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Marxist Critical Analysis of Synecdochical Use of the Hand in *Hard Times*

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to analyse the use of the “Hand” as a synecdoche and to show the power it gives to capitalists in their relationship with workers in *Hard Times* by the English novelist Charles Dickens. In the light of a Marxist analysis, it emerges that the “Hand” that replaces the worker is not charged with human values of dignity, sympathy, love, justice, equity and sharing. Therefore, at an epoch dominated by capitalism, it is obvious that the ideology that can justify the exploitation of the worker cannot do without a synecdochical use of the Hand. Thus, employers or capitalists are more tranquil when it comes to the oppression and exploitation of “Hands” than of the workers.

Key words: exploitation, substitution, ideology, workers, employers

Résumé

L'objectif de cette étude est d'analyser l'utilisation de la "Main" comme synecdoque et de montrer le pouvoir qu'elle donne aux capitalistes dans leur relation avec les travailleurs dans *Hard Times* du romancier anglais Charles Dickens. À la lumière d'une analyse marxiste, il ressort que la "Main" qui remplace le travailleur n'est pas chargée de valeurs humaines de dignité, de sympathie, d'amour, de justice, d'équité et de partage. Par conséquent, à une époque dominée par le capitalisme, il est évident que l'idéologie qui peut justifier l'exploitation du travailleur ne peut se passer d'une utilisation synecdotique de la "Main". Ainsi, les employeurs ou les capitalistes sont plus tranquilles quand il s'agit de l'oppression et de l'exploitation de la "Main" que des travailleurs.

Mots clés: exploitation, substitution, idéologie, ouvriers, employeurs

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Introduction

Hard Times is a novel that presents social conditions in 19th century England through a fictional representation of Coketown, an industrial town in England. The narrator, who plays a key role in the interpretation that readers can give, serves as a moral authority through his moral judgements about the characters and their actions. Thus, the relationship between the Employer and the worker is depicted in the third person. The narrator's point of view is limited, since he does not master everything about the characters, especially their emotions.

Through the narration, the worker's condition is described in a context where capitalism reigns and the rise of new class of rich factory owners becomes noticeable. For Hyumpherys (2008:396) “The narrator’s comments are heavily inflected with biblical references which introduce a moral and ethical commentary on the philosophy of Coketown”. Hyumpherys (2008) has, therefore, established that *Hard Times* which is Dickens’s tenth novel has generated the most varied response of all of his fictions. As a matter of fact, the novel “can be counted as one of the preliminary works that reflected on effects of Industrial Revolution on working life with a critical perspective within the scope of administrative mentality of that time” (Ozutku et al. 2018:839). In a sense, the novel addresses socio-economic challenges brought about by industrial revolution.

To achieve this role as a social critic through his novel, Charles Dickens uses several linguistic strategies to draw his readers' attention on the deviations of the new English industrial society. Synecdoche, one of the figures of speech, is used to translate power relations between the employer and the worker. As a figure of substitution derived from metonymy, synecdoche is about “a word or phrase in which a part of something is used to represent a whole, or a whole is used to represent a part of something” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (OALD), 9th Edition, here after, OALD, 2015:1589). Consequently, synecdoche makes it possible to designate or name a thing by referring to its part or whole. Thanks to that linguistic strategy, the worker in Dickens’ created world is known as the Hand.

1. Statement of the Problem

As a figure of speech, synecdoche is part of rhetorical tropes which contribute to aesthetic and persuasive use of language. Either used microcosmically or macrocosmically, synecdoche intends to personify the part in such a way that it fully represents the whole. It selects out of a whole thing, a part that has almost all features and qualities of a larger thing. As such, synecdoche allows poets, especially in love poetry, to idealise the beloved by using their parts (Hyumpherys, 2008; Inghan, 2008). Its usage arouses emotions and sentiments in love relationships. In advertisement, synecdoche is also employed to attract and catch the attention of the audience or readers as it makes it easy to associate the part with the whole. In short, the main purpose of synecdoche is not derogatory.

However, the usage of synecdoche in Charles Dickens’ *Hard Times* is derogatory. The “Hand” is microcosmically employed to designate the worker or employee. This usage tends to conceal power which is exercised over the element whose whole has been designated by its part. A close look at contexts and conditions under which workers are called “Hands”, it can

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be postulated that there are profits and privileges employers or factory owners in Dickens' created city of Coketown get at the expense of the improvement of workers' living conditions.

