circumstances that were developed in the new location caused a set of conditions that always disfavoured the poor. As a consequence, laws and unions began to arise during this period. All in all, Dickens' life and novels intertwine and are presented as a social exploration of the Victorian period.

Keywords: Industrial Revolution, *Oliver Twist*, *Hard Times*, Charles Dickens, Victorian period.

Resumen

Este texto se centra en el análisis de la Revolución Industrial a través de las novelas de Charles Dickens *Oliver Twist* (1838) y *Tiempos Dificiles* (1854). Analizando los acontecimientos históricos que se desarrollaron durante los siglos XVIII y XIX, se puede ver cómo ambas novelas describen con ironía y sátira la manera en la cual la sociedad solía vivir y pensar. Dickens usó sus propias experiencias de vida para mostrar cómo los trabajadores eran explotados sin compasión hasta su muerte y cómo esta gran revolución favoreció principalmente a la clase media y alta de Gran Bretaña. La industrialización hizo que la gente se desplazara desde las zonas rurales a las ciudades en busca de nuevas oportunidades. Sin embargo, las circunstancias que se desarrollaron en este nuevo lugar desfavorecieron principalmente a los pobres. Como consecuencia, comenzaron a aparecer nuevas leyes y sindicatos. Resumiendo, las novelas y la vida de Dickens se entrelazan y son presentadas como una exploración de la época victoriana.

Palabras claves: Revolución Industrial, *Oliver Twist*, *Tiempos Dificiles*, Charles Dickens, Época Victoriana.

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1. Introduction

As I reread *Great Expectations*, I came up with the following lines that gave me the idea to write this dissertation: “No more low wet grounds, no more dykes and sluices, no more of these grazing cattle - though they seemed, in their dull manner, to wear a more respectful air now, and to face round, in order that they might stare as long as possible at the possessor of such great expectations - farewell, monotonous acquaintances of my childhood, henceforth I was for London and greatness” (Dickens, 2008, p.133). While I read them over and over again I could not help but imagine how it must have been for Pip his arrival to the big city. Great Britain was at its peak of the Industrial Revolution that led people to move in mass from the country to the city; new technological innovations like the steam machine, transportation and factories that covered the cities with ashes and smoke; and other great changes in the social and political field. In the course of this revolution that took over the entire country and later expanded to the entire world, London was a city of contrasts with new buildings everywhere that “changed the landscape and infrastructure of Britain forever” (White, 2009a) but that unfortunately went hand in hand with the terrible conditions that people lived. Overcrowded slums and workhouses full of diseases and hunger were at the order of the day, so the experience of entering the overpopulated city, full of smog and smells should have been new to the senses and a great impact altogether.

The city of London as the mecca of industrialization was always present in Dickens’ novels, that is why in my eagerness to intertwine history and one of my favourite novels it came to my mind that the aim of this dissertation should be about an analysis of important social concerns that happened in the Industrial Revolution through two of Charles Dickens’ novels, *Oliver Twist* (1838) and *Hard Times* (1854).

The setting, plots and characters in Dickens’ novels are linked to his own experiences in life. As David Cecil (1948) points out in his book *Early Victorian Novelists*, Dickens’ “imagination is stimulated by what he himself has experienced at the age he was most susceptible to impression” (p.31). And because he was exposed and forced to endure certain circumstances in life, he had a better inside of the society and politics of that time: first as an exploited child, then as a Parliamentary reporter and later as writer but most importantly, as a Londoner. Dickens used his novels to exemplify the

society and historical events that were developing in the Victorian society but mainly to make people see what was really happening around them. That is why his novels were used as a sort of campaign in favour of the needed ones and against the actual system.

In order to develop this thesis, I will start by analysing how Britain was in Dickens' time by contextualizing the Industrial Revolution and the main factors that contributed to Britain's role as the birthplace of the revolution. By doing this, I will briefly explain how life was before and after these changes took place and how the quality of life changed making it a challenge to survive in the difficult new circumstances. The quality of the jobs and the working conditions were extremely hard for the paupers, especially for children, who endured the worst situations possible to finally die in the attempt of earning his daily bread. With the passing of time and a lot of consistency led by Dickens' hand many reforms were made that contributed to the betterment of life.

Subsequently, I will show how Charles Dickens exposed and denounced the social conditions of the era. His childhood provided him with plenty of unfortunate situations that helped him mould his point of view of society but in particular led him to become a renowned writer and advocate for human rights. The time when he visited his father in jail was a breaking point for him and even as an adult, he used to have nostalgic memories about the darker times that his parents made him live. The tiresome job that he had to take and the feeling of abandonment from his family contributed to his loss of innocence and expectation about life. For him it was definitely a slap in the face that perpetuated in him forever. In his adulthood, his novels as well as his writings as a journalist in several newspapers and magazines helped provide society a clear view of its darker aspects and to demonstrate that the lower classes were also part of humanity and that they needed to be treated with the same significance as the upper and middle classes.

Thirdly, the novel *Oliver Twist*, written by Charles Dickens in 1838, depicted how the author used satire and irony to treat important topics such as pauperism, among other social concerns. The story of Oliver is now read as a fable tale but in the Victorian period it helped to expose, through the narrative of one poor and hungry boy, the life of thousands of children in the country. Sometimes the plot and the characters that appear

in the text are over satirized in order to expose places such as the workhouses and the implementation of the Poor Law. The city of London provides a common playground for the character to develop their stories that will be intertwined in some manner. The omniscient third person will make direct contact with the reader to disclose delicate points and ask for the empathy of the upper classes. It can be seen that the questions and themes that arise in this novel are of close concern to Dickens and touch an especial place for him as many facts are related to his childhood. At the end, we can see how he restores a certain order in all the chaos but also posed new questions for the reader to debate.

And lastly, *Hard Times* (1854) is presented as a novel that shows the worst side of the industrial society and also how important human connection is, the use of imagination as something considerably significant in the life of a human being; without that people would be transformed into machines. In this dystopian society, based on a strike that took place in the city of Preston, Dickens presents us the city of Coketown as a place where industrialization took over the entire life of the people living there. Even the school was under an Utilitarian regime where professors teach children facts and only facts about their role in this society. In the city it exists a complete loss of identity since the children are called by numbers and the workers of the factory are called the Hands. As opposed to this, the writer introduces the circus and two important characters, Cecilia Jupe and Mr. Sleary, who will show and remark the importance of learning by experience and being raised with affection by family and the extended circle of the society.

