Title of Paper: **Hand In Glove: The Perversion of the Domestic Economy in *Hard Times***

**Author:** Stephanie Polsky

**Affiliation:** Goldsmiths College, University of London

**Section:** Articles

**Date of Publication:** November, 2013

**Issue:** Volume 1, Number 2

**Abstract:**

From the beginning of the novel *Hard Times*, it is evident that Dickens’s narrative is ‘allied not with the higher faculties of humans, but with the rote operations of the machine,’ a machine moreover that is fused at its heart with both the sentience and brutishness of humanity at its most basic level. What is displayed therein is the emergence of a temperament that reduces humanity to its primeval instincts. If these times are hard, it is because men make them so. Industrialisation threatened Victorian England in any number of symptomatic ways and Dickens’s genius is to classify these negative symptoms at the very heart of society. Here the domestic sphere and the industrial/imperial one, find their juncture in a feeling of unsteady obedience, wherein the inhabitants are mindful of their injuries, and keenly sensitive to injudicious punishment. The question is, will the exterior hold, or will the passions, long restrained from within, take hold when subjected to such provocation?

**Keywords:** Dickens, *Hard Times*, Industrialisation, Gender and Sexuality, Colonialism, Victorian literature

**Author Bio:**

Stephanie Polsky received her PhD from Goldsmiths College, the University of London in the History of Ideas. She has lectured widely on Visual Culture, Media and Politics at various institutions in Britain including Goldsmiths College, Winchester School of Art, Camberwell College of Arts, Central St. Martins, the London College of Communication, the University of Greenwich, and Regent's College London for the past decade. Her writing in cultural studies and critical theory appears as well in numerous journals and other publications dating back to 1997. Her book *Walter Benjamin's Transit: A Destructive Tour of Modernity* appeared in the summer of 2010, published by Academica Press and remains widely available. Her latest book project *Ignoble Displacement: Dispossessed Capital in Dickensian London* is in the planning stages.

**Author email:** stephanie.polsky@gmail.com

Hard Times. Hard Times. Hard Times. Dickens ‘had actually written it out three times (Ackroyd 366). On the surface the novel *Hard Times* is a critique of the logic of industry, but just beneath, ‘the vices and passions of men,’ lies and with them that common demon of self-interest (Ackroyd 369). It is that Fancy that captures Dickens’s imagination and causes ‘the theme of union and management’ to be ‘quickly raised and just as quickly forgotten,’ at the start of the novel (Ackroyd 371). What we learn instead is the value of exchange, and what lies beneath it, the role of the transactional in our most intimate encounters, and the human cost of maintaining any number of establishments: the home, the school, the factory, the bank, the government, imperialism, etc. Advantage and exploitation run the knife’s edge during *Hard Times*, and in the novel no one is subject to exception in the casting of fortunes along such lines. One must be educated into facing such a situation. At the same time one must betray education in order to subvert it. If these times are hard, it is because men make it so. *Hard Times* for our times. And for time immemorial it now seems, since those ‘greater furnaces’ first appeared… ‘Tongues of flames shoot[ing] up from them, pillars of fire turn[ing] and twist[ing] upon them’ (Ackroyd 367). *Hard Times* is *Oliver Twist* with a twist, the wind kicking up north toward Preston, a foul wind beguiling to only the sort of gentleman who sets his sights with a jaundiced eye. It is these *Hard Times*, which are much like our own.

From the beginning of the novel it is evident that Dickens’s narrative is ‘allied not with the higher faculties of humans, but with the rote operations of the machine’; a machine moreover that is fused at its heart with both the sentence and brutishness of humanity as its most basic level (Ketabgian 651). What is displayed therein is the emergence of a temperament that reduces humanity to its primeval instincts. The factory mechanism thus emerged as something open for critique by Victorian writers, each following a well worn course that depicted the effects of industrialisation ‘as deranged, irrational, and potentially dangerous to the stability of civil society’ (Ketabgian 651). The body was a force to be reckoned with once the animal and mechanical merged into one; indeed the curious alien bodies that emerged took on one another’s characteristics. ‘Machines harboured ‘bestial and instinctive’ drives and worker’s animal bodies appeared to be ‘fueled by powerful mechanical drives’ (Ketabgian 651). All this adds up to desire of a peculiar sort wherein reproduction becomes the stuff of hydraulics and human sexuality takes on an ‘energetics of steam’ (Ketabgian 651). The engine and the body run parallel in terms of their existence, borrowing techniques off one another and shaping themselves, according to a logic of heat. In this new economy heat was, ‘no longer a metaphor for life, necessary to maintain biological functions, rather ‘combustion was the actual form assumed by life,’ producing the energy to force open social pathways heretofore unknown, sometimes with frightening consequences (Ketabgian 651).

*Hard Times* is unique in that it does not limit its vision of mechanical instinct to one particular class, but to them all and realises for its audience anxieties about the state of England that are the consequence of this new modality. Industrialisation
threatened Victorian England in any number of symptomatic ways and Dickens’s genius here is to classify them at the very heart of its society. The proximity of danger to civility forms an unbroken chain that extends all the way through the class lines of the novel. The classroom, the factory, and the parlour all impose forms of tyranny on their inhabitants. There is a definite sense that a weak form of resignation mingles with the potency of revolt at various moments. Here the domestic sphere and the industrial/imperial one find their juncture in a feeling of unsteady obedience, wherein the inhabitants are “mindful of their injuries,” and keenly sensitive to “injudicious punishment” (Ketabgian 662). The question always is will the exterior hold, or will the passions long restrained from within take hold? For these inhabitants while not ostensibly in power, are nonetheless agents in their own right, whom are reactive when confronting acts of coercion and abuse.

This anxiety about being ‘broken’ by a more powerful male figure and the need to revolt however temporarily from a sheer acceptance of that fate, links Louisa’s plight to that of the workers as well as to the fate of other beasts of burden exploited for their labour such as horses and elephants, tacitly referred to in the novel as part of the complex machinery of empire where all bodies must be put to functional use in aid of productivity of one kind or another. The passions that rule Louisa bring her far from the paths of virtue, and in exploring her frustrations with the narratives of society, she develops affinities with the novels male outsiders Harthouse and Blackpool and, eventually, her own brother Tom—all of whom oppose social productivity at great personal cost. Despite the subplot of an extramarital affair with Harhouse, Louisa’s path is not one of either sexual, or even sensual awakening; rather her redemption comes to her in financial terms, through an intricate plot ‘of property, of dispossession, and of repossession’ (Schor 75).

