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# "AWFUL UNKNOWN QUANTITIES": ADDRESSING THE READERS IN *HARD TIMES*

*By Carolyn Vellenga Berman*

CHARLES DICKENS WAS LIONIZED IN THE EARLY 1850s for his political powers as a novelist, journalist, and reformer. A December 1850 review of *David Copperfield* in *Fraser's Magazine* affirmed that the so-called "Boz"

> has done more, we verily believe, for the promotion of peace and goodwill between man and man, class and class, nation and nation, than all the congresses under the sun . . . . Boz, and men like Boz, are the true humanizers, and therefore the true pacificators, of the world. They sweep away the prejusdices of class and caste, and disclose the common ground of humanity which lies beneath factitious social and national systems.[1]

Such tributes to his political powers must have been gratifying to a writer who had begun his career as a parliamentary reporter. They proclaimed the power of the writer in an age of print, bearing out Thomas Carlyle's sense that "Printing . . . is equivalent to Democracy . . . . Whoever can speak, speaking now to the whole nation, becomes a power, a branch of government, with inalienable weight in law-making."[2] *Fraser's* elaborated on this idea by linking Dickens's uncanny ability to "introduce" characters to one another to his ability to "introduce" such characters to readers of different ranks. "Men like Boz," the reviewer explained, "introduce the peasantry to the peerage" and "the grinder at the mill to the millionaire who owns the grist" (700).

In accordance with polite usage, the lower rank is "introduced" to the rich and titled here. But this conventional phrasing begs the question: were Dickens's readers actually peers and millionaires reading about the lower orders? Or vice versa? On the average, of course, the answer lies somewhere in the middle. Dickens's readers were mostly lower in rank than Lady Dedlock of *Bleak House*, and mostly higher up than the pauper Jo. Many, like David Copperfield, fell between his beloved Steerforth and Little Emily. Some readers were the daughters of successful hardware traders, like Louisa Gradgrind in *Hard Times*, but others were working men like Stephen Blackpool, whose introduction to Louisa proves as fatal to him as Emily's to Steerforth. While they were outnumbered, however, Dickens's readers did include fine ladies – and the queen herself.



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How could Dickens collectively address them all?[3] This question comes to the fore in *Hard Times*, a work which, in my view, betrays a marked self-consciousness about the Victorian novel's divergent audiences. To be sure, *Hard Times* is an unusual case, even within Dickens's *oeuvre*. First published in Dickens's magazine *Household Words* in 1854, weekly installments of *Hard Times* were available at a mere two pence an issue. The completed work, too, was meant to be shorter and less expensive to print than Dickens's other novels. While making the novel as "compact" and "cheap" as possible, however, Dickens and his publishing partners still aimed at readers with, let us say, higher aspirations.[4] This is reflected in the advertisements that appeared opposite the opening of the tale in the monthly reissue of *Household Words*, lauding "Manon's Resilient Bodice and Corsaletto di Medici . . . now so extensively patronised by the *elite* of our aristocracy," and "Imperial Flora," a manufacturer of silks allegedly ordered by the queen.[5]

Such marketing concerns enter the novel's text in the form of an elaborate effort to canvass both its subjects and its audiences. At the end of *Hard Times*, the narrator foretells that Mr. Gradgrind, Member of Parliament for Coketown, will finally learn to make "his facts and figures subservient to Faith, Hope, and Charity," only to be taunted by his "late political associates," "in the era of its being quite settled that the national dustmen have only to do with one another, and owe no duty to *an abstraction called a People*" (221; book 3, ch. 9, my emphasis). The unflattering vision of parliament as a set of trash collectors busily sifting through rubbish pinpoints a crucial problem for representative government: how does it represent, or even know, its own "People"? "The People," an entity which it claims to represent, is not just an abstract idea here, but an "abstraction": the result of a disassociation from specific instances, predicated on the removal of the very objects it represents.[6]

This abstraction ("the People") plays the same rhetorical role for representative government as the personification to whom Dickens claimed a peculiar duty: "the Reader." "Dear Reader!" Dickens writes in an openly political appeal at the end of the novel, "It rests with you and me, whether, in our two fields of action, similar things shall be or not" (222; book 3, ch. 9). With a magic typical of the printed novel, this abstraction renders a collective address intimate, reaching out from the (re)printed page to the parallel world of the unknown individual holding the (journal or) book. Elsewhere in the novel, however, the "reader" plays a more equivocal role: "So near was Mr. Bounderby – or, if the reader should prefer it, so far off" (15; book 1, ch. 4). Is he near or far? It depends on the reader. When the novelist's subjects become readers and audiences, the challenges of a collective address emerge further: "when the Hands cleared out again into the streets, there were still as many readers as before. / Slackbridge, the delegate, had to address his audience too that night" (185; book 3, ch. 4). With Slackbridge's speech, as elsewhere in the novel, authorial narration bleeds into free indirect oratory before the speaker's words surface in an extended quote, implicitly merging two abstractions: Reader and People.

*Hard Times*, I will contend, is deeply concerned about both abstractions, and their shared tendency to make incommensurate subjects commingle. The novel's true target may thus be something at once more abstract and more precise than the excesses of "political economy" and the industrial world that it sought to superintend. It is not the search for empirical evidence of social problems *per se*, nor the use of statistics generally, that Dickens attacks, but the government's increasing reliance on the gathering of evidence about "the People" and the accompanying shift in form as well as content for the British educational system. Criticizing the government reports on social conditions – known as the "blue books" for

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their stiff blue covers – Dickens turns from his larger project of inciting social reforms to the subtler project of examining the basis for such reforms.

To make this case, I emphasize Dickens's attack on the "blue books" as such. *Hard Times* teems with specific references to these government publications. Yet critical discussions of industrialism and political economy in *Hard Times* have largely overlooked the role played by the government reports that brought the two together.[7] Perhaps this was inevitable, since the very same government reports – along with newspaper accounts of them, and histories written from them – are our primary sources of "facts" and "contexts" for the Victorian novel. *Hard Times* reminds us that the blue books do not contain bare historical realities, but representations of them, with a material history all their own.

Dickens's novel does not just attack the blue books, as I will argue. It engages with them by mimicking them, staging the sort of fact-finding interview they described, and relying on their limited palette to tell its story.[8] In so doing, *Hard Times* reveals a convergence between government reports, novels, and the periodicals that digested them. All three rivals in the print marketplace sought to represent, to educate, and to speak *to* and *for* the public. *Hard Times* caricatures a representative government trying to apprehend its subjects. By implication, it also probes a flourishing print culture trying to apprehend its audience.[9] Looking anew at Dickens's attack on the blue books in *Hard Times* thus illuminates a crucial scene in the history of public knowledge as well as the history of the novel.

## *I. The Blue Chamber*

THE "BLUE BOOKS" PRINTED BY PARLIAMENT comprised a relatively new genre and a burgeoning phenomenon. Hansard began publishing authorized reports of the proceedings of the Houses of Parliament in 1774. By the 1830s, "parliamentary printing seemed to explode" (Frankel, "Blue Books" 310). Major reports on the British working classes, submitted to parliamentary committees and printed for the public, appeared after the formation of the Cambridge Statistical Society in 1833; these reports followed in the footsteps of earlier reports to Parliament committees on conditions in the colonies. Sheila Smith cites the Factory Inspectors' Report of 1839, Chadwick's *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population* of 1842, the Royal Commission on the Health of Towns in 1844, and the Draining and Sewerage of Towns Report in 1852 as "important pioneering reports of nineteenth-century society" (28). Gwyneth Tyson Roberts consults an earlier 1838 *Report on Negro education in the Windward and Leeward Islands* and an 1840 *Report on the State of Elementary Education in the Mining Districts of South Wales*. By 1854, sixty large folios were published under blue covers each year (Stanley).