2. Britain in Dickens' times

2.1. Contextualising the Industrial Revolution

During the course of the 18th and 19th centuries there was an enormous change in the development of Great Britain that led to the industrialization of the country and that later expanded to the entire world. As Hetami (2009, p. 42) points out, (in her article "The Industrial Revolution and its consequences [...]"), there was a great transformation in every aspect of the country: the economy raised giving further power

to Great Britain and the colonies, the cities and rural areas changed forever and the social consequences brought with them new social and political reforms. Before the 1800, most people lived in rural areas, farming and performing manual work and after this period, the reign of Queen Victoria was witness to “an unprecedented increase in the output of English agriculture that was associated with an increase in the efficiency of production by the land and labour production” (Winstanley, 2007, p.207). Prior to the industrialization, most manufactures were made at home using simple machinery or were produced by workers with modest hand tools, but with the arrival of more modern technology the rural areas rapidly became industrialized or, to the contrary, people living there had to migrate to the cities in search of better opportunities.

One of the many factors that contributed to Britain’s role as the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution was the fact that the land contained great deposits of coal and iron. But it was actually the creation of steam machinery that allowed a significant change in the industrialization. Before the new technologies arrived the development was slow and people depend on windmills, horsepower, waterwheels, etc. That is why the introduction of steam engines made it easier the development of textile mills, helped with the heavy work in the coalmines and other industries in general. New techniques in agriculture, textile and transportation began to be applied and the arrival of steam and coal facilitated industrial development, which was moving in accelerated steps. These new elements, adding to the new inventions, revolutionized mass production making the goods cheaper, quicker and easier to elaborate. All in all, “The iron and textile industries, along with the development of the steam engine, played central roles in the Industrial Revolution, which also saw improved systems of transportation, communication and banking” (Industrial Revolution, 2019). The other factor that helped Britain to be an industrialized power was the colonies. As Ward says, “By 1850 the British overseas empire was quite unrivalled [...] and achieved a temporary pre-eminence as ‘the workshop of the world’ (1994, p. 1). The colonies opened a new window to import and export raw material but also finished products, making an expansion to the whole world and enlarging the economy of the country. On the whole, it can be said that “the later eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century constituted a, if not the, critical period of structural change, regional

specialization, commercialization and productivity gain in agriculture which enabled a much larger urban population to be fed, albeit sometimes at the expense of the rural poor” (Winstanley, 2008, p.209).

2.2. Life before and after the industrialization

To illustrate the before and after life of British society in the awakening of the industrialization I put to use De Vries (1994) premise which points out that the Industrial Revolution can only be compare in historiographical importance with the Renaissance because the latter “claims to mark the onset of modern history and to define its abiding characteristics, just as the Industrial Revolution marks the onset of industrial society and defines the key mechanics of its progress (p. 2). Society indeed suffered a huge transformation, small towns and villages were left aside or transformed in urbanized sectors. Manufacture was mainly made at home, where they simply rely on natural resources to survive whereas the uprising cities made that almost everybody worked in the system in some way or another. Education was limited only to the wealthiest society and the gaps between the classes began to be even more noticeable even though a new social class began to appear, the middle class. The population in the cities began to increase and Britain experienced a demographic boom, estimating that the population more than doubled during the course of industrialization. As a matter of fact, when Dickens was writing *Sketches of London Life and Places* in 1833, “more than one and a half million people lived in the capital. In each decade after 1841, by which time several railways were running to and from the city centre half a million more were added in what had become an explosion of growth” (Grant, 1984, p. 71).

2.3. Quality of life and working conditions

The upper and middle classes seemed to be the only ones to benefit from the uprising economy and the new produced goods. For the paupers life was a great challenge and they struggled daily to survive the famine, diseases, terrible working conditions and the lack of rights. Surviving in the system was a difficulty that most of them could not endure and unfortunately they died early and very precariously. For the majority of them, the only thing that changed in their life was the scenery, from the

rural to the cities, since the entire family had to contribute to the economy of the house and the women and children played a vital role in the day to day survival. In addition, they lived in horrible accommodations where they lacked sanitation, clean water and the pollution in the cities was of great concern. “Give them water, help them to be clean”, said Charles Dickens in a speech to the Metropolitan Sanitary Association in 1851 (Brown, 1969, p. 161). Clean water was a main and urgent need because the lack of it meant cholera and typhoid, among other diseases leading to a short expectancy of life. Not even the rich people were immune to the smog and smells in the London atmosphere. It is even said that the strong odor could be felt in the premises of Queen Victoria’s Buckingham Palace because of the poor ventilation at that time. The River Thames, that served as the mutual point of water recollection for Londoners, was used to wash, cook and a good place to disposing the corpses, many of them unwanted babies. Fortunately, by 1870 the river had a new system that helped maintain the water clean and less dangerous for the people that consumed it. As mentioned above, another great issue was the pollution that covered the sky of Dickensian London that not only was produced by the many factories that worked non-stop but also the chimneys of the stuck up houses and buildings.

Because craftspeople were replaced by machines, people had to learn to work like them. The factory system was known for having strict rules and discipline where hard punishment was implemented if any worker dared to surpass the factory owners. The labourers endured long hours of work, including children and women who did not have the same recognition for their work as men did, and the wages were extremely low. That is why the entire family had to work in the factories and even by doing that they had problems to make ends meet. Which is even more, the factory system was created to depersonalize people. An example of this will be explained in section 5 in relation with Dickens’ novel *Hard Times* (1854), in which the author shows how the characters in the novel become just a number to the factory owner and how not only the factory but the industrialized city become a kind of a common place where people lose their freedom and there is no room for creativity. In late 19th century the working conditions began to improve thanks to the labour reforms and the implementation of new policies, marked by the beginning of the creation of unions; Even though the new

regulations were sometimes useless without the control of the government. Dickens shows an instance of this matter in the first section of his novel *Bleak House* (1853), that appeared after the Smoke Nuisance of 1852, and which aim was to put some control over factories but this text is just “the first of the great series of late novels in the course of which he described an England corrupted by its obsolete institutions” (Grant, 1984, p. 41).