Louisa is aware from very early on that her sexuality is something that is coerced from her by men, and in return she threatens violence to herself. When Bounderby demands a kiss from her, she replies: “You can take one, Mr. Bounderby,” ‘ungraciously’ raising a cheek to him. After he left she rubbed her cheek until it ‘was burning red.’ Her brother Tom retorts, “What are you on about Loo?”…you’ll rub a hole in your face.” Louisa rejoins him by saying “You can cut that piece out with a penknife if you like Tom, I wouldn’t cry!” (Dickens 27). The piece in question is the source of a great many character’s hope at penetration, her stony face as it were. However what Louisa conceals there is precisely nothing. Her curse is to suffer an emotional void, a chasm of unfeeling which has literally been drilled into her since childhood. Her incapacity to experience pleasure of any evocative nature makes her the perfect repository for other’s erotic motivations, which hover around her based on her sex. Hers is the deadened centre of the plot and for much of it she is manipulated by the desires of others for her attention, and the penetration they are unable to obtain from her. Such coercion is financial rather than sexual, but no less of an abuse of a woman incapable of handling her own form of currency in Victorian society. As such she has no option but to turn the violence inward upon herself and to endure her marriage through a psychic mode of automatism. She is not so much impenetrable as automatic, in her comportment, buzzing along in a state of emotional suppression. The passionate fires that Louisa once kept inside her are banked from this moment forth, and produce little more than negative interest from those around her.
Powerful men force her hand in most of the affairs of the novel, and in all cases she is painfully aware of her station in life, and how little ‘she could hope to do in it’ (Dickens 71). Louisa does not seek marriage on the grounds of love, but on the basis of Mr. Bounderby’s ‘desire to take me thus,’ and as a woman with ‘no escape … from problems that could be demonstrated and realities that could be grasped…’ (Dickens 134). At the moment she recognises this, it is as though any tiny glimmer of ‘tastes and fancies,’ ‘aspirations and affections,’ is let go with her breath, as ‘she unconsciously closed her hand, as if upon a solid object, and opened it as though she were releasing dust or ash’ (Dickens 134). The object in question is her heart, and the opening of it an act of inner conflagration. Her chest cavity thus vacated she offers her hand to do the work of her captivity on behalf of the man chosen for her by her father and brother. Her work of the heart has its companion in the work of her father, as he too is forced to toil [as] a cinder heap in London, to stoke the fires of another familial order otherwise known as parliament, for the sake of servicing the family reputation. The inherent structures of the nation, are seen by Dickens to add up to little that is good or human and yet such labour ‘determines the way things are done, and reaches out to desiccate the lives of everyone within its atmosphere…’ (Miller 295-296). Any sentiment that lies within, therefore, must be withered down to its elemental basis; and therein love attenuates itself egregiously into possession and within that same contest, fancy cedes to fact.

Louisa inherits this fact from her mother, who herself is overcome, driven to distraction, and debilitated, by a barrage of facts. Hearing Louisa go on about ‘combustion, calcination and calorification,’ with her father in lectures and experiments has driven Mrs. Gradgrind over the edge. And yet in the final moments of her youth, Louisa attempts to resort with her to a discussion of ‘sparks and ashes,’ comparing her plight as a maturing woman to that of ‘the red sparks dropping out of the fire, and whitening and dying,’ and presumably how she too would fall victim to such a fate (Dickens 70). Therein the first major outburst by a female character is achieved in Mrs. Gradgrind’s response to her. Mrs. Gradgrind, taking a chair, and discharging her strongest point before succumbing under these mere shadows of facts, “yes, I really do wish that I had never had a family, and then you would have known what it was to do without me!”’ (Dickens 70-71). This odd turn of phrase at once reorders history and then negates that possibility. It is illogical on the surface for her never to have had children and for Louisa to do without her as mother, unless of course she is referring to the universality of their respective conditions, the interchangeability of their fates, turning on the fulcrum of that relationship of mother to daughter and the little hope that cleaves to its utility beyond the mere fact of one begetting the other. And yet she wishes nothing more than to reverse the course of that exchange, to have refused marriage. And with the wish she bestows upon Louisa a ghost of a chance, a hint at the possibility of counteractualisation, which will soon be snuffed out; but not entirely because there will be no Mrs. Bounderby in her husband’s eyes: she will remain as Miss Gradgrind to both her new master and his servant Mrs. Sparsit, who pointedly will not acknowledge her as such a contemporary. It is only Mr. Harthouse who will address her in this manner, if only to send up the ridiculousness of its factual nature, when again it is clear no spark of interest ever rose within that relationship (and thus for him alone perhaps her sold nature is not a
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foregone conclusion). This is in contrast to the way her father Mr. Gradgrind would appear to witness it on a superficially universal scale. A scale which, even at this level of narrative progression, fails to convince the reader of its unanimous efficacy.

‘Mr. Gradgrind’s response to Louisa’s problems about the “proposed” marriage to Bounderby is to exhort her to think of the statistics on marriage, not her peculiar condition or disposition towards that union’ (Rosen 149). In reference to the inequality of the union itself, Gradgrind tellingly references, not the norms in England and Wales that ‘so far have not been obtained,’ but rather the ‘wide prevalence of this law among the natives of the British possessions in India, also in a considerable part of China, and among the Calmucks of Tartary.’ (Dickens 131). These contracts, therefore, in and of themselves, take on a colonial cast, where the marital acquisition of Louisa Gradgrind suddenly equates itself with other instances of commercial conquest, as well as the domestication of savage thought necessary to bring those foreign arrangements in congruence with domestic norms regarding the acquisition of portable property.

Louisa’s wild despair will not be not be given free rein to shake down the architecture of English society, but instead will remain fixed to the task of maintaining its status quo, albeit in a slightly altered form, by its temporary encounter with the heat of feminine consciousness; its registered feeling identified as little more than alienated surplus. Bounderby by the novel’s end may be dishonored by the failure of the bargain he has struck with Louisa, but he is never seriously penalised for it, in terms of social marginalisation. The extreme age disparity in the relationship between Louisa and Bounderby, point to ‘relations all over England’ that ‘take on an economic cast,’ ‘where the excesses on the margins of empire,’ ‘are permitted to return’ if ‘they are profitable in form.’ (Koenigsberger 116). The marriage according to Bounderby, is a contract without regard to individual circumstances, such as incompatibility or the number of rooms in a person’s house. To Gradgrind, marriage is a business “proposal” that includes the offer of a “hand.”’ (Rosen 149). That hand will in turn grind the social machinery it was made for and thus bind itself to the task of consolidating provincial Englishness. Thus forth, ‘in the case of Miss Gradgrind and Mr. Bounderby, ‘love was made … in the form of bracelets; and on all occasions during the period of betrothal, took on a manufacturing aspect. After their hands were joined, what quickly followed was a journey ‘to see how other Hands got on in those parts…” (Dickens 144). Whilst there is an interest in the native comportment, it is always with an eye towards containment of extremes concomitant within the form itself. The taming of the wild impulses of hands, for Bounderby means harnessing their wayward potential to the task of profitable display.

All ‘the domestic spaces’ in and around Coketown, allow Dickens to enliven a cast of characters who have allowed, on some level, for instinct and impulse to overcome their class training. In turn they have become akin in nature to ‘wild beasts,’ who in turn play out the imaginative repertoire of imperial England in the nineteenth century, so as to ‘highlight[ed] the convergence of the local and the global that enabled the national to define the imperial. (Koenigsberger 82). Therefore Dickens’ novel is polemical insofar as these characters point to a dissolution of traditional social boundaries taking place as bourgeois mores are redefined against an imperial background and the essence of Englishness itself as a factual state of being is
brought into question. Koenigsberger asserts that, ‘the narrative discourse of Hard Times (1854) evokes the exotic with insistence, including allusions to the British in India, The Arabian Nights, simooms in desert lands, sultans, pigmies, savages, transportation and penal settlements, Turkish carpets and Indian ale. Yet the story of the novel is resolutely domestic: Dickens’ novel reaffirms the imaginative boundaries between England and its imperial elsewhere and predicates a brand of domestic realism upon the containment of excesses and extravagances associated with the alien…’ (Koenigsberger 82-83). I would argue it does so with a tacit recognition that such containment is only possible if the story told about England limits itself only to an exploration of domesticated savagery.