As *Hard Times* reminds us, the "blue book" phenomenon represented a governmental innovation on two fronts. First, it marked a new stage in the surveillance of the British population by government-appointed professionals. It is noteworthy that the first subjects of this government-sponsored production of knowledge were those subjects with the least access to government power: colonial subjects and the working classes. Second, it institutionalized the reliance of lawmakers on the reports produced by experts. Even as the "blue books" trained the gaze of government on newly interesting objects of knowledge, they also shifted the relationship between power and knowledge within the government, requiring work by knowledge professionals hired by government committees to precede government action.

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The publication of government reports would seem an odd target for a novel that grew out of an essay called "Frauds on the Fairies," protesting against the politically correct revision of what Dickens considered the people's fairy tales. Yet in *Hard Times* Dickens's ire at the government reports ultimately targets efforts to study and shape working-class reading – of fairy tales and fiction, in particular. Key chapters of *Hard Times* thus function to introduce its central preoccupation: public knowledge of, and prescriptions for, the working class as consumers of everything from religion to drugs and popular reading. Chapter five, titled "Key-Note," first introduces Coketown as a series of "stunted shapes" and moral failures, only to reveal the source of such descriptions in parliamentary discourse:

> Nor was it merely the stranger who noticed this, because there was a native organisation in Coketown itself, whose members were to be heard in the House of Commons every session, indignantly petitioning for acts of parliament that should make their people religious by main force. Then, came the Teetotal Society, who complained that these same people *would* get drunk, and showed in tabular statements that they did get drunk . . . . Then, came the chemist and the druggist, with other tabular statements . . . (22).

As this passage emphasizes, the materials for Dickens's plot derive from the politically charged statements in a government forum.

Chapter eight, "Never Wonder," "strikes the key-note again" by referring to a different set of tables, this time proving and puzzling over the fact that these same people *would* read fiction (41). "There was a library in Coketown, to which general access was easy," the narrator explains, and Mr. Gradgrind "greatly tormented his mind about what the people read in this library: a point whereon little rivers of tabular statements periodically flowed into the howling ocean of tabular statements, which no diver ever got to any depth in and came up sane" (42). What the proliferating tables of library records documented about the people's reading habits was this: "They sometimes, after fifteen hours' work, sat down to read mere fables . . . . They took De Foe to their bosoms, instead of Euclid." How could they prefer reading novels to geometry books? "Mr. Gradgrind was for ever working, in print and out of print, at this eccentric sum, and he never could make out how it yielded this unaccountable product" (42).

Despite Dickens's emphasis on statistical tables, the blue books were not exclusively composed of economic analysis and statistics. Anecdotal knowledge clashed and combined with statistical knowledge in live debate, as in the ensuing government reports. The power of public stories told by witnesses comes to the fore in an 1835 account of how the House of Commons came to request studies of working conditions in factories. Taking the side of embattled factory owners, the *Foreign Quarterly Review* stressed that

> The manufacturers answered the charges made against them through incontrovertible facts, the tables of mortality, the records of hospitals and police-offices, the registers of parishes and courts of justice . . . but there are still people in the world, who prefer the figures of speech to the figures of arithmetic, and the rules of Longinus to those of Cocker.[10] Pathetic tales, more than sufficient to supply a whole generation of novelists, prevailed over a dull, dry parade of stupid figures, and a Committee of the House of Commons was appointed to examine the state of our manufacturing population. (Taylor 109; qtd. in Poovey, *History* 313)

We have in this account a succinct précis of Dickens's dramatic opposition in *Hard Times*: stories versus "dull" figures; classical grammar versus geometry; and novels versus tables

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of mortality. The British government reports on the condition of the working classes, like Dickens's novel, thus arose in the context of parliamentary contests between the persuasive power of "pathetic tales" and "stupid figures" – and both kinds of knowledge abound in the government-issued reports.

Dickens takes revenge upon the puzzled parliamentarians by employing a fairy tale allusion to intimate the violence lurking behind the government reports' bland blue covers. His reference to the fairy tale villain Bluebeard construes the proliferation of blue books as a site of secret horror in the library of the former hardware trader turned, first, school reformer and, finally, M.P. of Coketown, Mr. Gradgrind, a "man of facts and calculations" (6):

> Although Mr. Gradgrind did not take after Blue Beard, his room was quite a blue chamber in its abundance of blue books. Whatever they could prove (which is usually anything you like), they proved there, in an army constantly strengthening by the arrival of new recruits. In that charmed apartment, the most complicated social questions were cast up, got into exact totals, and finally settled – if those concerned could only have been brought to know it. (75; bk. 1, ch. 15)

In the classic fairy tale by Charles Perrault, Bluebeard's secret chamber contains the evidence of his crimes – the bodies of his former wives. Revealing this evidence only serves to harm "those concerned," since the newest wife's discovery of this knowledge provokes her own (attempted) murder. The "final settlement" of Dickens's "complicated social questions" in the "blue chamber" would, by this analogy, amount to death for the objects of this official knowledge.[11] Construing the blue covers of the government reports as a marker of secret evil *à la* Bluebeard, *Hard Times* appears to concur with a Welsh response to an 1847 report on education in Wales, dubbing the report "blue without and black within" (Jones 13).

The collection of evidence about working-class life is not a minor concern but a major object of apprehension in *Hard Times*. Dickens stages the primal scene of a new relationship between governance and knowledge in the encounter between the unassuming laborer Stephen Blackpool and his employer, the blowhard manufacturer Josiah Bounderby. When Stephen refuses to join the workers' "Combination" (union), Bounderby summons the poor man, in order to present him to the gentleman James Harthouse, who has "coached himself up with a blue book or two" for a possible bid for parliament (97; bk. 2, ch.2). As Bounderby explains to Stephen, "Here's a gentleman from London present . . . a Parliament gentleman. I should like him to hear a short bit of dialogue between you and me . . . instead of receiving it on trust, from my mouth" (114; bk. 2, ch. 5). The ensuing dialogue indicates an awareness of the new status of the workers as objects of governing knowledge. Stephen at first appears to recommend to his interlocutors the formation of "blue book" commissions: "Look how we live, an wheer we live, an in what numbers, an by what chances, and wi' what sameness," he says, citing the kind of information contained in those government reports (115). But at the end of this sentence, Stephen invokes the world not of "blue books," but of Bluebeard, after all: "and look how the mills is awlus a goin, and how they never works us no nigher to ony dis'ant object – ceptin awlus, Death."

Stephen next addresses the government reports directly: "Look how you considers of us, an writes of us, an talks of us, and goes up wi' yor deputations to Secretaries o' State 'bout us, and how yo are awlus right, and how we are awlus wrong, and never had'n no reason in us sin ever we were born" (115; bk. 2, ch. 5). This complaint is presumably aimed at manufacturers like Bounderby who, the narrator explains, submit "tabular statements" to the

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House of Commons diagnosing the workers of Coketown as a "bad lot," "never thankful," "restless," "dissatisfied and unmanageable" (22; bk. 1, ch. 6), while resisting any government inspection or regulation of their own practices:

> They were ruined, when they were required to send labouring children to school; they were ruined, when inspectors were appointed to look into their works; they were ruined, when such inspectors considered it doubtful whether they were quite justified in chopping people up with their machinery; they were utterly undone, when it was hinted that perhaps they need not always make quite so much smoke. (86; bk. 2, ch. 1)

Yet Stephen's speech goes beyond Bounderby, by emphasizing how the workers have become objects of representation by others, even when they provide the facts themselves. What Stephen objects to is what we have learned to call a "discourse": "how you considers of us, an writes of us, an talks of us" – a serious matter not only for parliament but also for the literary man. Despite all the reports, as Stephen asserts, true knowledge of the situation is elusive and unfathomable: "Who can look on't, sir, and fairly tell a man 'tis not a muddle?" (115; bk. 2, ch.5).