2.4. Child Labour and Labour Reforms

Before 1800, pauper children got their education from the Sunday Schools for free. They worked long hour shifts, almost like adults, who used to work between 14 to 16 hours a day in dangerous and harmful settings. The Act of 1788 was one of the first laws that attempted to protect children at work and it was addressed to improve the work of the chimney sweeps. But it was not until the Parliament passed the Factory Act in 1833 that children acquired the right of having two hours of education a day that was compulsory for children who worked in factories. Moreover, “this expanded the feeble protection of young people provided by the Cotton Mills Act of 1819. It restricted the hours of employed children” (Brown, 1969, p. 158). Despite all this, another source points out that “before the Factory Act of 1847 children worked, on average, twelve to thirteen hours a day, six days a week, often in temperatures as high as 80°F (27°C) within environments that were damp and thick with the cotton dust” (Ashworth, 2004, p. 227). The continual disconformities by the lack of progress and constant exploitation by the hand of the upper classes led to the creation of unions who fought to obtain better wages and improvements in the quality of work. Dickens, who became a Parliamentary reporter in 1832, saw at firsthand how the reformers passed many reform bills under pressure and violence. Apart from this, it is important to remark that child mortality was something quite common in Victorian times and unfortunately it was a topic that Dickens himself experienced when his sister-in-law died at a young age. This shocked him profoundly and he carried the grief with him until the last days of his life. Hence, this kind of situations, linked with personal experiences, led him to become the writer that he was; exposing in his texts how innocent children died and the decay of life that they endured.

3. Dickens as a social exposé of the social conditions

3.1. Dickens' childhood

Charles John Huffam Dickens was born at Landport, Portsea, on 7 February 1812. He was the second of eight children and because he was a not a healthy child he used to spend many hours inside his house reading and writing short stories. Because of his father's job, the increasing number of siblings and the ups and downs that the family faced, they moved a lot and it was in Chatham that he started creative writing and had the first encounter with theatre. "Dickens later wrote happy accounts of his time in Chatham, playing with friends, attending school, visiting the theatre and pantomime, and going to parties" (Allen, 2011, p. 4). His father, John Dickens, worked in the Navy Pay Office at Portsmouth Dockyard and he was known to be a very good and generous man with gambling problems who had trouble managing his income. When the family moved to London their economical situation went down and then is when his father started to have real troubles and ended up being arrested for debt. At that time their only salvation was for him to work at the blacking factory: "As a child and youth, he had personally observed the squalor and degradation in which many of his fellow men lived, and these early impressions never faded" (Tomlin Ed., 1969, p.132). Learning about Dickens' life is learning about the Victorian period since he was a spectator of London life and because he experienced both sides of it, one as a poor boy who had to survive the worst consequences of his parents' mistakes and then as a rich man. At the end, Dickens' family always struggled to survive despite all the help that they received from his son and his effort for them to achieve certain stability in what was left of their lives.

3.2. Prison Life

When John Dickens was sent to prison for debt in 1824, Charles Dickens was only 12 years old and he was forced by his own family to work at Warren's Blacking Factory "where for a few months he pasted labels on the bottles of boot-blacking and made up packages" (Gill, 2008, p. xviii). He visited his father in prison and worked at the same time in order to help his family survive this dark period in their lives. He lived almost all by himself during the course of the week and his family seemed to show no

empathy for him. Even though his father was out of prison in three months he continued working there for two more months in request of his mother, who did not want Dickens to stop working in the factory. He, among the other children that worked in the factory, was exhibited through a window where people used to stand and look at how the young man was working there. He felt the abandonment not only from his family and close circle but also from the society itself that dared to look through the window and not do anything about the unfair situation. This is one of the reasons why he had said to feel completely abandoned and betrayed by adults who left him at his mercy, suffering things that no child should live in his short life and using these as topics later in his novels, being one of the most renowned, *David Copperfield* (1850). However, we can see examples of this period in several of his novels such as *Little Dorrit* (1857), *The Pickwick Papers* (1837) and *Oliver Twist* (1838) among others, the role of the Victorian prison as a continuing symbol for bondage and outrageousness that people have to endure in their stay in that place. From this time he wrote some entries in his secret diary that later gave to his friend and biographer John Foster, who included about twenty pages of Dickens' journal in his biographical book. In it Dickens wrote:

No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship; compared these everyday associates with those of my happier childhood; and felt my early hopes of growing up to be learned and distinguished man crushed in my breast. The deep remembrance of the sense I had of being utterly neglected and hopeless; of the shame I felt in my position; of the misery it was to my young heart to believe that, day by day, what I had learned, and thought, and delighted in, and raised my fancy and my emulation up by, was passing away from me, never to be brought back any more; cannot be written. My whole nature was so penetrated with grief and humiliation of such considerations, that even now, famous and caressed and happy, I often forget in my dreams that I have a dear wife and children; even that I am a man; and wander back to that time of my life. (as cited in Grant, 1984, p.19)

There is no doubt that this period in his life was of great turmoil and misery. As a young man he felt and was completely left aside by his beloved ones. But in fact he was quite lucky since he was able to survive and live this situation only for a few months. Nevertheless, it seems that this chapter in his life was so powerful that left a permanent mark on him and his novels are a reflection of this. He preserved in his memory everything that he saw and felt during the time that he had to visit his father in the Marshalsea.

For most people who were in prison, their only crime was to be poor. The system was a wheel very difficult to get out of without help from family or friends and their money. Brown, one of the many authors of the book *Charles Dickens 1812-1870* (1969), describes how the imprisonment for debt was for people: "The system was absurd. When creditors took action the debtor was first removed to a sponging-house, an establishment kept by a bailiff or sheriff's officer. There he remained in some comfort for a short period of time in the hope that friends or relations would settle his affairs. And if no money arrived he was sent to prison" (p.151). Dickens' father was somehow accommodated and he was sent to a sponging-house where his son took him out of by paying his debts. For those who had no money there was no way out of prison.