In Hard Times colonial spaces are invoked, when James Harthouse flees to Egypt, or young Tom Gradgrind is sent ‘many thousands of miles away’ to ‘North or South America, or any distant part of the world.’ (Koenigsberger 103). However, the narrative never ventures to cover their experiences in these distant locations. As a result, ‘these exotic spaces—which are frequently interchangeable for Dickens’s narrator, as ‘any distant part of the world’ suggests – play an important role in establishing the dialectical rapprochement between work and play that Dickens seeks to achieve in Hard Times, serving as repositories for excessive energies that are irreconcilable with labor or with play’ (Koenigsberger 103).

What it fails to do is extend that dialect outward to encompass the domestic and the imperial in any meaningful way. Nonetheless it does draw seemingly disparate forces together by their very nature, both at home and abroad. ‘For example, Harthouse’s failure to be compatible with Bounderby’s commercial world … is signaled by the fact that he “got bored everywhere” – and therein becomes subject to wandering the world as a cavalry officer, as a flaneur in Jerusalem, as a leisured yachtsman. He is thus drawn to Louisa, who has a similar propensity for both boredom and wandering into homes and communities that are foreign to her on her much more limited domestic lead, as compared with Harthouse’s international sway. Harthouse ‘finds the labour of seeming never to exert himself causes considerable ennui.’ (Gallagher 64) The various incompatibilities wrought by the advent of global industry, render many new compatibilities possible within the social sphere of the novel as desires appear to coincide on the many levels of confinement in the system, which seems to be buckling under the pressure of its own advancement.

It also speeds the failure of many institutions that fail to vindicate themselves at home, which in turn seek solace from abroad to continue, at least for a time, to ply their trade. When its ‘all up in Coketown,’ in terms of reliable social domination the heavy hand of English self-interest finds itself ‘going in for Camels’ (Dickens 303). And so it was in the intervening years of Empire following Dickens’s demise. In 1854, it is still possible for Dickens to explore this economy close to home and in reference to ‘schooling’ in the art of manipulation. And so we fall upon the ‘One Thing Needful’ at the start of Hard Times: ‘Facts’ (Dickens 1). Facts that equate from the start for Dickens with acquisition, and not just any sort of acquisition, but those of an imperial measure: ‘gallons of facts’ to be poured into the young ‘until they were full to the brim’ (Dickens 2). Gradgrind is full of doubt about anything that does not equate to ‘facts and calculations,’ and yet Dickens tells us that the man who administers such an outpouring is ‘a man of realities’ (Dickens, 2). In the plural, so to
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speak, Thomas Gradgrind is made known to us, and over the course of time, even to himself. Here is a man made to be broken in, from the start, by a girl, Sissy Jupe, who has been trained by her father in the art of horse-breaking. She can’t define her actions, which makes her immediately the object of subversion and yet she has something of the character of a trainer, and thus an affinity with the old man. Her schoolboy counterpart Bitzer, is something of a chancer, a pale imitator of his creator, Gradgrind. She on the other hand, brings colour and warmth to her surroundings by nature, if not by right, as she is not a true member of the middle class despite her opportunity at schooling, and therefore will never be able to provide much in the way of its decorum. Nonetheless she possesses a vivid imagination, an element foreign to British notions of order and practicality, as evidenced by her demands for a riot of colour and pattern in her surroundings, which threaten what is assumed to be civilised tastes by the likes of Gradgrind and the schoolmaster M’Chakumchild at his school:

‘You are to be in all things regulated and governed,’ said the gentleman [M’Chakumchild], ‘by fact. We hope to have, before long, a board of fact, composed of commissioners of fact, who will force the people to be a people of fact, and of nothing but fact. You must discard the word Fancy altogether. You have nothing to do with it. You are not to have, in any object of use of ornament, what would be a contradiction in fact. You don’t walk upon flowers in fact; you cannot be allowed to walk upon flowers in carpets. You don't find that foreign birds and butterflies come and perch upon your crockery. You never meet with quadrupeds going up and down walls; you must not have quadrupeds represented upon walls. You must use,’ said the gentleman, ‘for all these purposes, combinations and modifications (in primary colours) of mathematical figures which are susceptible of proof and demonstration. This is the new discovery. This is fact. This is taste’ (Dickens 7-8).

Implicit in this instruction is the nationalistic urge to institute a uniformity of taste that will allow students like Sissy, to ‘institute a policing structure in their homes that will make and keep in their minds, orderly and practical’ in a way that is able to resist the seduction of external influences, that might lead them back to the unproductive lives of their parents.’ (Cameron 73). ‘Sissy Jupe’s father has failed at his profession of circus clown and Bitzer’s mother has been living in the work house.’ (Cameron 73). It is believed that reform of their environment in the schoolroom as children, will in time reform their domestic surroundings as adults. It is similarly intended that they never fancy lives beyond the geometrically determined pattern of their ideological confinement in Coketown. Whilst, the fanciful threat of the exotic East remains beyond the material grasp of the working classes for the most part, it is Gradgrind’s own middle class children, Louisa and Tom, who will be the future consumers for its foreign goods such as fine china, flowered carpets and printed wallpaper. For them Eastern seduction lies just beyond these walls, housed in objects which call out for nothing so much as their coveted acquisition. Competition from the East threatens to rob from Britain, its lucrative domestic industry in textiles and crockery produced in places like Coketown. Moreover, it does not just rob the society financially, but also ideologically making citizens covet goods and tastes of foreign origin, which might call into question Britain’s cultural and moral superiority over its colonial Others.

It is Grandgrind and his schoolmaster M’Chakumchild that will be tasked with
The apprehension and the attendant abuse that must surely follow on from indulgence in such fanciful temptation demonstrated by the younger generation. Dickens describes M’Chakumchild as being both the product of the factory and the government, and obsessive when it comes to facts. However, what is most significant about him is his hands that get to work on the children, in order to choke them with facts, through an act of strangulation if need be. He is ‘a professed pugilist, always in training, always with a system to force down the general throat like a bolus, always heard of at the bar of his little Public-office, ready to fight all England. To continue the fistic phraseology, he was a genius for coming up to scratch, wherever and whatever it was, and proving himself an ugly customer. He would go in and damage any subject whatever with his right, follow up with his left, stop, exchange, counter, bore his opponent (he always fought All England) to the ropes, and fall upon him neatly. He was certain to knock the wind out of common sense, and render that unlucky adversary deaf to the call of time.’ (Dickens 6).

It is not intelligence that is on M’Chakumchild’s side, but mere brawn. His countenance is more reminiscent of prison warden, government despot, or shop steward than a teacher. What is significant about M’Chakumchild’s hands, as well as Grandgrind’s and later Bounderby’s, is that they run counter to the hands of those they seek to apprehend and bring under control. Already in this opening gambit we witness a grudge match shaping up that will run aground on an authority, which while not in danger of killing, may maim or distort in ways not yet grasped by its emerging protagonists. Even the purportedly self-taught Bounderby has ‘a fist’ to grind (Dickens 21). Where it might land is yet to be determined. ‘The hands suggest complications to intimacy in a world of control. In the book, hands as devices of control and production are contrasted with hands as means of contact and intimacy’ (Rosen 161). ‘Men touch men more frequently in Hard Times, although it can be argued that there is some physical intimacy between women in the function of carer that displays itself through the novel (Rosen 161-162). ‘Hard Times’ differs from other contemporary fictions of the time in the self-conscious way in which it insists that order creates the monstrosity by which it justifies itself. It also differs through Dickens’ insistence that such monstrous beasts be seen for what they really are; ordinary members of the society, both male and female.