Even in the key speech that Dickens (in)famously deleted from his manuscript, the context of government reporting upstages the content of Stephen's claims. The scene in question furnishes Stephen with specific complaints, as well as a motive for his refusal to join the workers' union (Butwin 181). The passage starts out in a deceptively intimate conversation between star-crossed lovers, Stephen and Rachel: "'Thou'st spoken o' thy little sister. There agen! Wi' her child arm tore off afore thy face.' She turned her head aside, and put her hand [up]." The factory accident involving Rachel's beloved sister prompts a sentimental call for pity and action based on the pain of an eye-witness. But Dickens turns at once from this private pain to the public scene of the factory accident dispute, as Stephen goes on to note the inadequate miracle of a subsequent government report:

> "Where dost thou ever hear or read o' us – the like o' us – as being otherwise than onreasonable and cause o' trouble? Yet think o' that. Government gentlemen come and make's report. Fend off the dangerous machinery, box it off, save life and limb; don't rend and tear human creeturs to bits in a Chris'en country! What follers? Owners gets up their throats, cries out, 'Onreasonable! Inconvenient! Troublesome!' Gets to Secretaries o' States wi' deputations, and nothing's done. When do we get there wi' our deputations, God help us! We are too much int'rested and nat'rally too far wrong t'have a right judgment. Haply we are; but what are they then? I' th' name o' the muddle in which we are born and live and die, what are they then?" (qtd. in Butwin 177)

Dickens may well have deleted this scene in order to "avoid a kind of working-class activism" (Butwin 179). He may also have felt uncomfortable with the quieting speech he gave Rachel: "Let such things be, Stephen. They only lead to hurt, let them be!" "I will, since thou tell'st me so. I will. I pass my promise" (qtd. in Butwin 177). If so, however, we should note that this deletion indicates an acute awareness of his own working-class readers. The scene is dangerous not because it menaces middle-class readers, but because it might well be read by working men like Stephen, making Dickens himself into a rabble-rouser, comparable to the pitiless Slackbridge.

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*Hard Times*, as Blackpool's "muddle" suggests, is a strangely cautionary industrial novel. After all, as Sheila Smith has argued, the "blue books" provided the material for industrial novels and social realism in this era. Noting that "the people who gave evidence in the reports are far from being a faceless crowd," Smith cites the "authentic voice" of individuals from the reports who "speak more than once in nineteenth-century literature, especially in the novels of George Eliot and Thomas Hardy" (26). Quoting the scientist T. H. Huxley's claim that "even the mere man of letters, who affects to ignore and despise science, is unconsciously impregnated with her spirit and indebted for his best products to her methods," Smith suggests that *Hard Times*, in a way, bites the hand that feeds it (Smith 29).

Why would Dickens attack the blue books, representing as they did the reformist impulses of representative government? I suspect that an intramural critique of government reports on working-class readers became something far more radical as Dickens developed his story for a puzzling and faceless set of diverse readers. Rather than scorning the political science that influenced him, Dickens satirizes parliamentary discourse about "the People" in a manner that implicates his own address to his readers. Stephen's voice is thus a discursive effect, important not so much for what it says as for how it is exhibited. This is why the content of his speech foregrounds its context and the demands that produced it. "Now, what do you complain of?" Mr. Bounderby asks; Stephen responds by reminding him, "I ha' not coom here sir . . . to complain. I coom for that I were sent for" (114; bk. 2, ch. 5). Here, as in Stephen's other speeches, what we see is less a worker's "authentic" voice than a satire of the way it is staged in parliamentary contests. Such scenes parody not only the government's use of statistics to apprehend the condition of the working classes, but also its efforts to exhibit the "authentic voice" of the workers within its chambers. The parade of dialogues and "pathetic tales" by witnesses in the blue books thus forces us to reconsider both the theatrical aspects and the satiric range of Dickens's novel.

## *II. The National Schoolmaster*

*Hard Times* stands apart from Dickens's other novels. As David Lodge has noted, it is unusually melodramatic, constructed from "scenes rather than episodes, explicit verbal interchanges between characters"; "even the authorial voice is very much a speaking voice: not a ruminative essayist, or even a fireside conversationalist, but an orator, a pulpit-thumper" (405–6). A parliamentary orator, perhaps? Lodge does not say. But since D. A. Miller's searching analysis of *Bleak House*, we have understood how Dickens, like his character, "do[es] the police in different voices."[12] Surely, as a former parliamentary reporter, he could impersonate parliamentary voices just as well? To grasp how and to what effect Dickens might adopt such voices in *Hard Times*, we must read *Hard Times* in the context of the blue book reports, particularly those on working-class education.

Readers have long been puzzled by Dickens's indirect approach to the industrial landscape in *Hard Times*. Rather than going into the "fearful story . . . being then enacted in the north," with "loss of money on the one side and the pangs of hunger on the other," as one disappointed reviewer commented, *Hard Times* had "subordinated" this "purpose" to "another": "to exhibit the evil effects" of an "educational system" not, to the reviewer's knowledge, "in operation anywhere in England" (Sinnett 331). If the conflict between "masters and men" in the north of England were the subject of Dickens's story, this

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focus would, indeed, be unaccountable. But if *Hard Times* set out to critique the curious new relationship between government reports and the laboring classes, then the question of educational reform deserves all its prominence in the novel. The blue book reports on education allow us to grasp not only why Dickens approaches the social problems of industrialism as he does, but also why we cannot attribute the resulting narrative voice solely to "Dickens."

Far from being a footnote to the story of labor conflicts, education was a key site for government intervention in the manufacturing districts and the lives of workers. The Committee of the Privy Council on Education was formed in 1839, hiring as its first secretary James Kay (later Kay-Shuttleworth), author of the 1832 report on "The Moral and Physical Condition of the Working Classes of Manchester" (Alton 67–68). In support of his view that education was the solution to the poor moral and physical conditions of the laboring classes, the Committee produced such blue book reports as "The State of Elementary Education in the Mining Districts of South Wales" (1840), "The Establishment of Schools in the Factory Districts" (1843), and the "Report into the State of Education in Wales" (1847).[13] This last effort to ground government educational reforms on a fact-based survey of specific localities provoked a great controversy, "entering Welsh national mythology" with the nickname "The Treachery of the Blue Books" or "Brad y Llyfrau Gleision" (Roberts 1).

Kay-Shuttleworth's guidelines on hiring Commissioners to conduct this survey show how the education reports aimed at once to assess current conditions in education with newly scientific precision and to facilitate governance by ideological conversion. According to Kay-Shuttleworth, the men who were to "examine the whole question with impartiality" should be "laymen of the Church of England" who were "accustomed to statistical inquiries" and would be "capable of analysing the opinions on social, political and religious questions which may be presented to them, *and of diffusing juster views among all classes*" (my emphasis, qtd. in Roberts 76). What he means by "juster views" becomes clearer when we read the text of the 1843 report on new model schools in the factory districts, where the commissioner comments that

> In every town some individuals were to be found who thought (or pretended to think) that universal suffrage . . . would secure a system of legislation more beneficial to the working classes than what had hitherto been pursued. Among these were several ill-disposed persons, who, in order to gain some temporary advantage assumed, and induced others to believe, that the principles of the Charter would be obtained by the compulsory stoppage of mills and factories and generally of all labour." (*Report from R. J. Sanders* 299)

Education reports stressed the efficacy of model schools in counteracting such dangerous ideas, observing for example the "beneficial effects" of new schools on "the working-classes of this neighborhood, who used to be notorious for their blackguardism."[14] In towns "neglected in respect of education," the Commissioners suggested, "the effects were partly seen in the turbulent and seditious state" of these districts. A "sound secular education, based on the principles of reason and religion," they agreed, "would be the best antidote against these vicious habits."[15]

This is why *Hard Times* opens with the scene of an unnamed "government officer" visiting a model school under the wing of the school reformer Gradgrind, who exhibits the work of a model teacher turned out by the new teacher "factory" established by

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Kay-Shuttleworth's committee (8, 10; bk. 1, ch. 2). Dickens knew such scenes well. As Anne Hiebert Alton notes, Dickens was "active in helping various schools, especially Ragged Schools, and institutions for orphan and defective children"; he "spent much of his time visiting schools, especially those . . . for the poorer classes"; and he "advocated more State intervention in the funding, supervision and setting of educational standards." Nevertheless, he "wanted both a higher caliber of education for the poor and a higher caliber of teachers" than these reforms produced (Alton 73–74). What we see in *Hard Times* is thus a pointed intramural critique of Dickens's own allies in efforts to provide and regulate quality education for the working classes.