3.3. Dickens' writing and the darker aspects of Victorian society

When Dickens was 15 years old he had to leave his education and work as an office boy, a job that would launch his career. At the age of 18 his maternal uncle got him a job as a parliamentary reporter at the newspaper the *Mirror of Parliament*. In a speech that he gave many years later for the *Newspaper Press Fund*, he said: "I have worn my knees by writing on them on the old back row of the old gallery of the House of Commons; and I have worn my feet by standing to write in a preposterous pen in the old House of Lords, where we used to be huddled together like so many sheep" (Macdonald, 2012). This experience allowed him to see firsthand the way in which the government worked and how important it was to take further action and involve himself actively in society. Later he would be invited to stand for a seat in the Houses of Parliament but he refused. As Brown (1969) recalls, "even though he wrote with effusion about the new reforms that came from the Parliament he still continued to treat

the members of both Houses snobs, sloth and jobbers” (p. 143). His work as a writer, especially in his novels, is characterized by the use of satire and for his depiction of injustices, making extended criticisms of his time and of the society in itself. Moreover, most of the characters that he created were based on some historical figures or people that came into his life at some point. He mixed real facts and made them more grotesque, evil or pious depending on what he wanted to portray. By doing this his writing transformed in texts that fought against the system and did not conform to the established by the upper classes’ exigencies. His novels started to be an eye opener to the citizens and created awareness of what was happening at that time in history. Moreover, he established the magazines *Household Words* (1850-59) and *All the Year Round* (1859-70), where he could splash about, write and edit whatever he wanted (Allingham, 2017). We can say without a doubt that his writing not only exposed the problematic of the Victorian period but also contributed to construct a better tomorrow for Great Britain: “Both in his lifetime and afterwards, Dickens has a reputation as a reformer. Many have credited him with creating the climate of opinion that facilitated the reforms in education, public health, and criminal law that helped to make Britain a safer and less strife-ridden society” (Cunningham, 2011, p. 159).

3.4. Outsiders of Victorian society

Misery, violence and criminality were always associated with pauperism. The outcast had no place in society and there was no way out of the poverty area. Vagrants and criminals occupy a great place in Charles Dickens’ novels; *Oliver Twist* (1838), *Great Expectations* (1860), *Hard Times* (1854) and others, they all have characters that represent the lowest and darkest secrets of civilization. By telling their life Dickens helped people to see beyond poverty and approached their stories with his narrative. His intention was to show that paupers were also human, with stories worth telling, but more importantly they needed to be accounted for and treated as such. In his desire to help them by any way possible he wrote in one of the volumes of *Household Words* of 1854, “improvements in public health and housing were more important than electoral reform” (Brown, 1969, p. 146).

In one of the passages of Grant's *A Preface to Dickens*, he explains that "It was in terms practical rather than philosophical or intellectual that Dickens promoted the cause of reform" (1984, p. 66). He took action and surrounded himself with people who could help him achieve an actual change. Dickens became friends with a rich woman called Angela Burdett-Coutts who admired his novels very much. With time she began to ask Dickens for advice on how she could invest the fortune that his grandfather had left her. Apart from other charity work that she contributed to with the guidance of his new friend, together they planned the establishment of a home for the rehabilitation of prostitutes and young female offenders and contributed to a number of schools and housing for the poor. In addition, he persuaded her to build a building with flats and that the people living there should have access to gas and clean water, among other facilities. Apart from this, he always helped the most needed and was known to be very generous with money.

4. *Oliver Twist* (1838)

4.1. How the novel satirizes the system

Oliver Twist; or The Parish Boy's Progress appeared for the first time in a serialized issue of *Bentley's Miscellany* and it was such an instant success that by 1841 it was in its third edition and with time it has been dramatized for films and TV many times. As Gill (2008), the writer of the introduction for the 2008 *Oliver Twist* Oxford edition describes, the book accomplished to "passed into the common stock of fable in the English language" (p. vi), even though he argues that the narrative presents some struggles to settle the register of the novel because it goes from an ironic manner to one more obscure and melodramatic. This could be due to the fact that the novel was not written all at once and Dickens could play with the story line depending on what the readers desired to see in the plot in the next month edition. Despite the fact that the writer could move the direction of the narrative as he wished, the ideas of what the novel exposed were very clear from the beginning. The plot and characters, especially that of the protagonist, were presented to satirize and expose the workhouse system and to show how the Poor Law, which was passed in 1834 and had "recently stringently

altered the treatment of poverty and paupers” (Brown, 1969, p. 155), was applied in that context. We can see examples of these in the first chapters of the novel where Mr. Bumble, in charge of running the institutions such as the farms and workhouses, remarks that it was ‘meat’ what gives Oliver courage to defy the system. He reminds to Mrs. Sowerberry: “Meat, ma’am, meat’. You’ve raised a artificial soul and spirit in him” (Dickens, 2008, p.51); Or when the board debates the sale of Oliver to anyone who can take him, not caring at all for the child’s well being (Dickens, 2008, p.22) . So what could be better than showing the system’s faults than through a poor, suffering and abandoned child?

Since the first lines of the novel the reader can feel how the text sets a common ground to every town and city in Britain, “Among other public buildings [...] there is one anciently common to most towns, great or small: to wit, a workhouse” (Dickens, 2008, p. 1). In the Elizabethan times the workhouses were places designed to provide an environment of discipline, productiveness and to help the sick ones in time of distress. But over time, the implementation of new policies, especially the Poor Law that established the workhouse system, these places ended up being like a prison. The idea of this policy was to establish the workhouse system and provide several improvements for the refuges, such as food and clothing in exchange for work. But instead of that the authorities put into practice a tyrant regime with the separation of families, strict discipline and a poor diet service. At the end, the new laws that were passed in an attempt to relive the situation concluded in being part of a cycle of poverty rather than a remedy to it. Dickens remarked this point stating: “So, they established the rule, that all poor people should have the alternative [...] of being starved by gradual process in the house, or by a quick one out of it” (2008, p. 10).