These monstrous beasts must be domesticated by harsh measures, or to use Dickens’s metaphor of dismemberment, they must be “broken” like horses. McChoakchumchild, like a horse, has been trained by “being put through a variety of paces.” [Sissy] Jupe, another sort of horse, needs rigid “training.” ‘Obviously, such training has use in promoting control and productivity, but such training also suggests a fear of the bestial that the training emphasizes rather than obliterated.’ (Rosen 164). ‘Bounderby and McChoakchumchild are conventional “hacks in harness” who discharge their sexual energy and passion through their work’ (Rosen 164). ‘The horse between Harthouse’s legs in a matter of aristocratic display. After being jilted by Louisa …he rides [it] furiously up and down the streets’ (Rosen 164). The only man who seems to be able to manage his horse with ease is Sleary, who is able to ‘integrate it in all aspects of the community’s life,’ thus creating a common intimacy with the animal, that allows this community to preclude ‘violence and sexual
aggression,’ by allowing ‘intimacy to integrate sexuality with comfort and affection: people get married on horseback, rear children on horseback, teach on horseback’ (Rosen 164). This variety of encounter defuses tensions and allows for an ease of emotion and sentiment through contact that is not solely centred on the control and domination of emotional energy. When it becomes so, the fallout is monstrous, resulting in a pattern of ‘distance, restraint, violence, hardness and lack of intimacy’ that together form the blueprint of this novel (Rosen 166). All the characters share in common, apart from Sissy, the unrequited desire for sexual intimacy that is repressed and identified as the cause of shame or even potential social ruin. Violence bursts forth in these various failed encounters where sexuality gives way to self-suppression. What destroys everyone is the novel is there inability to express intimacy in any satisfying way within the family unit. The lack of affection in Louisa and Tom’s upbringing translates itself into the world of commerce when on one level they conspire a marriage between Louisa and Mr. Bounderby fraudulently, for the purposes of financial rather than emotional advantage, and on another Louisa and Tom are caught up in act of embezzlement from Bounderby, implicating both Louisa to whom such assets have been entrusted through marriage and Tom to whom such assets have been entrusted through labour in the act of converting such resources to a nefarious end. Louisa has the nascent capacity to change in this regard, but not the social influence to do so. Instead she remains dominated at every turn by the men in her life, who practice, ‘cold methodical calculations of gain and power to frame their activities’ with the exception of Stephen Blackpool, who finds himself with no way out short of demise, by following the letter of the law and the command of his social superiors (Rosen 147). He is simply ground down by them in the face of education and training: in other words the very mechanism that calls out the bestial in society, rather than restraining it according to Dickens’s logic of institutions. Such a malign force in Dickens’s mind can only be overcome through the application of a gentle touch, as opposed to the intense pummeling normally meted out in society. Times are hard because men make it so, and women who insist on being Sissy’s and refusing to divide and conquer through force, are those who can surely bring the community back in line with humankind’s innate beauty of nature, a gloveless sensuality if you will.

It is in the second chapter of the novel that Thomas Gradgrind had to be reintroduced, as the son, and not the father, and given a companion in life, his sister Louisa. These two are at once introduced and caught red handed in the act of robbery, by ‘stealing’ a look into the circus tent. A starved imagination wishes to feed here, ‘a fire with nothing to burn,’ making Tom ‘no better’ and Louisa ‘no worse’ for their strained desire which would one day grope its way forward providing it had a conduit, a tantalising brightness to adhere to (Dickens, 16). But for the time being, there would be only obstacles, embodied by Mr. Bounderby, one who through commonsense must mark a boundary to Tom and Louisa’s budding wills. Grandgrind understands that his middle-class daughter needs money to set up her social establishment. Bounderby comes off as a man with means to support both Louisa, and the career prospects of the young Tom Gradgrind. He, more than his father, sees Louisa’s marriage to Bounderby as strengthening the power relationships between the two families, as well as providing a good financial deal for his sister. Tom employs a mercenary approach. He views matrimonial alliance as a source of personal economic
advantage or exploitation. Whichever way you look at the unmarried and uncareered, Tom has the most to gain from such an alliance. This gain is far and above that of his sister, whose value declines precipitously the moment she accedes to the union. Tom is not wrong in doing so, as the marriage guarantees that his own social credit will go up precipitously. Still young Tom Gradgrind knows his place, describing himself as a workhorse, in need of breaking, ‘a donkey, a mule; stubborn, stupid and resigned as one of those poor laboured creatures’ (Dickens 69). Much like them, Tom shares that creature’s desire ‘to kick out,’ and the source of his frustration is the very stuff of his societal making: “If father was determined to make me a Prig or a Mule, and I am not a Prig, why it stands to reason, I must be a Mule. And so I am,” Tom said desperately. Louisa’s desperation comes not from her condition as a Mule, but ‘as a pet’ whose purview was not limited to work, but to proffer amusement (Dickens 69). Louisa is painfully aware she will not be able to succeed in this regard when she becomes homemaker to Bounderby; her first inklings of rebellion, come from the fact that she simply cannot locate within herself such qualities:

As I get older, and nearer all grown up, I often sit wondering here, and think how unfortunate it is for me that I can’t reconcile you a better home than I am able to do. I don’t know what other girls know. I can’t play to you or sing to you. I can’t talk to you so to lighten your mind, for I never see any amusing sights or read any amusing books that would be a pleasure or a relief to you to talk about, when you are tired. (Dickens 67).

It is this failure in Louisa that enacts an even stranger order of things to come, as Tom precedes her into the marriage house to Bounderby, as ‘inmate’ only to be followed by Louisa who is imminently bound to the same fate. The difference will come from the fact that two genders are not equal in their imagination to confronting their confinement, whilst Tom ‘diligently’ occupies himself ‘in his calculations relative to number one’ (Dickens, 120), Louisa prepares no such defense again the round numbers of twenty and fifty that at once separate her from Bounderby, and at the same time the insurmountable gap between these figures must certainly make her unreachable. Her father detects this and asks her if she has a ‘any wish’ in reference to the period of her marriage, intimating there is a chance for early parole, but Louisa accepts no such bargain repeating to him ‘what does it matter.’ (Dickens 133-134).

From the moment of acknowledging her engagement, she became ‘impassive, proud and cold, changed altogether, in the face of anything but the aggregate of her situation’ (Dickens 137). Where Tom’s thoughts turn to liquidity in crossing the threshold of Bounderby’s homestead, Louisa’s form in a perfect mimicry of her fated environment as an acquisition, ancillary to another male-to-male conquest wherein her influence is simply a mute point. Love has no place in this economy; rather it is enterprise that fuels the passions of men that surround her. Domesticity far from being her sphere is exclusively cast in the image of its male rather than female inhabitants. Louisa is all too well aware of this from her own upbringing where her mother is reduced in stature to little more than a ‘dormouse’ within the midst of her husband’s aptly named Stone Lodge, wherein the name alone invokes masculine rigidity and fortitude with no space left free to feminine curvature. (Dickens 81).