Labor tensions, living conditions, and the mortal dangers of the mining districts – all the loosely gathered problems in Dickens's novel – were targeted by the government educational initiatives grounded in these reports on working-class education.[16] Frequently, the reports combined a fastidious predilection for numbers with a fatuously incomplete mode of "accounting" for these numbers. For example, on the life expectancy of miners: "The average life is very short – not above 33 years, as appears from the [parish] register. This may be accounted for by the personal dirtiness of the miners, who never wash their bodies."[17] In *Hard Times*, Mr. Grandgrind similarly attempts to answer the question of whether his daughter should marry his friend Mr. Bounderby by comparing the "Facts of this case" (the disparity in their ages) to "the statistics of marriage, so far as they have yet been obtained in England and Wales" (77; bk. 1, ch. 15). The government reports, like Gradgrind, concealed their partiality by grounding themselves in numbers.

Meanwhile, as the novel hints, government reports on the working classes were gradually becoming the educational medium by which not only elected officials but British citizens of all kinds – including the schoolchildren of the ruling classes – gained knowledge of the laborers in their midst (and in the British Empire). Dickens gives us the consequences of this shift in Louisa Gradgrind's general notion of the workers in her town as a phenomenon of nature:

> Something to be worked so much and paid so much, and there ended; something to be infallibly settled by laws of supply and demand; something that blundered against those laws, and floundered into difficulty; something that was a little pinched when wheat was dear, and over-ate itself when wheat was cheap; . . . something that occasionally rose like a sea, and did some harm and waste (chiefly to itself), and fell again; this she knew the Coketown Hands to be. (120–21; bk. 2, ch. 6)

Louisa's apprehension of the "multitude of Coketown" as something "like the lower creatures of the sea-shore, only hands and stomachs" (52) dramatizes the "positive unconscious" of the new forms of governing knowledge, and indicates the corresponding shift in form and content for the British educational system.[18]

As J. M. M'Culloch (a model for Dickens's teacher, "M'Choakumchild") explained in the preface to his 1831 textbook, *A Series of Lessons*, students were once taught elocution by "reciting parliamentary speeches, and reading the latest sentimental poetry"; now they must instead study "useful and interesting facts" in "Natural History" and "Elementary Science" (*Hard Times* 325–26).[19] Rather than picking up ruling-class skills by imitating parliamentary speeches, students would learn to decode the new forms of knowledge produced by knowledge professionals for government use.

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The population surveillance mimicked in *Hard Times* is thus not just any surveillance. Other Dickens novels echo and indict the "individualizing" surveillance described by Michel Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*: "In a system of discipline, when one wishes to individualize the healthy, normal and law-abiding adult, it is always by asking him how much of the child he has in him, what secret madness lies within him, what fundamental crime he has dreamt of committing" (192–93). *Hard Times*, by contrast, generalizes its characters. With regard to the composite they cannot help but form, individuals stand out only by baffling categorization. Sissy Jupe confounds Gradgrind in just this way: "there was something in this girl which could hardly be set forth in tabular form . . . . [H]e was not sure that if he had been required, for example, to tick her off into columns in a parliamentary return, he would have quite known how to divide her" (73; bk. 1, ch.14).

Dickens's Coketown is, in short, cooked up from parliamentary returns. It is an amalgam of the manufacturing towns found in blue book descriptions. We might thus compare the narrator's tone with the "language of the blue books" as Gwyneth Tyson Roberts has described it. In her close analysis of the 1847 *Report . . . into the State of Education in Wales*, for example, Roberts finds that

> [Commissioner] Johnson's overview . . . has a high frequency count of vocabulary with strong – and negative – emotive force ("barbarous," "obnoxious," "atrocious," "heinous," "degradation," "depravity," and so on), but for him these were apparently objective descriptions of people, places, and educational standards in north Wales, and he seems to have seen no contradiction between the use of such vocabulary and the dutiful assurance . . . with which he ended his survey: "I limit this Report to the facts which I have ascertained."[20]

What guaranteed the objectivity of Commissioners' "facts" was not a neutral descriptive tone, but the collection of quantifiable data alongside direct testimony by the Commissioners as well as their interlocutors, e.g., "the number of teachers – their ages, whether trained at a normal school or a model school – for what period and when."[21] This by no means precluded a judgmental response from the reporting observers. Kay-Shuttleworth himself invoked the specter of degeneration in describing the workers' "physical and moral evils": "Ill-fed – ill clothed – half sheltered and ignorant . . . [it] only remains that they should become . . . demoralized and reckless to render perfect the portraiture of savage life" (*Four Periods* 23). This was his description of the weavers of Manchester.

Stephen Blackpool, Dickens's fictional weaver, first appears in a long sentence which would fit neatly among the descriptive passages written by blue book commissioners, if it were not exaggerated. As in the blue books, the careful observation of the physical spaces in town, taken to be a reflection of the "multitude" it contains, overwhelms the description of the individual who will represent it. He is identified only by name and by the relevant number that describes him: his age.

> In the hardest working part of Coketown; in the innermost fortifications of that ugly citadel, where Nature was as strongly bricked out as killing airs and gases were bricked in; at the heart of the labyrinth of narrow courts upon courts, and close streets upon streets, which had come into existence piecemeal, every piece in a violent hurry for some one man's purpose, and the whole an unnatural family, shouldering and trampling, and pressing one another to death; in the last close nook of this great exhausted receiver, where the chimneys for want of air to make a draught, were built in an

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> immense variety of stunted and crooked shapes, as though every house put out a sign of the kind of people who might be expected to be born in it; among the multitude of Coketown, generically called "the Hands," – a race who would have found more favour with some people, if Providence had seen fit to make them only hands, or, like the creatures of the sea-shore, only hands and stomachs – lived a certain Stephen Blackpool, forty years of age. (*Hard Times* 51–52; bk. 1, ch. 10)

Knowledge of the individual is elusive here, but figures of speech abound to bring the compound to life. They are, indeed, crammed frantically into an overburdened sentence, trampling one another, as metonymic courts, streets, bricks, gases, shoulders, feet, chimneys, houses, hands, and stomachs aggregate, while metaphorical Nature is bricked out, only to return as the degenerate, post-Malthusian "unnatural family." Like the blue book accounts, this passage jumbles together a condemnation of the conditions of work and labor with a horror for the people who might survive it. Dickens's narrator only distances himself from such associations in the final phrase, with the comment that "some people" might have preferred them to be "only hands and stomachs."

Fans of the blue books may object that Dickens fails in his satirical effect by ignoring the "authentic voices of the workers" in the government reports. Yet these voices themselves were also an amalgam. Let us consider, for example, the heavily anthologized testimony of a child textile worker, which helped to prompt the 1833 Factory Act:

> I work at Mr. Wilson's mill. I attend the drawing-head. I get 5s. 9d. It is four or five years since we worked double hours. We only worked an hour over then. We got a penny for that. We went in the morning at six o'clock by the mill clock. It is about half past five by our clock at home when we go in, and we are about a quarter too fast by Nottingham. We come out at seven by the mill. The clock is in the engine-house. It goes like other clocks. I think the youngest child is about seven. There are only two males in the mill. I dare say there are twenty under nine years . . . . [22]

There is nothing spontaneous about this voice, which is obviously a set of answers to questions designed to elicit and verify relevant numbers: "How much?", "How long?", "What time?", "How do you know what time it is?", etc. The presentation of these first-person statements in a seemingly affectless string of statements, however, conjures up a powerful (and pitiable) subject. The phrase "I dare say" has not been edited out, presumably because it refers to a factual doubt, but it also functions to confer a subjectivity-effect on the speaker. Occasionally, on "moral" questions of particular interest to Parliament, the child witness is permitted to express an opinion: "William Crookes is overlooker in our room; he is cross-tempered sometimes. He does not beat me; he beats the little children if they do not do their work right. They want beating now and then" (1100).