As a writer, Dickens is highly critical of the poor laws implementation and the inhumane treatment given by the government to the paupers. It can be said that the novel exposes the political and social concerns of the Victorian period that are intrinsically linked to the text produced in that time. Moreover, Bayle states that *Oliver Twist* (1838) “is a modern novel. It has the perennially modern pretension of rejecting the unreality of a previous mode, of setting out to show us ‘things as they are’” (1967, p. 83). The text was meant to be used as a weapon against the rulers of Britain and to

open the minds of those who had the chance to live in a different reality from that of the common people. In this case, satire is used as a weapon to make people laugh but also to rise awareness of the darker aspects of Victorian society. Although the text is full of references to this matter, I would like to point out two of them: the first one being the use of Oliver's innocence to highlight certain satirical moments. For example, when in Chapter II Mr. Bumble informs Oliver that he must appear before the board immediately but "not having a very clearly defined notion of what a live board was, Oliver was rather astounded by this intelligence, and was not quite certain whether he ought to laugh or cry" (Dickens, 2008, p. 9) or how he is used by adults to help them achieve certain things, being that mainly money. As Grant (1984) points out, it can be said that "at the beginning of the novel Dickens' satire is directed against the inhumanity of the conduct of the workhouse in its calculated hostility to the fact of Oliver's existence (p. 98). The other point is the use of satire in the characters' names, which are full of significance and ironically remark the personality of that persona. For instance, Mr. Bumble, who for his name is supposed to be clumsy and have an idiotic sense of humour is quite the opposite. He is presented as a fat choleric man that uses his stick with the children that he supervises. On the other hand, Oliver Twist, because he is the pauper boy, has no identity or knows where he came from at the beginning of the novel. In fact, Oliver's name was picked out from a list of names made in alphabetical order and as Mr. Bumble explains; he had more names prepared for the rest of the poor children to come. Lastly, Fagin "The Jew", the leader of the pickpocket band, who in real life was the boy that took him under his wing when he started to work in the blacking factory and that Dickens decided to immortalize by using his real name in his book.

4.2. Pauperism

In Victorian times social classes were very well defined, but not completely demarked, and it was quite difficult to cross from one class to another: "The working class was divided into three layers, the lowers being 'working men' or labourers, then the 'intelligent artisan' and above him the 'educated working man' (Picard, 2009b). In *Oliver Twist* (1838), the protagonist starts learning about this fact early in life. When he

begins to work as an apprentice for Mr. Sowerberry he meets the older apprentice, Noah Claypole who is “a charity-boy, but not a workhouse orphan” (Dickens, 2008, p. 34). This superficial distinction of classes seems very important and in this case even more because at least Noah knows who their parent are.

Charitable relief was administered by the authorities in parishes and workhouses; from here they decided the fate of thousands of people. Most paupers chose these places as a last resource as without them it was very difficult to survive because vagrancy was forbidden and people could be flogged or taken into arrest for practicing it. One instance of this can be seen when Oliver starts his journey to the city and in some villages he encounters large painted boards that were fixed up “warning all persons who begged within the district, that they would be sent to jail” (Dickens, 2008, p. 56). When Oliver moves to the workhouse, the reader can have an insight of what it is like to live in a place like that. People are scarcely clothes and in occasions washed, and the food is just enough to keep people from starvation. “In *Oliver Twist* it was alleged by Dickens that pauperism at all ages was reduced by the simple process of starvation. More deaths meant less cost” (Brown, 1969 p. 155). *Oliver Twist*'s famous line “Please, sir, I want more” (Dickens, 2008, p. 12) it is used as the cruelest example of what a child had to face. He, of course, is flogged for forcing the authority and is denied to eat more of his daily ration. The punishment that he receives in the workhouse is similar to the one that would receive if he were in prison. Nobody around Oliver shows pity for him for the mere fact of being born a pauper. If it was not that the story needed Oliver to be alive in order to tell the story and denounce the system, he would have died of starvation as any other child in that situation.

Another solution to survive poverty was prostitution. In the book we have Nancy as the clear example of how that difficult outcome was, but child prostitution was also practiced with frequency although it was done with more discretion and secrecy. Prostitution was a way, for a lot of women, to make ‘easy’ money and help their families. “Many vulnerable young girls were forced into prostitution through their failure to secure work, or were otherwise tricked into the occupation by the promise of respectable employment” (White, *Poverty in Georgian Britain*, 2009). Life in the Victorian era was dangerous not only because of the costumers but also for the

contagious diseases such as syphilis. Gill (2008) argues that when in Chapter XL Nancy speaks with Rose she “insists that for her sort there can be no turning back. The same degree of environmental and perhaps hereditary determination might be thought to operate upon the homeless boys” (p. xv); Hence, it can be said that these lines help to establish again that the social ladder cannot be broken or can be only trespassed by few.

4.3. Child Labour

Children in Dickens’s novel represent the real little boys and girls of Victorian London. Children that were found alone, neglected and hungry wandering the streets of the country were his inspiration behind the texts that he wrote. As I explained before, Dickens’ own life was used in the different stories that he developed over the years, they were full of truth and pain but more importantly they sought to found a social reform and mark a difference in people’s lives. Through the innocent look of the younger he reached through an entire country that had an indifferent feeling toward the paupers in general. From birth, children were doomed to live and suffer the consequence of the system that was too busy making money rather than trying to help the most needed ones. Relief in the slums of the great cities almost never arrived and children died of starvation, sickness, enslaved in workhouses and factories. Reforms and help from part of the upper classes took time to arrive and most of them never knew something better in their life. Child exploitation was a recurrent theme in all his novels but especially in *Oliver Twist*. In the novel, Oliver is lucky to escape the system by founding out his true identity through a journey that is full of violence, criminality and lack of love by the adults responsible for his life.