A very regular feature on the face of the country, Stone Lodge was. Not in the
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least disguise toned down or shaded off that uncompromising fact in the landscape. A great square house, with heavy portico darkening the principal windows, as its master’s heavy brows overshadowed his eyes. A calculated, cast up, balanced, and proved house. Six windows on this side of the door, six on that side; a total of twelve in this wing, a total of twelve in the other wing; four and twenty carried over to the back wings. A lawn and garden and an infant avenue, all ruled straight like a botanical account book. Gas and ventilation, drainage and water service, all of the primest quality. Iron clamps and girders, fireproof from top to bottom; mechanical lifts for the housemaids, with all their brushes and brooms, everything that heart could desire. (Dickens 12-13)

Stone Lodge sets out to do nothing less than subdue the nature that surrounds it with a heavy cast of order and mechanization. Individuals do not move themselves on these premises, rather they are moved and indeed elevated at will by Gradgrind’s authority in his home. His desire shapes nothing so much as a fortress around the inhabitants of Stone Lodge, who when brought here seem to lose feeling, only to have it replaced with a foreboding tally of responsibilities. On the surface Stone Lodge may appear as little more than an applied exercise in utilitarian architecture and industrial engineering, but for its inhabitants it functions much more profoundly as a model of discipline to be reflected outward from its complementary spaces at all times.

‘Accordingly, Stone Lodge functions as an uncanny resemblance to the centre of a Benthamite panopticon, a model for an incarceration where prisoners could be observed at all times from an omnipotent lit tower at the prison’s centre, with a multiplicity of windows, which at once capture light and reflect it back to the centre to enable constant surveillance from a sole focal point (Scarborough 96). Gradgrind with his intense, lack of empathy is an ideal guard for his interior charges within this model. His son refers to his childhood home as “a jolly-old Jaundiced Jail.” Louisa also sees it this way and yearns for freedom, as she sees other bright sparks such as she, temporarily eluding the confines of a parallel confinement at the factory at night. Her static incarceration is by contrast uniform and seemingly endless, as compared with the Hands ability to shift back and forth from their dual sites of confinement: home and factory. From Gradgrind’s perspective Stone Lodge is the embodiment of his privilege within Coketown to govern both ‘surveillance and morality’. Therein he fails to recognise that ‘the rigidity of its structure, is causing the disintegration of his family members in a literal and figurative sense, generating criminality in its respective guises, embezzlement and alleged adultery (Scarborough 97). As opposed to eradicating deviance or reforming their morals, Gradgrind’s pressured environment causes his children’s irregular development, transforming ‘the mirth of the children’s nursery into a stolid observatory, wherein play has no business, and the business of learning resembles nothing so much as a parliamentary report. Life within Stone Lodge’s stem walls proceeds “monotonously round the clock like a piece of machinery which discourage[s] human interference”’ (Dickens 47). Coketown’s subjects, much less, his children, are not to create friction to complicate this order.

Bounderby’s country estate furthers the sense of domesticity as an exclusively masculine enterprise, by tying its procurement with an economic gamesmanship that
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has little to do with any notion of familial abode. Purchased after a bank foreclosure, Bounderby’s country house is a symbol of conspicuous consumption and of financial muscle on the part of the new ascendant class that Bounderby represents throughout the novel. The divinities that protect his property are taken directly from Mammon. After telling Harthouse “‘there’s not a completer place of its size in this kingdom or elsewhere,’” Bounderby proudly explains the method by which he “‘got into the middle of it, like a maggot into a nut, is Josiah Bounderby’” (Dickens 224). This statement suggests that he has infiltrated the domain of the middle class through this aggressive acquisition style belonging to the working classes, whose hunger motivates them to dig deeper for such riches. The fact that this is another man’s personal space, as opposed to a commercial space, seems to give Bounderby special pleasure, because it allows him to become a member, or at least a neighbour, of the landed gentry, whose wealth is more esteemed than those whose wealth has been acquired through trade. The previous owner’s displacement from it, despite his breeding, brings great satisfaction to Bounderby for the very reason that such expropriation of property, signifies the decline of that class of men in favour of men of his own. Bounderby eagerly relays to Harthouse how “‘Nickits [the previous owner], who used to act in Latin, in the Westminster School plays, with the chief justices and nobility of this country applauding him till they were black in the face, is drivelling at this minute - drivelling, Sir! - in a fifth floor, up a narrow dark back street in Antwerp’” (Dickens 224). His description of the progressive emasculation of Nickits, from Westminster aesthete to common European renter, entering his property, dubiously from a back alley, suggests this transaction is something illicit. Furthermore, it points to a class rivalry wherein it is understood that such dispossession marks the rise of one man at the cost of another on the new industrial stage.

In this story line there is no need to distinguish the domestic from the commercial any longer, because all are universally acquired as assets. Whilst Bounderby does not live in his bank per se, his servants remain in service there to occupy and protect it. Indeed, prior to the betrothal that lands Louisa in Bounderby’s two other properties, another betrothal of sorts has taken place, between Mr. Bounderby and Mrs. Sparsit, when she is moved from the main house to the apartments at Bounderby’s Bank, to act as it were, as his commercial wife. She would be ‘keeper of the place,’ insuring that nothing would part them, in the event of his marriage to Miss Gradgrind. Mrs. Sparsit, acknowledges such a proposal, through the assumption that her occupancy at the Bank insures that she is in ‘no way descending the social scale’ (Dickens 141). The Bank, Bounderby assures her, is a place of respectability: “‘You’ll have your own private apartments, you’ll have your coal and your candles, and the rest of it, you’ll have a maid to attend upon you, and a light porter to protect you, and you’ll be with what I take the liberty of considering precious comfortable,’” said Bounderby (Dickens 141). In the bargain Mrs. Sparsit, acknowledges such an arrangement will not free her “‘from the bread of dependence,’” but nonetheless she “would rather receive it from [Mr. Bounderby’s] hand, than from any other’” (Dickens 141-142). And so it goes that a mutual dependency is formed between the Home and the Bank, each fêted in their own way by those invisible Hands of Coketown, creating a necessary friction, which in time would turn Hands against their makers.
The folk of Coketown are always referred to as a multiplicity, “generically called “the Hands,” a race of lower creatures, whose sole value is in their functionality, from what they can produce through manual labour. There is a divinity about these hands, however, insofar as Dickens gives them a resemblance throughout the novel with the ultimate Creator, God himself. He remarks that these Hands forced to work under conditions of shouting and cacophony, share a conjuring task at every point with the ‘Hands’ of Providence which are mutes,’ and with God himself, whose work is noiseless and his factory a secret place ‘where fortunes are made and lost’ (Dickens 126). Where there is a lack of grace, those lower creatures interceded to do their work. For Bounderby, this race of creatures is defined simply by their desire to consume. “Lastly,” said Bounderby, “As to our Hands. There is not a hand in this town, Sir, madam, woman, or child, but has one ultimate object in life. That object is to be fed on turtle soup and venison with a gold spoon. Now, they’re not a-going - none of ’em – ever to be fed on turtle soup with a gold spoon. And now you know the place” (Dickens 167). Whilst their desire to consume society’s spoils may be interpreted as literal, the tastes of others of a higher rank tend to prize another order of satisfaction. As Bounderby closes out his remarks, he shakes hands before he introduces the town’s aristocratic newcomer James Harthouse to his wife Louisa, ‘Tom Gradgrind’s daughter’ fulfilling Harthouse’s ‘dearest wishes,’ to make her acquaintance to better his correspondence with the family, an interest that is not entirely of the wholesome kind. Upon the arrival of her brother Tom, Harthouse observes, ‘she put out her hand, a pretty little soft hand; and her fingers closed upon her brother’s, as if she would carry them to her lips’ (Dickens 173). It is here that Louisa’s ultimate object in life reveals itself: the desire to express her affection and “the need of someone on whom to bestow it. “So much the more is this whelp the only creature she has ever cared for,” thought Mr. James Harthouse, turning it over and over. “So much the more. So much the more” (Dickens 147). It is the prize of her affection, that Mr. Harthouse aims to grasp beyond his proprietary reach, with a similar probability of success to the fortune mentioned above that the other sort of Hands strive to capture.