Thus, in the light of a Marxist criticism, this study aims to analyse the use of synecdoche as a figure of speech and to show the power it gives to capitalists (factory owners and employers) in their relationship with workers in *Hard Times*. It intends to show that since the "Hand" that replaces the worker is not charged with human values of dignity, sympathy, love, justice, equity and sharing; its usage at an epoch dominated by capitalism, is an ideological strategy that justifies the exploitation and oppression of the worker.

2. Review of Related Literature

Marxist criticism is rooted in the writings of Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx. They, respectively, wrote *Condition of the Working Class in England* (1845) and *Das Kapital* (1867) but co-authored *The Communist Manifesto* (1848). From these foundational theoretical books, social critics and other followers of Marx and Engels established sets of ideas through which socio-economic challenges could be scanned and interpreted with the objective of restoring social justice. It is then noted that Marxist criticism gained prominence with the advent of Industrial Revolution (Bertens, 2001; Bressler, 1994; Eagleton, 1976; D'Encausse & Schram, 1965; Mbon, 2019).

From Industrial Revolution, the birth of England of the poor and that of the rich has become the concern of many social critics whose calls are meant to stop capitalism (Rousseau, 2008; Parker, 2002; Djagri T., 2016, 2018; Motchane & Chevènement, 1973). Literary texts produced within that context are most of time explored, discussed, analysed and interpreted in the light of Marxist point of view as Tripathi and Bhattacharjee (2016: 71) state: "Novels of Charles Dickens and Thomas Hardy dealing with London in the age of Industrial Revolution served as an agency of awareness". For Bhat (2016), the rise of a new class of rich factory owners has caused the Victorian man to be proud to the extent that he despises and exploits his fellows. That is why "like *Shirley*, *Hard Times* focuses on the conflict between the middle and working class" (Balkaya, 2015 :1). Consequently, the ironically called the 'Honourable' Gentlemen in *Hard Times* are those who cause destruction through exploitation, oppression and corruption. As a matter of fact, workers (Hands) are, according to Terci (2015), humiliated and squeezed by ill-mannered, dishonourable and unscrupulous factory owners. The microcosmical form of synecdoche through the use of the "hand" of the worker becomes, in this respect, the adequate literary tool thanks to which Charles Dickens exposes the gaping wounds of England of his epoch.

Synecdoche is one of Dickens' linguistic strategy to deal with industrial revolution and capitalism in *Hard Times*. For Inghan (2008:126), "Dickens's mastery of language is unique among nineteenth-century novelists in its inventiveness and multilayered density which makes him in effect the James Joyce of the Victorian period". That is why, it is crucial to seriously examine every available linguistic resource employed by Charles Dickens in his creative works. Synecdochical use of the Hand (part-and-whole relationship) in *Hard Times* can, in this respect, be loaded with a surplus of meaning that helps readers to better understand the depiction of deplorable social conditions and the monstrosity of capitalism.

Dealing with the object metaphor and synecdoche in mathematics, Font V. et al. (2010) point out the relevance of synecdoche in the 'particular—general' relationship. They underscore that students can grapple with mathematical discourse if they develop the ability to move from a part to a whole or from objects that exist to their representations. In "Dickens's Radicalism, Plausibility, and His Image of the Working Man", George Orwell

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(1939) problematises that many readers like and love Dickens because of the narrative of his childhood that synecdochically mirrors their own. From both Font V. et. al and Orwell, it can be posited that synecdoche plays communicative roles that remain less explored (Blank & Koch, 1999; Clarke & Nerlich, 1999).

3. The Hand as a Synecdoche in *Hard Times*

In *Hard Times*, it is noted that workers in Coketown are “generically called ‘the Hands’” (Subsequent references to *Hard Times* will be abbreviated as HT, 52). These Hands are fully represented through the characterisation of Stephen Blackpool and Rachael. Both characters work in the same factory with other Hands. All categories of age and sex can be numbered among them since it is said that “the Hands, men and women, boy and girl, were clattering home” (HT, 53) after a long hard-working day in factories. In short, workers are known and referred to as Hands.