“The first seven chapters of *Oliver Twist* are remarkably innovative [...] using the victimization of the workhouse orphan as the occasion for a fictional attack in contemporary attitudes and abuses” (Cheadle, 2011, p. 308). At the beginning of the novel we find a pauper boy that is ready to be ‘farmed’ (Dickens, 2008, p.4), a decision made by the authorities of the Parish. Children were at the mercy of rich men that formed a board in charge of children’s destinies. The appetite for money and the rapid rise of industrialism made that the wheel never stopped or cared about poor people. Thin and small children, like the case of Oliver, were used to be sold to work as

chimney-sweeps, a very dangerous profession since they were sent up the chimney and fire was made under them to 'help' them escape if they found themselves trapped. Luckily, the board do not reach an agreement with the chimney sweeper and Oliver avoids being bound as an apprentice to the Sweep after he begs the board not to send him away with the disgusting and aggressive Mr. Gamfield: "Oliver felt to his knees, and clashing his hands together, prayed that they would order him back to the dark room –that they would starve him –beat him –kill him if they pleased –rather than send him away with that dreadful man" (Dickens, 2008, p. 22). Despite Oliver's lack of education and knowledge of life he was aware of the consequences that came with a job like this. The board, without knowing what to do with him, ends up selling the boy to the parish undertaker, Mr. Sowerberry, a man that makes a profit out of the death of people that lived in the workhouse and their new feeding system. This new place is not different than that of the workhouse. Oliver is given to eat the rest of the food that the dog rejected and he has to sleep next to the coffins: "I wish some well-fed philosopher [...] could have seen Oliver Twist clutching at the dainty viands that the dog had neglected" (Dickens, 2008, p. 31). In this passage Dickens speaks directly to the reader, expecting that they see the atrocity and desperation of this little boy for a piece of meat. He wishes for empathy. He wishes that people put themselves in Oliver's shoes and experience his life at least for one minute. At the end, this seems to be the main point of the text; to emphasize the tyranny and coldness with which the different institutions were ruled. Tired of the abuse and neglect he has in his new house, he decides to escape to the city where he encounters a new way of living, surrounded by criminality led by the gang's head, Fagin.

4.4. And last, social order restores

At the end, Dickens tries to regain a certain stability and order in the society by punishing or rewarding the characters according to their actions. The good ones are shown living happily together in the country and the bad ones finally get what they deserved. In Chapters 52 and 53 we can see how everything concludes as the author puts a closure to the main characters in the text, he approaches the audience for the last time, and says that he would like to concentrate in the most honourable characters.

Despite all the bad things that happened to Oliver, he is in a constant search of love and happiness and he finally achieves all this when Mr. Brownlow adopts him and “He gratified the only remaining wish of Oliver’s warm and earnest heart, and thus linked together a little society, whose condition approached as nearly to one of perfect happiness as can ever be known in this changing world” (Dickens, 2008, p. 437). The good people that he meets in London create a ‘little society’ outside the big city and together they live in the peace and harmony they deserved. On the other hand, the members of the gang are eventually punished for the bad actions that they committed in their life. Fagin’s will is completely broken when he is found guilty and sentenced to death by a system that was too quick to judge people. Monks, Oliver’s half brother, is given half of the inheritance and spent it all in the New World where he continues committing criminal activities to finally end up imprisoned and died. Noah and Charlotte are pardoned for their crimes but they become Informers, that is, someone who made a living by bringing breaches of the law to the notice of the authorities and thus claiming part of the fine. One of the most rewarding endings is that of Mr. and Mrs. Bumble, who become what they have always hated, “deprived of their situations, were gradually reduced to great indigence and misery, and finally became paupers in the very same workhouse in which they had once lorded it over others” (Dickens, 2008, p. 438). Here the reader can see how pauperism can be reached by anyone if the conditions in life do not favour them. Even Agnes, Oliver’s mother, the woman who opens and closes the novel and seems not to be very important in the telling of the story line, leaves a new topic to discuss as the narrative comes to an end. She is not the ‘angel in the house’ as Rose is and represents the unwed women that did not belong in Victorian society. She is closer to be defined as Nancy the prostitute than Rose since she finds herself pregnant and with no husband to take care of her. She has clearly practiced sex outside marriage and that sinful act made women outcast of the community of that time. In the last lines, Dickens tries to give Agnes a place to rest in the old village church and remarks her condition of being weak and erring. I think that the author leaves an open question to this matter and since he was a reformer and an active thinker of what was wrong in society, I would like to believe that Agnes gives the Victorian society a

moment to think about the morality and difference that people trace between Agnes and Oliver's father and the contrast with which they were treated.

All in all, I would like to close this analysis by pointing Bayley's article *Oliver Twist: Things as they really are*, where he argues that it is not a satisfying story because it does not liberate us. And he continues by saying that, "The sense of complete reality in fiction can perhaps only be achieved by the author's possessing, and persuading his reader to share, a sense of different worlds [...] The awareness of difference is the awareness of freedom" (1967, p. 85). He just bounds the reader to rethink everything that is established in our morality and to see other realities beyond our own.

5. *Hard Times* (1854)

5.1. The worst side of the industrial society

Hard Times was written during the course of 1854 and it initially appeared published in parts in a weekly serialized periodical ran by Dickens, *Household Words*. It can be said that this text is in part inspired by Dickens' journeys to different parts of the country where he got to see with his own eyes how the Industrial Revolution was changing the scenery of Britain. But more importantly, it was Dickens' visit to the town of Preston, Lancashire in January 1854, where he was able to observe a strike that was taking place. He wrote about this event in *Household Words* and later in this novel, where he explained the worst side of industrialization and how cities were transformed for the satisfaction of the upper classes, but also to exhibit the squalor in which paupers lived. Even though in many of his novels social issues occupy the centre of interrogation to understand society, *Hard Times* is one of the most important ones since it "is driven by a sense of urgent social problems, [...] and seeks to identify a negative subject" (Schlicke, 2008, p. ix). This manifestation that Schlicke refers to can clearly be seen since the first line in the novel when Mr. Grandgrind says, "Now, what I want is, Facts" (Dickens, 2008, p. 7) a dogmatic approach used to rule every aspect of the city of Coketown. In this character, Dickens satirizes the principles of the philosopher Bentham's Utilitarianism, who held that "we ought to maximize the good, that is, bring about 'the greatest amount of good for the greatest number'" (Driver, *The History of Utilitarianism*, 2014). And on the other, Adam Smith' Political Economy, a social

political system based on the distribution of wealth. Both were crucial thinkers of the time in the field of economy but for Dickens their ideas were abhorrent. As opposed to this, he presents Mr. Sleary, the proprietor of the circus, and focuses in the life of the people who work in it rather than the circus as a business.