The initial description of Coketown as a community of radically indistinct appendages is mirrored by its architectural lay out. “It contained several large streets all very like each other, and many small streets still more like one another, inhabited by people equally like one another, who all went in and out at the same hours, with the same sound upon the pavements, to do the same work, and to whom everyday was the same as yesterday and to-morrow, and every year the counterpart of the last and the next” (Dickens 28). Such symmetry while certainly creating monotony also encourages a certain proscribed movement among residences in aid of a pure functionalism. Bounderby’s bank, is the logic repository for their labours, as much as the factory and the home, and the other nondescript buildings that populated Coketown:

The bank offered no violence to the wholesome monotony of the town. It was another red brick house, with black outside shutters, green inside blinds, a black street door up two white steps, a brazen doorplate, and a brazen doorhandle full stop. It was a size larger than Mr. Bounderby’s house, as other houses were from a size to half a dozen sizes smaller; in all other particulars, it
The outlook from each structure reinforces the factual nature of the other’s existence, as though a natural order had voluntarily allowed itself to be seized by industrial uniformity and was now bearing out life domestically through a framework of factory chimneys. There is a certain fatalism inherent to this order, which colours Louisa’s gaze out the window, as much as it does Mrs. Gradgrind’s demise, as little more than ‘a weak transparency,’ for more powerful others to cast their light through (Dickens 267). ‘The light had always been feeble and dim,’ the body unable in the final moment to rouse itself to communicate and what could not be written about the female story, attempts nonetheless to make itself known in ‘figures of wonderful no-meaning’ that a dying Mrs. Gradgrind ‘traces upon her wrappers’ (Dickens 267).

Authority never comes to her, and shortly thereafter ‘Mr. Gradgrind, apprised of his wife’s decease, made an expedition from London, and buried her in a business-like manner. He then returned with promptitude to the national cinder-heap, and resumed his sifting for the odds and ends he wanted, and his throwing of the dust about into the eyes of other people who wanted other odds and ends — in fact resumed his parliamentary duties’ (Dickens 274). Death in this instance corresponds with the fluid uniformity between servicing the demands of home and nation, which requires strained competition at all levels of society and the occasional decoupling of these demands when want presents itself.

If there is a fluid uniformity of space evident in *Hard Times*, there is a contemporary organ that plays equal part in it’s leveling of all activity to laboured subsistence. The organ in question is the hand, which against ‘Providence’ has ‘become a race’ in Coketown, and ‘like the lower creatures of the seashore’, remain subject to their lower drives as well as their upper ones (Dickens 83). The Hands have hands, as well as stomachs, and therefore possess utility as well as appetite. The Hands are a community of needs, drives and impulses. While the Hands might be seen to literally embody these features, those of a higher social order manage these differently, simply because a variety of organs is at their disposal, transit through which makes possible a greater confusion of desires in all its forms. Hands in the novel form ‘a conduit’ between representation and sexuality, generating a number of types that exemplify a range of sexual postures. Dickens outlines for us a series of links ‘between the overt representation of the manual, on one side, and the mystification of sexuality, on the other side, through the novels themas of eroticism that extends from male homoeroticism, to incestuous desire, to heterosexual desire and finally to female homoeroticism. (Cohen 36). ‘As exemplar, the novel, trains the bodies of its characters in exceedingly peculiar lessons; it becomes in this sense, a novel of manners.’ (Cohen 36).

The frustrations of the productive hands, pair with the idleness wasteful hands, in a way that folds an interrogation of labour practice into a critique of sexuality in the Victorian domestic sphere. Time and again ‘an overt anxiety about class takes the form of sexual humiliation’ (Cohen 37). This humiliation extends through the pageant of male figures in the novel, distinguishing them only in their unhappy, or unrequited encounters with the female sex. The Gradgrind marriage for all intents and purposes is demonstrated as loveless, as will soon be the Bounderby’s. Stephen Blackpool’s wife will give him no recourse in life to be with his love match, Rachael. Finally there are Tom Gradgrind and Jem Harthouse, the
bachelors, whose frustrated attempts to achieve social ranking, leave them bereft of a repository for their erotic impulses, that are then readily absorbed into drink, drugs and gambling.

Dickens’s females are reduced in the end to little more than their pound’s worth. For example, Louisa has no say in what happens to her. The fact that Louisa inherits Mrs. Sparsit, is another cruel function of the narrative of *Hard Times*, wherein she does not gain another motherly figure to substitute for the failings of her own, but rather a love rival for Bounderby much closer in age and interest to him, than to her. This creates an even greater erotic longing for her brother Tom, leading her toward Harthouse’s triangulated extramarital embrace as a result. Harthouse is able to play his role in the triangulation effortlessly as he has been schooled, however superficially, in the exceptional status of emigration, wherein what cannot be sanctioned in the Victorian family, is granted ‘an alternative setting within which their attachment can be experienced without mediation’ (Furneaux 177). This can however, only go so far within the domestic confines of the Grandgrind home, and therefore the insertion of an intermarriage plot, must be devised, where the seduction that is only practiced on Tom, might be enacted on Louisa.