*Hard Times* does swerve from the politicized encounter between state and subjects in the factory schools to Gradgrind's home school; in narrative terms, this swerve is accomplished through the adoption of the abandoned child Sissy Jupe, an unusual working-class pupil who hails from the circus.[23] Yet Sissy Jupe's ongoing experiences at the model school in Coketown give Dickens ample opportunity to lampoon the blue books' efforts to address the working classes. As the government visitor informs the (presumably lower class) children in the school in chapter one, from now on "you are to be in all things regulated and governed by fact" (9; bk. 1, ch. 2). How could facts "govern" working-class children? The education reports encourage us to take the phrase literally. In the West Indies as in Wales, government

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commissioners expressed shock at the pupils' ignorance of the British government and the (imperial) nation for which it stood, unified by language and religion. In Wales, for example, they complained that "a child might pass through the generality of these schools without learning either the limits, capabilities, general history, or language of *that empire of which he is born a citizen*" (qtd. in Roberts 106, my emphasis). Commissioners verged on self-satire as they reported encounters with individual children: "One boy told me, he did not know if he had a part about him that would never die; neither had he heard of such a person as Jesus Christ."[24]

Like the children featured in these reports, Sissy Jupe is a recalcitrant subject. Unlike them, however, she combines a resistance to statistical analysis with a firm knowledge of church dogma:

> M'Choakumchild reported that she had a very dense head for figures; that, once possessed with a general idea of the globe, she took the smallest conceivable interest in the exact measurements . . . that after eight weeks of induction into the elements of Political Economy, she had only yesterday been set right . . . for returning to the question, "What is the first principle of this science?" the absurd answer, "To do unto others as I would that they should do unto me." (46; bk. 1, ch. 9)

Sissy must, in Gradgrind's view, be taught according to the prescriptions of the blue books that she is being trained to comprehend: "it showed the necessity of infinite grinding at the mill of knowledge, as per system, schedule, blue-book, report, and tabular statements A to Z" (46). So, too, her teacher M'Choakumchild had "worked his stoney way into Her Majesty's most Honorable Privy Council's Schedule B" (10; bk. 1, ch. 2). Blue books identified the defects *and* prescribed the remedies for her education, all the better to govern her. Yet Sissy's surprisingly sure knowledge of church tenets, as they contradict those of modern governing knowledges, allows Dickens to highlight the moral failures of those who would do so.

The knowledge required of Sissy is primarily that of the state and all it rules – that is, it is a knowledge of herself as part of a mass of subjects governed by an empire. As Sissy explains to Louisa, "today, for instance, Mr. M'Choakumchild was explaining to us about Natural Prosperity." "National, I think it must have been," Louisa corrects her. "Yes, it was. – But isn't it the same?" (47; bk. 1, ch. 9). Hinting in her "ignorance" that the statistics of national prosperity have been conflated with the proof of a providential bounty, Sissy makes the connection clear in her report: "And he said, Now, this schoolroom is a Nation. And in this nation, there are fifty millions of money . . . . isn't this a prosperous nation, and a'n't you in a thriving state? . . . I said I didn't know. I thought I couldn't know . . . unless I knew who had got the money, and whether any of it was mine" (47). However useful mathematics might prove to a child like Sissy, the teaching of political economy sought in just this way to convince the working classes of the benefits of siding with their rulers. As Kay-Shuttleworth insisted, "The ascertained *truths* of political science should be taught to the labouring classes, and *correct* political information should be constantly and industriously disseminated amongst them" (63, my emphasis). With this in mind, we might return to the description of the "blue room" with which we began: "In that charmed apartment, the most complicated social questions were cast up, got into exact totals, and finally settled – *if those concerned could only have been brought to know it*" (75; bk. 1, ch. 15, my emphasis).

This assurance was only a slight exaggeration of real parliamentary discourse. A parliamentary counterpart may be found in an oration addressed to members of the House

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of Commons and printed by parliament in the same year as *Hard Times* (1854), entitled "What Shall We Do With Our Blue Books? Or, Parliament the National Schoolmaster." How could the workers be brought to know the government solutions to social questions? Lord Stanley's answer was simple: they could read the blue books. "What we most require," as he explained, "is an increased facility for diffusing sound knowledge, and especially knowledge on public affairs, among the adult members of the peasant class" (4). This knowledge could "only be obtained through a study of the opinions held, and of the facts collected, by those who have given them time and thought"; and, "these facts and opinions are only to be found, for the most part, in those fifty or sixty annual volumes of Parliamentary Blue Books, which form the raw material of 'Hansard'" (5). At present, he noted with regret, "the labouring class are either utterly illiterate, *or read only such cheap publications as are manufactured expressly for the market* – publications at best utterly worthless, and in most cases, positively mischievous" (4, my emphasis). Referring to the studies of working-class reading – of novels, perchance – Stanley claimed a firm foundation for his generalization: "I do not stop to adduce evidence of this fact . . . of which many of our Blue Books contain evidence" (4, my emphasis). Members of the education committee were seeking to distribute these blue books widely, by sending copies to lending libraries and Mechanics Institutes;[25] Stanley suggested a more efficient means of distribution: sending them to newspapers, since "the political instructors of the nation ought to be themselves well and accurately informed" (5). Dickens the journalist, in this view, would best convey the information contained in government reports, while Dickens the novelist would merely purvey trashy "publications manufactured for the market";[26] a grown-up Sissy, meanwhile, could spend her spare time not just studying according to the blue book prescriptions, but studying the blue books themselves. In this utopian parliamentary view, parliament with its blue books would indeed become "the national schoolmaster."

### *III. The Pitfalls of Public Knowledge*

EITHER DICKENS WAS UNCONSCIOUSLY IMPREGNATED by the parliamentary discourse he attacked in *Hard Times*, or he meant to mimic it. Given his explicit attack on blue book knowledge, however, what is perhaps most remarkable about *Hard Times* is its failure – or refusal – to offer in its stead a knowledgeable representation of the problems of the working classes. As Charles Kingsley commented in a review of Elizabeth Gaskell's 1848 novel *Mary Barton*, "in spite of blue-books and commissions, in spite of newspaper horrors and parliamentary speeches, Manchester riots and the 10th of April, the mass of the higher orders cannot yet be aware of what a workman's home is like in the manufacturing districts."[27] But if a reader of *Mary Barton* could claim better knowledge, as Kingsley believed, a reader of *Hard Times* could not. Dickens never shows us what we might want to see, by delineating the real lives of laborers.[28]

Over and over, *Hard Times* prefers a critique of the new modes of governing knowledge to a representation of the conditions the reports sought to describe. In the first and only scene of laborers working in the mill, for example, all we see is that "Stephen bent over his loom, quiet, watchful and steady" (56; bk. 1, ch. 11). From this laconic observation, the narrator goes on to pose his own counterpart to Stephen's claim that the situation is a "muddle" (115; bk. 2, ch. 5):

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> So many hundreds of Hands in this Mill; so many hundred horse Steam Power. It is known, to the force of a single pound weight, what the engine will do; but, not all the calculators of the National Debt can tell me the capacity for good or evil, for love or hatred, for *patriotism or discontent*, for the *decomposition of virtue into vice*, or the reverse, at any single moment in the soul of one of these its quiet servants, with the composed faces and the regulated actions. There is no mystery in it; there is an unfathomable mystery in the meanest of them, for ever. (56; bk. 1, ch. 11, my emphasis)