Moreover, Mr. Bounderby, the factory owner, and Mr. Grandgrind, the teacher of Coketown's school, appear as the personification of industrialization and indoctrination. Even though Dickens highly criticized the ruling hands that were behind the factories, he "had a pride in progress even though he opposed any mechanization of the spirit" (Fielding and Smith, 1971, p. 22). What is more, the narrator presents the city in its own chapter as the 'key-note' of the novel, perhaps as if it were another character that gives the story a common ground to develop the narrative. The city is depicted as being shadowed by the contamination that the factories produced, rivers polluted with ink and garbage and smog that cover all the surfaces in the same colour. Dickens describes it as follow, "It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but as matters stood, it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage" (2008, p. 26). It is presented as a place so monotonous in every sense that all the buildings look the same in every aspect. They were all constructed all by facts, where all the streets and people were the same, did the same job and had the same boring unappealing life.

Even though many critics gave a negative review about the book stating that the text did not expose the reality and showed inaccuracies about how the system really was, as it is the case of Harriet Martineau (writer at *Household Words*), who stated that "its characters, conversations, and incidents, are so unlike life" (1855, p. 36), I believe that this idea can be argued since the story goes beyond all this facts, and in an attempt to show light in a time of darkness, the writer presented *Hard Times* as a moral fable with opposed characters and an industrialized city as the background of intertwined stories.

5.2. The Hands

The factory workers of the city of Coketown are called "The Hands" and are presented through the character of Stephen Blackpool, a noble worker that looks too old

for his age. The author introduces the Hands with irony and shows them as a race in itself “who would have found more favour with some people, if Providence had seen fit to make them only hands, or, like other lower creatures of the seashore, only hands and stomachs” (Dickens, 2008, p. 64). In this passage, it is clear the direct critics to the upper classes and their concern to make profit out of men, women and children that worked nonstop. The Hands are just one more part of the mechanism of industrialization, forced to work long hours, earning very low incomes and with no one to care about their rights; but more precisely, they were deprived of their identity to become a sort of machine along with every other object in town. Additionally, Dickens gives many vivid comparisons for the readers to understand the position and experiences that the workers live daily. One example of this can be when he introduces the mill and the people that work there giving the reader a sense of what it looked like to see the insides of a factory: “So many hundred Hands in this Mill; so many hundred horse Steam Power” (Dickens, 2008, p. 69). Another instance can be the usage of the character of Stephen Blackpool to expose the complication that paupers had to get a divorce. As a Hand at that time, it was something impossible to achieve, Stephen struggle to separate from his drunk and prostitute wife but cannot come to an end for the fact that he is poor and “until 1857 full, legal divorce was only possible by an extensive, lengthy and public process of securing a private Act of Parliament” (D’Cruze, 2004, p. 267), in other words, it could only be achieved by the rich part of the population.

The Hands, apart from being outcast in society, could be also outcast from the inner circle of Hand. The character of Stephen becomes one when, for reasons not specified, he decides not to join the union of his factory led by the spokesman and worker, Slackbridge. This fact is welcomed by Mr. Bounderby, who sees in Stephen the perfect Hand, a man who is content with his position and works without complaining. Despite this, Mr. Bounderby denies helping Stephen to get a divorce and has no objection or remorse in reminding him of his place as a Hand. Lastly, Stephen is forced to face the consequences of being a pauper when his master fires him for not giving information about the union, that he does not belong to, and dies for being thought to be implicated in a bank robbery that he has never committed.

Finally, as opposed to the Hands is Mr Bounderby, the embodiment of the self-made man. In chapter IV, the reader is introduced to this character as a “rich man: banker, merchant, manufacturer, and what not” (Dickens, 2008, p. 19). He has no humility and proclaims himself the title because he was able to survive poverty and beat ignorance. Nevertheless, through him the reader is shown how without a good heart and compassion a person becomes a tool, another piece in the machinery of the raising industrialized city.

5.3. Facts and Fancy

The opening lines of *Hard Times* (2008) give the reader a very good glimpse of what to expect in the rest of the novel, “Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life” (Dickens, 2008, p. 1). The Coketown’s school was a place designed to be all facts, based in a set of rules to establish the relationships between master and man. In this institution, children were deprived of using their creativity, imagination and emotions freely; they were completely repressed in order to make of them non-thinker machines. This Utilitarian regime was perfect to make of people what was needed to progress in a country of industrialization, guided by factory owners who did not need interrogations of any kind. Even though this system could seem a little bit exaggerated, it was in fact true. Henry Morley wrote about the Birkbeck schools, in which Dickens based his story, in one article for *Household Words* on 25 December 1852. It tells that the intention of its creator, William Ellis, was to form paupers for their function in society and the industrial environment. In *Hard Times*, little boys and girls were taught from tender age to be just and nothing but a number, something that they will continue to be in their adult life. We learn this when in class, Mr. Grandgrind refers to Sissy Jupe as “girl number twenty” and refuses to call her by her nickname. According to Grant (1984), Mr. Grandgrind is one of the best representations of the “most savage and memorable satirical on what he took to be inhuman aspects of nineteenth-century English life. Schooling equals denial and repression, whether systematic or terrorist, and what is denied is the child’s world of the imagination” (p. 95).

In addition to this, we can see more instances of the education of that era in previous pages when a gentleman who works for the government office says to the children, “You are to be in all things regulated and governed, by fact. We hope to have, before long, a board of fact, people of fact, and of nothing but fact. You must discard the word Fancy altogether” (Dickens, 2008, p. 12). In this example it can be seen how facts and the imaginative came face to face as opposed forces that cannot coexist in the same place. For Johnson (1989), “The imaginative constraint of *Hard Times* is the symbolic expression of Dickens’s critique of the interlocking structures –economic, social, and political –of industrial capitalism” (p. 128). To illustrate this, I would like to refer to chapter II, which Dickens called “Murdering the Innocents”, in reference to the reading of the Bible, Matthew 2:16 that tells the story of King Herod murdering innocent children of Bethlehem in an attempt to kill all children who could potentially be a threat to his throne. By doing this, I believe he compares King Herod’s brutality to Mr. Grandgrind’s strict norms and rules of killing the imagination in young boys and girls that attend his classes and threat to tumble the educational town’s system. His aim is to indoctrinate every student so that they are prepared for a life of facts but Sissy Jupe, the daughter of the horse-riding of the circus, breaks all the rules by mixing facts and fancy. In one instance, Sissy is asked to define a horse but she cannot do it by facts, only by the experiences that she had with her father in the circus, which is the opposite of the education applied in this Victorian classroom. In opposition to Sissy appears Bitzer, a student who can describe the horse as something that he studied from an encyclopaedia. With time he becomes a stiff man, emotionally empty and full of utilitarian ideals. Furthermore, even Mr. Grandgrind’s family, in especial Louisa and Thomas are raised under Utilitarian values. His relationship with them makes the children become two persons emotionally damaged who cannot accomplish or develop real connection with the real world or other people.