HARTHOUSE is ‘part of the instantiation and development of a large bureaucracy in the 1850’s, partially to serve out the demands of the British Empire, but also as employment for second and subsequent sons born to families with high levels of personal consumption that could no longer be sustained from rents on land’ (Gordon 17). His family connections through his brother Jack, who serves both the House of Commons and his Board of Directors, allows for James Harthouse’s career in Coketown to take root and ‘gain entrance to all the crucial “houses” – so that he becomes in name their empty heart’ and spectral ‘mediator’ (Gordon 16). Mr. Harthouse, is ‘a wonderful hybrid breed’ born out of a productive union between politician and banker, mixed with an inconvenient truth: that everything is worth nothing and equally that one should be ready for anything or indeed anyone in the service of self-interest. Thus Harthouse wishes ‘to be all things to all people, or as he exclaims at one point, “ready to sell myself at any time for any reasonable sum”’ (Gordon 17). Harthouse’s importance is determined by what other’s project upon him in terms of value. When he approaches Bounderby’s bank, he does so carrying in his hand a letter of introduction from the elder Tom Gradgrind, without which he would have no recognisable worth. He arrives with no long-term purpose or interest in Coketown. He has no apparent labour to perform here other than making himself known and welcomed by Coketown’s great and good. In that vein, he quickly assumes the guise of a facilitator of the Gradgrind’s family’s various interests in transaction with the Bounderby clan. His appearance therefore remains ‘tolerable,’ due to his ‘careful management’ of an assumed honesty within dishonesty’; in his rationale for being their assistant, as it were, to all things enterprising that will work to augment his social currency. (Gordon 18). Harthouse is a symbol of the easy flow of capital which saunters into provincial outposts, such as Coketown, where it is an ‘adjunct to the administration of politics – when neutral administration rather than representation becomes the source of power, because the “assistant” lends the cover of deniability and hence anonymity to those in real power’ (Gordon 19). ‘HARTHOUSE’S powers are enhanced by the fact that he returns to England as a political operative,
inverting the colonial impulse with the aid of a stereotypically Asian product: ‘the submission to the absolute power of his superiors’ (Gordon 15). ‘Harthouse’s singularity consists in his plural or dual nature, the ability of the chameleon or the parasite to disguise subversion by miming the values and practices of a host so that his views seem indistinguishable from the dominant ideology. He is a man as if, and thereby advances the imaginative life, albeit under cover’ (Gordon 13).’ Indeed, ‘one way of addressing Harthouse’s unique skills might be to imagine him as infinitely, softly adaptable’ (Gordon 13). His ‘Asiatic temperament,’ complements an ‘imperial fantasy’ of exaggerated mechanical consistency, which cleanses the effects of power and the nature of submission from the domestic record, while at the same time ‘reproducing systems of barbaric oppression’ found abroad (Ketabgian 667). Despite what superficially seems to the contrary, Harthouse’s ‘appearance is coerced,’ his service not so very different from the Hands, creatures whose appearance is deemed lower than his—and because coercion unites them.. His subversive tendencies bring him in league with Tom Gradgrind, in whom he finds a partner in the enterprise he wishes to undertake - to seduce some worth out of Coketown’s industrial elite in service to their own moral vacancies.

Dickens sets the stage for a convergence of their nefarious actions in the chapter “Effects in the Bank” wherein the subject of Tom Gradgrind’s negligent attitude towards his professional duties at Bounderby’s Bank comes up in conversation between Mrs. Sparsit and Bitzer, the bank’s light porter, who was formerly the best pupil at Mr. Gradgrind’s school. Bitzer asserts that Tom ‘“as an individual has never been what he ought to have been, since he first came into the place. He is a dissipated, extravagant idler”’ (Dickens 155). Bitzer is equally able to size up Harthouse. When Mrs. Sparsit asks for an assessment from him, Bitzer remarks that he ‘spends a deal of money on his dress, ma’am,’ and implies that such decadence is immoral:

‘It must be admitted,’ said Mrs Sparsit, ‘that it’s very tasteful.’
‘Yes, ma’am,’ returned Bitzer, ‘if that’s worth the money.’
‘Besides which, ma’am,’ resumed Bitzer, while he was polishing the table, ‘he looks to me as if he gamed.’
‘It’s immoral to game,’ said Mrs Sparsit.
‘It’s ridiculous, ma’am,’ said Bitzer, ‘because the chances are against the players’ (Dickens 162-163).

And yet, against the odds, Harthouse is able to outwit all the major players in Coketown. The minor players such as Bitzer and (eventually within that same evening of conversation), Mrs. Sparsit see through him. Nonetheless he wins favour with the elder Tom Gradgrind to start his gamble, and then parodies the Good Samaritan role by, ‘holding out the hand of friendship’ to the Gradgrind’s and Bounderby’s of this world (Gribble 433). Mrs. Sparsit is able to deduce this path toward destruction because she shared in common a confluence and willingness to engage in warmongering in aid of the acquisition of economic powers. Mrs. Sparsit, the Bank Dragon keeping watch over the treasures of the mine, finds her counterpart in Mr. Harthouse, ‘a Cornet of Dragoon,’ keeping watch over the treasures of the cinder heap (Dickens 157). Mrs. Sparsit guarded various assets, including ‘cutlasses and carbines, arrayed in veneful order above one of the official chimney-pieces; and over that
The respectable tradition never to be separated from a place of business claiming to be wealthy—a row of fire buckets—vessels calculated to be of no physical utility on any occasion, but observed to exercise a fine moral influence, almost equal to bullion, on most beholders’ (Dickens 150). Despite such precautions, Mrs. Sparsit remains on permanent high alert to her surroundings. She is after all a prowler, which like Harthouse, is something in the first instance one might mistake about her given her former sphere of influence in high society: a Powler by marriage, a prowler by social widowhood. Bounderby regarding her new status thusly as, ‘not only a lady born and bred, but a devilish sensible woman’ (Dickens 139). Mrs. Sparsit takes up several occupations as time goes on, one of them being private investigator:

‘Humph!’ thought Mrs Sparsit, as she made a stately bend. ‘Five-and-thirty, good-looking, good figure, good teeth, good voice, good breeding, well-dressed, dark hair, bold eyes.’ All which Mrs Sparsit observed in her womanly way—like the Sultan who put his head in the pail of water—merely in dipping down and coming up again (Dickens 139).

Mrs. Sparsit, like Harthouse, is ‘not a native’ to her surroundings and yet she is a keen judge of them from the vantage point of her occidental status:

Harthouse: “Will you allow me to ask you if it’s always as black as this?”

“In general much blacker,” returned Mrs Sparsit, in her uncompromising way (Dickens 159).

Mrs. Sparsit and Harthouse share in common that they are circumstantial recruits to these parts brought in by the locally wealthy to ensure that the supremacy of the ruling classes prevails. The environment in which they conduct their business could not be more suitable in its blackness as a complement to their self-interest. Taking another look at Mr. Harthouse his initial subterfuge becomes evident:

When the Devil goeth about like a roaring lion, he goeth about in a shape by which few but savages and hunters are attracted. But, when he is trimmed, smoothed, and varnished, according to the mode: when he is aweary of vice, and aweary of virtue, used up as to brimstone, and used up as to bliss; then, whether he take to the serving out of red tape, or to the kindling of red fire, he is the very Devil (Dickens 239).

Hartthouse is in service to ‘legions’ or aristocrats who are given all the power in society and yet show a complete lack of ability to take responsibility when welding it. Publicly and privately, Harthouse is a product of his age, which designed spare members of the upper class to be indifferent and purposeless and yet casually destructive to those in their purview. The infernal city of Coketown, gives rise to a daemonic terrain, which draws in a figure like Harthouse to prey upon its deficiencies. Coketown from the beginning of the novel itself is characterised by degeneracy:
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. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled. It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of buildings full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long…” (Dickens 28).

Such a description of the place ‘suggests that this hellish environment which surrounds and confines Coketown’s main inhabitants ‘could potentially give rise to a life-like monster’ (Fannuchi, 92). Its shape would be formed by sheer want ‘prevailing over the people, reducing them to almost nothing, and simultaneously breed[ing] within them a terrible power that is to be unleashed,’ as sure as ‘its steam-engines progresses upon their task with the melancholy madness of a great beast (Fannuchi, 92). Harthouse’s complete lack of want for anything, divorces him from the very substance of existence, so that he can no longer feel compassion towards others, and instead applies his attention solely to ‘frivolous diversion and materialism’ (Fannuchi, 99).