This verbal shrug is a direct response to the blue books. After all, the workers' capacity for patriotism or discontent, construed as virtue or vice, is precisely what blue book compilers aimed to discover. Kay-Shuttleworth, for one, hoped to prove through tables of illiteracy rates among prisoners that "education prevents or restrains crime, either by the operation of those good and religious principles which should be its great object to communicate, or at the least, by giving a taste and a capacity for pursuits incompatible with the low and debasing propensities which open the door to crime for the ignorant and sensual" (Kay-Shuttleworth 198). Yet Dickens's assertion of an "unfathomable mystery" suggests that numbers cannot predict the "decomposition" of virtue into vice. Nor is close observation of "composed" workers any better. Far from discerning in their faces what Kay-Shuttleworth dubbed the "volcanic elements" of "misery, vice and prejudice" (Kay-Shuttleworth 74), what Dickens's narrator observes in the weavers' "regulated actions" is a watery stillness: an enigma figuratively so deep that it cannot be measured. Dubbing the weavers "quiet servants," Dickens invokes the etymology of "mystery" from *minister* (that is, *servant*) and from *mystos* (*keeping silence*), hinting that their "mystery" concerns their work: the guild secrets of the weaving craft.[29]

It is true that the narrator gestures toward a better governing knowledge: "Supposing we were to reserve our arithmetic for material objects, and to *govern these awful unknown quantities* by other means!" (56; bk. 1, ch. 9, my emphasis). Yet this suggestion is more remarkable for its adoption of a parliamentary authorial voice than for the alternative means of governance it conjures. For, like Lord Stanley, the narrator speaks here to fellow rulers ("we") about those whom they collectively govern (the "unknown quantities"). Moreover, like the blue book that relayed Stanley's speech, Dickens's book paradoxically conveys this intramural address to "unknown quantities" of (poor) readers. *Hard Times* shares the peculiar positioning of the government publications it mocks. On the one hand, it speaks to and for the governing classes, with the prescient and esoteric project of examining the dangers of modern public knowledge. On the other hand, it speaks to and for the governed classes, with the contradictory project of rendering itself available to a newly literate public through condensation and compression.[30]

The strangeness of *Hard Times* derives in part from this self-consciously doubled, pseudo-governmental, address. It is a novel written *to* fellow governors *about* "an abstraction called a People," and then sold to another abstraction, called the Reader (221; bk. 3, ch. 9). In a time of political transition, as new kinds of voters obtained the franchise and new kinds of people learned to read, Dickens's novel expresses uneasiness about these shifting political unions through its narrative of two failed marriages. The impossibility of lumping Stephen with his drunken wife, or Louisa Gradgrind with Josiah Bounderby, and the bizarre composites that result, belie the apparent seamlessness of marital and political unions and exposes the genuine "disparities" they mask.

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The "pitfalls of knowledge" are thus a problem for both the blue book and the novel. Dickens uses this phrase as he explores reformers' prescriptions for working-class readers. He stresses the infantilizing quality of their efforts by describing their targets as grown-up babies:

> There happened to be in Coketown a considerable population of babies who had been walking against time towards the infinite world, twenty, thirty, forty, fifty years and more. These portentous infants being alarming creatures to stalk about in any human society, the eighteen denominations incessantly scratched one another's faces and pulled one another's hair, by way of agreeing on the steps to be taken for their improvement. (41; bk. 1, ch. 8)

Dickens pits "Bodies" against these Babies, drawing on the customary governmental figure of speech, as in Lord Stanley's "we, as a body, have nothing to lose" (Stanley 16). What the "Bodies" of Coketown recommend furnishes the novel's character system. "Body number one, said they must take everything on trust": hence Josiah Bounderby, the "self-made Humbug" whose sanguine view of self-improvement is "built . . . upon lies" (196; bk. 3, ch. 5). "Body number two, said they must take everything on political economy": hence Gradgrind. The doleful tales of Stephen, Tom, and Louisa might derive from "Body number three," which "wrote leaden little books for them, showing how the good grown-up baby invariably got to the Savings-bank, and the bad grown-up baby invariably got transported" (42; bk. 1, ch. 8). "Body number four" is another case: like Dickens himself, it produces seemingly comic stories. "Under dreary pretences of being droll (when it was very melancholy indeed)," it "made the shallowest pretences of concealing *pitfalls of knowledge*, into which it was the duty of these babies to be smuggled and inveigled" (42, my emphasis). Such "pretences" may appear anti-Dickensian at first, with their "shallow" humor barely camouflaging a trap – knowledge – into which readers are blindly conveyed. *Hard Times*, by contrast, exposes the "pitfalls of knowledge" in the sense of its hidden dangers. (Dickens actuates the term by making Stephen Blackpool fall to his death in a hidden coal pit.) In so doing, however, Dickens's tale itself – in melancholy fashion – traps us in knowledge of another order: knowledge of the *pitfalls of public knowledge* and the weakness of its grasp of the "People."

The social knowledge typically obtained through novels is thus never exempt from the cutting edge of *Hard Times*'s critique. While it openly cultivates fears of the (abstract and potentially deterministic) knowledge of political economy, *Hard Times* also expresses anxiety about the (sexual and possibly immoral) knowledge typical of novels. As Mary Poovey suggests, this anxiety centers on Louisa Gradgrind, whose "curious reserve" "baffle[s], while it stimulate[s]" not only Mrs. Sparsit and James Harthouse, but also the narrator and reader (*Hard Times* 156; bk. 2, ch. 11). The novel benefits from Louisa's habitual absence of mind, since her characteristic "abstraction" generates an ambiguity about her desires that "rivet[s] the reader's attention" (Poovey, "Structure" 163). "By repeatedly blocking the reader's access to Louisa's feelings," Dickens "keeps us guessing about whether Louisa will fall" into adultery (Poovey 163). Toward the end of the novel, however, like the economists he mocks, Dickens suddenly substitutes "an explanatory abstraction" for Louisa's blocked feelings (164–65). In Poovey's estimation, this "retreat from the imaginative allure of anxiety" on Dickens's part "sought to anticipate the criticism that the knowledge his writing produced was suspect" (167).

To grasp what is at stake in Dickens's satire, we must thus think less about its rhetorical opposition between the two kinds of "figures" and the discourses they tend to adorn, and more

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about what they have in common. It's *all* a muddle, after all. The bizarre results of statistical analysis, the special purview of Mr. Gradgrind, are well known. But the effects of witnessing, mostly by Mrs. Sparsit, the impoverished gentlewoman retained by Mr. Bounderby, are equally tragicomic.

Take, for example, Mrs. Sparsit's efforts to regain her place as Bounderby's favored "female" by anticipating his wife's adultery. Hidden in the shrubbery, watching Louisa speak with Harthouse,

> Mrs. Sparsit saw him detain her with his encircling arm, and heard him then and there, within her (Mrs. Sparsit)'s greedy hearing, tell her how much he loved her. . . . All this, and more, in his hurry, and in hers, in the whirl of her own gratified malice, in the dread of being discovered, in the rapidly increasing noise of heavy rain among the leaves, and a thunder-storm rolling up – Mrs. Sparsit received into her mind, set off with such an unavoidable halo of confusion and indistinctness, that when at length he climbed the fence . . . she was not sure where they were to meet, or when. (160–61; bk. 2, ch. 11)

This is an ultra-novelistic scene, as it foregrounds the words of illicit love overheard through the eavesdropping witness's envy and malice. Yet the consequences of witnessing here coincide with those of Bounderby's dry exhibition of the dialogue with Stephen. Both result in premature conviction. (Stephen's compelled testimony, tragically, gets him fired.) Just as Mrs. Sparsit's inquiring eyes condemn innocent Stephen for lurking by the bank on the day of a theft, so, too, with Louisa:

> Lo, Louisa coming out of the house! Hastily cloaked and muffled, and stealing away. She elopes! She falls from the lowermost stair, and is swallowed up in the gulf! . . . Though her teeth chattered in her head from wet and cold, Mrs. Sparsit exulted hugely. The figure had plunged down the precipice, and she felt herself, as it were, attending on the body . . . . But, Mrs. Sparsit was wrong in her calculation. (161–162; bk. 2, ch. 11)

Blinded by her desires, the witness *par excellence* of Coketown never knows just what she has personally seen and heard.