The circus is presented as an alternative to the facts created by Mr. Grandgrind since the people who belong to the circus are free thinkers, imaginative and creative with their work, body and personal life. They travel the world freely and know new people and places, something that is not possible for paupers, especially those in Coketown. In the novel, the circus is such an abhorrent idea that Louisa and Thomas

have to look through a peephole as if it was a perversion to see. To illustrate these treats, Dickens uses opposed characters such as Mr. Grandgrind and Louisa or Mr. Sleary and Cecilia Jupe. The latter imply everything that is missing in the people of the city and invite the reader to rethink the Victorian education and where this is leading the country. Schlicke (2008) explains that “Education was a major concern of Dickens throughout his career” and that the author was in complete opposition to the Utilitarian ideals of education, adding that “the Utilitarians considered education an essential prerequisite for achieving the greatest happiness of the greatest number, and the development of a centrally directed national school system was controversially under way even as Dickens wrote” (p. xi).

5.4. Women

During the reign of Queen Victoria, women’s place was next to their husbands, they had to be obedient and their only command was to be the ‘angel in the house’. But femininity in *Hard Times* is in question in the character of Louisa, Sissy and Rachel, three different women educated by under a same system but in different class situations. To start with, Louisa cannot fulfil her role as a mother or wife because the education that her father gave to her deprived her of love and that was much worse than any other type of neglect. She is finally able to express her thoughts to her father after her destiny is already ruined by an unfortunate marriage, “What you have never nurtured in me, you have never nurtured in yourself; but O! If you had only done so long ago, or if you had only neglected me, what a much better and much happier creature I should have been this day!” (Dickens, 2008, p. 201). Even though Dickens wants the reader to feel that Mr. Grandgrind is a good father he is incapable of showing love because he was also deprived of it. Secondly, Sissy is presented as the opposite of Louisa because she was raised with the circus people; she is in fact a girl that represents the Victorian ideal: she is always very polite and curtsying and tries to never argue or question the things that she is taught in school. Despite all this she is not an ideal woman in the city of Coketown since she is not regulated by facts: “This is the new discovery. This is fact. This is taste, said the gentleman. The girl curtsyed, and sat down” (Dickens, 2008, p. 12). Finally, Rachel is referred to as an ‘angel’ because of her purity and high morality

toward marriage. Her character is used to portray working women and their limited life but more importantly how even they have an arduous life. Rachel is capable of showing compassion, love and empathy toward others; especially towards Stephen and his drunk wife, whom she takes care after Stephen pass away.

All in all, women in the novel are shown as creatures capable of evolution despite having being educated by facts or by facing the difficulties of class barriers. They overcome the mechanization of the industrial city, something that no men could achieve, which situates them in a position of great importance within society. Once again Charles Dickens breaks the stereotypes of the era portraying strong, thinking women.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, I believe that it can be said that Dickens was successful in achieving a change in Victorian society. Through his novels he reached a part of the nation that was in the darkness about certain important issues such as the unfair treatment of paupers under the Poor Law of 1834. His own life served him as a constant inspiration to his novels where he portrayed dramatic characterizations and the injustice of the life of children, women and men. It seems that he was motivated to generate a profound revolution in the government; to wake up the upper classes and show them the reality by using characters that people can feel empathy with, generating a real change in human nature. Dickens was also known to be a “man of the theatre, a tireless supporter of good causes and social reforms, a radical campaigning journalist, the head of a large, demanding family” (Grant 1984, p. 17) among other things, who had a sad part in his life that shaped his vision of the world in a particular way. But despite all this, he managed to use and transform these memories in real life changes, using them to the benefits of the unfortunate ones.

The Industrial Revolution and the cities affected by it was a common field for him to create stories. Dickens uses many times the entrance of the character to the new city and the first impressions of it. As a citizen of the city of London he knew their whereabouts very well because he walked through the city streets daily, that is why in his novels he is capable to make the locations so palpable and approachable to the reader, describing with assertion many institutions, shops and slums. On the other hand,

the era of the Industrial Revolution was a time of great change in every aspect of life. It constituted a change in commerce, population, geography and life style. By unifying these two central topics he denounced the useless system of justice in the Victorian period, its education, sanitation and the necessity to improve the life of people but mainly paupers.

In the novel *Oliver Twist* (1838), Dickens has chosen the character of Oliver, a hungry pauper boy, to satirize the system of the workhouses and the unjust treatment of the people living there. Fortunately for the young boy, he overcomes every situation that he is put through mainly because he is used by the writer as a tool to call the upper classes to be more empathetic with the situation that paupers confront every day. He points directly to the government as main hand that is too quick to punish vagrancy but also that turns the blind eye in the implementation of other laws that protect people, especially children.

In *Hard Times* (1854), Dickens creates a dystopian world where he sets the city of Coketown. In this novel he makes the reader spy through an imaginative hole, just as the children in the novel do, to explain the doctrines on which Victorian society stood. Once again, the use of irony and satire are presented in every page of the book, especially when he refers to certain topics such as Mr. Grandgrind's Philosophy of Fact, took by real philosophers' ideals, such as Smith and Bentham. Fancy and fact are not allowed to coexist in this industrial society where the mechanization of the low classes is imperative. Dogmatic ideals are implemented to replace the identity of the population and through a variety of many key characters, Dickens shows the reader the difference between two sides of civilization: one made of facts and one made of imaginative elements, both necessary for the construction of the self.

To sum up, I think that the main aim of Dickens' novel is to provide the reader with an end that gives a sense of social order but at the same time poses new questions that leave the reader thinking what we as humans can do to make of the place where we live, and also of our future, a better place. But more importantly, it is to point out our duty as citizens to always try to stand up against injustice and fight for the ones that have no voice in our society, no matter in which period we are living in.

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