As the novel progresses it is clear that ‘the pride of the aristocrats dehumanises them in the same way that vengeance dehumanises the workers, making them blind to the true Christian message of forgiveness and redemption’ that only the character of Sissy Jupe seems to have any true grasp of (Fannuchi 99). When asked by her schoolmaster, M’Choakumchild, what the first principal of life was, she replied with ‘the absurd answer: “To do unto others as I would that they should do unto me”’ (Dickens 73). Figures such as Louisa and Tom Gradgrind, and James Harthouse, however, know all too well that the prosperity that surrounds them comes at a cost. Some percentage of others must ‘starve to death’ or ‘be drowned or burnt to death’ to guarantee its perpetuation (Dickens 75-76). The acceptance of this statistical reality, allows them to become mercenary in carrying out their external duties in the service of their own self-perpetuation against the needs and wants of others. Other characters are brought into this framework of logic, Mrs. Sparsit with her obsession with the ‘staircase’ of society which is frighteningly capable of both upward and downward ascension and Bitzer, whose transaction with his intimate ones can be characterised generally, by his treatment of his own mother:

Having satisfied himself, on his father’s death, that his mother had a right of settlement in Coketown, this young economist had asserted that right for her with such a steadfast adherence to the principle of the case, that she had been shut up in the workhouse ever since. It must be admitted that he allowed her half a pound of tea a year, which was weak in him: first, because all gifts have an inevitable tendency to pauperise the recipient, and secondly, because his only reasonable transaction in that commodity would have been to buy it for as little as he could possibly give, and sell it for as much as he could possibly get; it having been clearly ascertained by philosophers that in this is comprised the whole duty of man — not a part of man’s duty, but the whole (Dickens 153).
Bitzer claims that he does not want a family because, "‘I have only one to feed and that is the person I most like to feed.'"

‘To be sure,’ assented Mrs. Sparsit, eating muffin (Dickens 156).

This unenviable cast of characters are exactly who ‘the Gradgrind’ party wanted’ to assist them cutting the throats of the Graces’ (Dickens 164). Like their union counterparts who played upon a taste for vengeance against their employers, this party played upon a taste for conceit against the lower classes. As diligently they went about indoctrinating the working class in the schools to feel ashamed of their ‘improvidence,’ they went about recruiting the ‘fine gentleman’ in business and government to feel pride in their perception of ‘everything to be worth nothing,’ and therein their equal willingness to be ‘ready for anything’ (Dickens 164). This is a crucial question for Dickens, how these ‘two fields of actions’ can be brought together in sympathy to one another, but for this there is no answer, no satisfactory conclusion.

What we do know from his concluding notes is that Dickens intended to ‘finish Sissy here,’ amongst the status quo and to ‘dispose of Mrs. Sparsit,’ as a societal cipher and lastly to ‘wind up with: ‘the ashes of our fires grown grey and cold,’ and perhaps the spark of the determination to light up fancy that much duller for it (Dickens 408). At novel’s end, ‘the ‘national dustmen hav[ing] only to do with one another,’ and workers ‘once again appearing at the ringing of the factory bell, passing to and fro at the set hours, among the Coketown Hands’ (Dickens 396), the question of how to institute real change is placed in the Hands of readers, i.e. the middle classes as benevolent mediators between the two parties.

And yet there are parties that remain to be addressed. James Harthouse and junior Tom Gradgrind by novel’s end appear fully dissipated from the realm of our concerns, their punishments of banishment to exotic elsewheres, conveniently explaining away their further significance. Nonetheless their fall fails to temper the truth of their relations to those at the centre of Britain’s elite power (Koenigsberger 105). Indeed it is their trusted place within such relations that precipitated their social demise. Therein it is possible for both to have a kindred tie with Louisa, in their residual intuition for a place of feeling in the void of their carefully mannered appearance. This is evident when Harthouse is confronted by Sissy with a painful fact shared in common later with Tom Gradgrind: ‘“You may be sure Sir, you will never see her again as long as you live”’ (Dickens 307). He is right that he is not the lady’s persecutor. Rather he and indeed Tom Gradgrind are the victim of their own breeding and education, ‘brought up in that catechism’ of self-interest’ (Dickens 383)

Harthouse is momentarily touched by Sissy’s sentiment of love towards Louisa, but this is only a temporary capture, for he like Louisa had long ago surrendered the organ of his heart in the furtherance of his social prospects:

He was touched in the cavity where his heart should have been — in that nest of addled eggs, where the birds of heaven would have lived if they had not been whistled away — by the fervour of this reproach (Dickens 309)
The potential for any nurturing productivity had long since been charred away and with it any place of moral nesting. Harthouse asserts:

“I am not a moral sort of fellow,’ he said, “and I never make any pretensions to the character of a moral sort of fellow. I am as immoral as need be. At the same time, in bringing any distress upon the lady who is the subject of the present conversation, or in unfortunately compromising her in any way, or in committing myself by any expression of sentiments towards her, not perfectly reconcilable with — in fact with — the domestic hearth; or in taking any advantage of her father’s being a machine, or of her brother’s being a whelp, or of her husband’s being a bear; I beg to be allowed to assure you that I have had no particularly evil intentions, but have glided on from one step to another with a smoothness so perfectly diabolical, that I had not the slightest idea the catalogue was half so long until I began to turn it over. Whereas I find,” said Mr. James Harthouse, in conclusion, “that it is really in several volumes” (Dickens 309)

Here Harthouse temporarily becomes mouthpiece to a domestic scenario that Dickens has been keen to point out to us all along; that the configuration of male power that surrounds Louisa is in fact populated by flawed individuals, who present little in the way of contest for his rightful or unrightful place as being alongside her at the ‘domestic hearth’. After such a depth of insight Harthouse quickly springs back to his superficial level. He reckons that relinquishing his feelings for Louisa is of no greater consequence than a wager lost, which now needs to be paid for. The greater bargain that he has lost is his appearance as a man on public business amongst his would-be contemporaries.

His shame at this conclusion signals a potential. A potential that manipulation at every level of society will extract its costs and its surplus, in the form of waste, profligacy and excess abroad, will never fully be detached from its operations at home. It is men like Harthouse that will ultimately threaten the ‘foundation of a society built on inequality and privilege,’ in his testing of his own foundations of superiority (Koenigsberger 107). Finding them wanting, he remains a superior partner to Louisa at the domestic hearth, for the very virtue of his ability to size up his competitors and at once relinquish his hold on the competition.

Instead, Harthouse, the Great Pyramid of failure, will in years to come be retrieved or at the very least acknowledged as the beginning of a formulation of a new volume where Britain can tally its excesses. The new territory yet to be discovered is none other than the exigencies of the colonial world eventually brought home to roost in all their ‘squalor, grossness and vulgarity’ requiring only the slightest manipulation to see their mirror image clearly as being always already a product of home. The boundary between the colonial and the domestic in Dickens’s work is there ‘to prevent the reader from making connections in a world where relationships almost without exception are destructive’ (Koenigsberger 115). The unreal quality that Harthouse brings to such proceedings signals however a beyond, a world where England’s inability to beautify its machinery, both social and functional, extends right the way through to its logical colonial margin in terms of consequence. Such a reality
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supports a single fact accepted readily by the majority of Victorian Britons: that ‘every inch of the existence of mankind, from birth to death, was to be a bargain across a counter.’

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