Could Mrs. Sparsit, the remnant of a good family, fallen on hard times and reduced to being paid for the work of being aristocratic, represent the politicians in the House of Lords, as grim and ludicrous in their roles as the circus performers?[31] Certainly, her greedy hearing calls to mind all the deaf, dumb and blind politicians who hear what they desire. Yet her eager pursuit of Louisa's illicit romance also makes her one of us, raising a prospect even more aggravating for the novelist than a deaf politician: the bad reader's inclination to rush to conclusions and lose track of the novel's plot. Mrs. Sparsit thus becomes a figure for prurient readers who desire Louisa to "fall" or who fail to notice her survival, and we are accordingly punished in her person.

In the final analysis, however, Mrs. Sparsit is a key allegorical figure in the story Dickens tells about modern knowledge. In this story, "Mrs. parse-it" represents a residual regime of knowledge (or the Longinus to Gradgrind's Cocker). In the key scene of her witnessing failure, when she proves "wrong in her calculation" about Louisa, Mrs. Sparsit finds her formerly high social connections and classical airs reduced to the literal "connections" of buttons and strings, as she is caught eavesdropping in the rain:

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> Wet through and through: with her feet squelching and squashing in her shoes whenever she moved; with a rash of rain upon her classical visage; with a bonnet like an overripe fig; with all her clothes spoiled; with damp impressions of every button, string, and hook-and-eye she wore, printed off upon her highly-connected back; with a stagnant verdure on her general exterior, such as accumulates on an old park fence in a mouldy lane; Mrs. Sparsit had no resource but to burst into tears of bitterness and say, 'I have lost her!' (162; bk. 2, ch. 11)

In this moment of dispossession, Mrs. Sparsit's formerly upper-class body degenerates, and its connections cease to signify. Ravaged by the Nature to which it returns, her bonnet becomes a smelly fig, and her old body is covered with mold.

Decommissioned, Mrs. Sparsit's classical truths and high connections form a meaningless print on her decayed body. This is what happens to language, according to Michel Foucault, from the nineteenth century onward: "language as . . . the primary grid of things, as an indispensable link between representation and things, is eclipsed . . . . Language loses its privileged position and becomes, in its turn, a historical form coherent with the density of its own past" (xxiii). Mrs. Sparsit is, likewise, "at her journey's end," nothing but "a classical ruin" (*Hard Times* 178; bk. 2, ch. 3). Hence by the final volume, she can neither witness nor testify, but merely annoys with violent mute expressions:

> That unfortunate lady hereupon essaying to offer testimony, without any voice and with painful gestures expressive of an inflamed throat, became so aggravating and underwent so many facial contortions, that Mr. Bounderby, unable to bear it, seized her by the arm and shook her.
>
> "If you can't get it out ma'am," said Bounderby, "leave *me* to get it out. This is not a time for a lady, however highly connected, to be totally inaudible, and seemingly swallowing marbles." (178; bk. 2, ch. 3)

Mrs. "parse-it" thus serves as a striking figure for the dwindling prestige of language in governance and education, as *Hard Times* marks the commissioning of new forms of knowledge in relation to government power, while noting language's loss of privilege within this shifting formation.

At the summit of his public influence as a literary man, Dickens thus paradoxically mourns the loss of literary language's privileges in an age before mass publication. But what is the ultimate effect of this satire? Does Dickens, in the end, repudiate statistics, government inquiries, and the knowledge that comes from them? No; this mourning is no melancholia. To train us to spot the dangers in government reports is not to repudiate the knowledge of government reports – or of novels, for that matter. It is, rather, to teach us – and the Sparsits, Blackpools, Jupes, and Gradgrinds among us – to read them better. As D. A. Miller has argued, "despite or by means of its superficially hostile attitude toward bureaucracy," Dickens's novel *Bleak House* "is profoundly concerned to train us – as, at least since the eighteenth century, play usually trains us for work – in the sensibility for inhabiting the new bureaucratic, administrative structures" (89). *Hard Times* is remarkably effective at preparing us to wade through the tables and figures of government reports, as well as their digests in newspapers.[32] The downfall of Mrs. Sparsit thus indicates that something must take her place: a better reader. More curious and doubtful, more given to wonder, this reader will be the sort of "critical thinker" celebrated by our own pedagogical moment.[33] Braving the dangers of a wet and pitted landscape, she will be a perceptive reader of novelistic *and*

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governmental texts. *Hard Times* thus teaches its recalcitrant and greedy readers to navigate the world of modern public knowledge in novels, government reports, and the periodicals that relay (and "digest") them both.

Readers have long blamed Dickens for getting his social facts wrong,[34] but when we look further, we may discover our own error: Dickens's novel reacts not to Victorian England's social ills *per se*, but to the available *representations* of them. Dickens's point in "Frauds on the Fairies" and "Gaslight Fairies" was not that gas-lamps do not belong in stories, but that fictional texts – including the People's own – should be as sacred and inviolate as any "fact." More so, even: Dickens highlighted the special facticity of fictional representations, and their power to endure beyond particular forms of transmission. His concern for the power of representation extended far beyond the literary text, as we see in *Hard Times*. But his legacy has been lopsided. On the one hand, his concern for the sanctity of the literary text, linked to authors' copyright, has prevailed, as we dutifully note all the characteristics and variations of literary texts in our scholarly editions, reproducing with exactitude the characteristics of early publications. On the other hand, the early publication of "facts" has often been obscured and de-materialized. Blue book reports must be today sought in digests, in microform, or in on-line databases. This fate of government "facts," ironically, presages the (on-line) rabbit hole into which literary texts, like all books, seem to be falling today. Dickens's anxiety about his readership, and his meditations on the address of governing knowledge in the age of cascading print, thus speak to us with renewed force today. Grasping at old volumes in a topsy-turvy world, we risk relying on the findings of Gradgrind's blue chamber, that "astronomical observatory . . . without any windows" where astronomers once "arrange[d] the starry universe solely by pen, ink and paper" (*Hard Times* 75; bk. 1, ch. 15). In its troubled approach to a complex readership available only through abstraction, in short, *Hard Times* exposes a history of power and knowledge that we, too, paper over – or "wiki" – at our peril.

*The New School*

## NOTES

1. "Charles Dickens and *David Copperfield*," 700; see Poovey, *Uneven Developments* 109.
2. "The Hero as Man of Letters: Johnson, Rousseau, Burns," 152; see Poovey, *Uneven Developments* 107.
3. To ask this question is to remain within Dickens's text, rather than venturing out into the history of actual readers' readings of Dickens. My essay is meant to complement illuminating work on the history of working-class reading by Flint and Rose, among others.
4. "I have constructed it patiently, with a view to its publication altogether in a compact cheap form." (Letter to Thomas Carlyle, 13 July 1854; rpt. in Kaplan and Monod 283.)
5. *Household Words*, April 1854. At 9–11 pence, the monthly reissue of *Household Words* was cheaper than the shilling numbers of other Victorian novels. Viewed at The Morgan Library and Museum; price information provided by the curator, John Bidwell; see also Drew, "Household Words." (Butwin erroneously suggests that "*Household Words* included no commercial advertisement beyond the announcement of its own future publication," 173.)
6. Political economy, as Poovey explains, had to "generate an abstraction – 'society,' 'human nature,' or 'the market' – that somehow stood in for, but did not refer to, whatever material phenomena it was

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said to represent" ("Structure" 151). This problem of abstraction is an obvious theme of Dickens's novel. Poovey compares political economists' acknowledgment of anxieties about the abstraction and determinism in political economy with Dickens's cultivation of anxiety about female sexuality and the novel's capacity for immoral incitements ("Structure" 165).

7. Poovey's "Structure of Anxiety" stresses the prevalence of scenes of witnessing in *Hard Times* without mentioning the parliamentary stage. The blue books provide a missing link between the knowledge of the novel and the knowledge of political economy, which she studies in parallel.
8. Poovey and Gallagher have recently shown how Dickens's novel converges surprisingly with the discourse of his supposed enemies. As Gallagher asks, "Given Dickens's need to distance himself, and his novelistic endeavor, from the dynamics of industrial capitalism, why would he stress its futility and then mimic it in his narrative mode?" (72). I would suggest that the mimicry is partly intended, as Dickens creates a pastiche of blue book language throughout.
9. See Frankel, *States of Inquiry*, 8–9.
10. One of Dickens's proposed titles for the novel was "According to Cocker" (Kaplan and Monod 227).
11. *Hard Times* was not the first novel to invoke the question of governing knowledges through the tale of Bluebeard. As William Godwin explained in an 1832 preface, "I rather amused myself with tracing a certain similitude between the story of Caleb Williams and the tale of Bluebeard" (Godwin 352). In *Caleb Williams* as in *Hard Times*, a working man is framed for the crimes of his "better" and finds no justice in a legal system rigged against him. The corrupt master "was my Bluebeard, who had perpetrated atrocious crimes . . . . Caleb Williams was the wife, who in spite of warning persisted in his attempts to discover the forbidden secret; and, when, he had succeeded, struggled as fruitlessly to escape the consequences" (Godwin 353).
12. The quote is from Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend* (198; ch. 16). See Miller, chapter 3, "Discipline in Different Voices."
13. See Roberts and Edmonds. "The first governmental inspections in Britain were of factories, and part of the factory inspectors' task was to supervise the factory schools, in which some instruction was required from 1802. By 1833, factory schools were provided with paid, professional inspectors, and by 1844 government Inspectors of Voluntary Schools were armed with a 150-page questionnaire, covering 'mechanical arrangements,' school building and plans, 'means of instruction,' 'organization and discipline,' and religious instruction" (Shuman 48).
14. Great Britain, Parliament, *Report of the Commissioners . . . into the State of Education in Wales* I: 338–9.
15. Great Britain, Parliament, *Report of the Commissioners . . . into the State of Education in Wales* III, App. 153: 160–61.
16. See Roberts 130.
17. *Report . . . into the state of Education in Wales* I: 421–2.
18. This is Foucault's object of study in *The Order of Things*: not the "negative side of science – that which resists it," but the "*positive unconscious* of knowledge: a level that eludes the consciousness of the scientist and yet is part of scientific discourse" (xi).
19. J. R. McCulloch, the economist, was also an inspiration for Dickens's teacher (Poovey, "Structure" 161). A third McCulloch, John Ramsay McCulloch, was the Stationery Office comptroller responsible for printing the blue books; he argued in the 1849 blue book record against a proposal to issue them in octavo rather than folio, suggesting that they were comparable not to magazines and works of literature but to dictionaries and encyclopedias (Frankel, "Blue Books" 314).
20. Roberts 78. See *Report . . . into the State of Education in Wales* III, 68.
21. Great Britain, Parliament, *Report . . . into the State of Education in Wales* I, iv.
22. "Testimony of Hannah Goode" 1100. Previously anthologized in Hellerstein, Hume, and Offen, *Victorian Women*.
23. Gradgrind brings her home to illustrate the benefits of "practical education" and its capacity for ideological conversion (33; bk. 1, ch. 6). But Sissy's imperviousness to her (re-)education, contrasted

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with Tom and Louisa Gradgrind's dangerous susceptibility to it, reveals its impracticality as a panacea for working-class conversion and its hidden dangers for those who govern.

24. 1838 report on "Negro" education, qtd. in Roberts 64. In the parliamentary testimony of child mineworkers from the widely-read 1842 report on *Children's Employment (Mines)*, this sort of response is ventriloquized: "The men do not insult the girls with us, but I think they do in some. I have never heard that a good man came into the world who was God's Son to save sinners. I never heard of Christ at all" ("Testimony of Ann and Elizabeth Eggley, Child Mineworkers" 1101).
25. Many working men agreed: 272 petitions to Westminster, appended by 15,281 signatures, requested the free distribution of parliamentary papers to Mechanics' Institutions, but the Members of Parliament could not agree on the selection of blue books for allocation (Frankel, "Blue Books" 315).
26. Stanley's formulation draws attention to the *manufacture* of print publications, and to Dickens's own industrial entanglements. Dickens lashes back by describing the "rather dirty machinery" in a mill for the "manufacture of the human fabric," where Gradgrind was "made Member of Parliament for Coketown" (73; bk. 1, ch. 14). But novels and newspapers *were* manufactured in (printing) factories, requiring capital investment and the prospect of profits to secure and sustain them. *Hard Times* began as a marketing ploy driven by the machinery of Dickens's printing business. As he explained in early 1854, "there is such a fixed idea on the part of my printers and copartners in *Household Words*, that a story by me, continued from week to week, would make some unheard-of-effect with it, that I am going to write one" (Kaplan and Monod 279). To understand how the material and economic reality of print manufacturing preoccupied Dickens, see "A PAPER-MILL," the "first factory-tourism article" in *Household Words*, published in August 1850 (Farina 43). The paper-mill is a miracle of rejuvenation, "like the Mill of the child's story that ground old people young" (Dickens and Lemon, "A Paper-Mill" 529).
27. "Recent Novels," in *Fraser's Magazine*, April 1849: 429; qtd. in Butwin 169. Dickens solicited Gaskell to write for *Household Words* with the claim that "There is no living English writer whose aid I would desire to enlist in preference to the authoress of Mary Barton (a book that most profoundly affected and impressed me)" (Butwin 170).
28. As Spector maintains, Dickens lets his industrial workers "fade into the colorless anonymity of moral personifications while quietly relinquishing the project of presenting the truth about them" (380–81).
29. This emphasis is in keeping with the tone of wonder of *Household Words* reports on factory tours; see Farina.
30. "Why I found myself so 'used up,' after *Hard Times*, I scarcely know," Dickens wrote later. "Perhaps because I had intended to do nothing . . . for a year, when the idea laid hold of me by the throat in a very violent manner; and because the compression and close condensation necessary for that disjointed form of publication, gave me perpetual trouble" (Kaplan and Monod 284).
31. In Gallagher's most recent reading, *Hard Times* "imagines the melancholy confluence" of the "theoretical expansion of the category of labor," and the "affective implications of the theory of value" in mid-Victorian political economy (72–73). Signaling the expansion of the category of labor, everyone in the novel works (even Mrs. Sparsit, at being aristocratic for a wage; even Harthouse, at *ennui*; even the circus entertainers), and everyone is miserable working.
32. In a similar spirit, *Household Words* prefaced a summary of the 1851 census by picturing "many a nervous reader preferring . . . a month at the treadmill to the thorough perusal of a blue book" (*Household Words* 21 October 1854: 221–28; qtd. in Coles 160). This alluded not only to the blue book containing the census, but also to Captain Pringle's "Report on Prisons in the West Indies," which provoked outrage at the prevalent usage of the treadmill for punishment in the West Indian colonies.
33. Shuman notes the compatibility of Dickens's pedagogical ideals with recent feminist pedagogy favoring a "midwife" over a "bank deposit" model of instruction (158–59).
34. See, for example, Williams's comment that "*Hard Times* is more a symptom of the confusion of industrial society than an understanding of it" (96).

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