The hand is a part of the human body that participates in the performance of mobility and actions. It is considered to be a propulsive organ since its absence considerably reduces the ability to move around. Human beings have two hands: the left hand and the right hand. The hand is known as the part of the body that ends with four fingers and a thumb. The multiple services it renders to the whole human body are carried out thanks to the four fingers and the thumb or the five fingers, if the thumb is counted as a finger. They make it possible for human beings to give and receive things. Through the hand, people can feel, pat, tap, grab, snatch, grasp, squeeze or grip. The hand is used for feeding, cleaning, washing, calling, protection, defence and for whatever action that is part of its physiological functions.

Beyond its motor and sensory functions, the hand is used to name and conceptualize ideas. For its ability to perform tasks for the benefit of the whole body, the use of the hand as a concept gives rise to expressions such as “to give a hand”, “to have a hand in something”, “all hands on deck”, “to be good with your hands”, “to have your hands tied”, “to take off your hands”, “out of hand” or “put your hand in your pocket” (OALD, 2015:707-708). This connotative use of the hand leads to many colloquial expressions connected to it.

Nevertheless, instead of using Manpower to talk of workers, Dickens rather uses Hands. The difference between Manpower and Hands lies in the fact that the former refers to the work performed by the worker's hands, whereas the latter refers to Hands as work instruments or tools, just like machines used to perform certain tasks in factories. Manpower can literally mean the power of the worker (Man) implemented through his hands. Thus, the Hand represents a synecdoche as it is connected to the human body and helps recognise it among other animal bodies.

However, because there are instruments or machines that perform almost all functions like the hand of a human being, the synecdochical use of it does not guarantee a sincere representation of the whole human being. As a reasonable animal, a human being cannot be reduced to the qualities of a part of himself especially when that part can be compared with things (instruments or machines) which are product of his own imagination. Thus, the head as another synecdochical representation of a human being, would have been more appropriate than the hand in that the human brain (which is contained in the head) is the producer of artificial intelligence manifested in machines and robots which are used in industries and factories.

Therefore, the Hand as a synecdoche in *Hard Times* plays two roles: a figure of speech and an ideology. As a figure of speech, the Hand refers to the worker but not translating his whole human nature. Though the hand feeds, cleans, washes, gives, takes, calls, rejects, protects, saves, defends; it cannot, however, replace the head which designs,

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thinks and takes decisions. Thus, the Hand, used as a synecdoche, causes the worker to lose much of his dignity as employers consider his hands as machines acquired for tasks assigned to them.

4. The Hand as an Ideology in *Hard Times*

Hard Times portrays the friendly English countryside that has undergone degradation in all sense of the word. The environment and people are exploited through factories, mining installations and warehouses. For Djagri T. (2018), people are physically, morally and psychologically worse than before industrial revolution since the greed for individual and personal achievement and fulfilment stripped factory owners of basic social virtues embedded in humanism. The use of Hands to refer to workers in factories informs the extent to which human exploitation has been done.

Ideologically speaking, the use of the Hand or Hands create two forms of consciousness: one for the employer and the other for the worker. Both people are trapped by industrial revolution. Thus, “Employers degrade employees and are in their turn degraded by their limitless greed for profit. The former is physically and psychologically worn out by ‘hard work’ and ‘hard times’ in factories whereas the latter suffer from moral and mental corruption or degradation due to their being alienated and blinded by material possession (Djagri T., 2018: 211). Out of this alienation that binds together both the employer and the employee, the use of the Hand is more than a synecdoche. It becomes a powerful ideology used by factory owners and politicians in Coketown to shape realities.

For the employer, exploiting or using a Hand is as legitimate as using or exploiting a machine. The relationship he can establish with a machine or an instrument can only be based on the production which enables him to reap the highest possible profits. Instruments and tools including Hands are not eligible for dignity. However, dignity is a parameter that ought to be taken into account when it comes to the representation of human beings. If in the conscience of the employer, it is not a matter of the exploitation of workers but rather of machines, he cannot, therefore, be concerned about improving the working and living conditions of machines except for maintenance sessions to be carried out in a case of breakdowns.

Consciousness is created from the dominant discourse which defines and establishes norms and realities (Eagleton, 1976; Bertens, 2001; Parker, 2002; Bressler, 1994; Quessada, 1999). The exploitation of the worker in Dickens' imaginary world requires a dominant discourse. To this end, the use of the Hand to name the worker helps to legitimise the employer's most horrific actions. It plunges factory owners deeply into dehumanising practices as the name becomes a thick veil on their consciousness and causes them to fail to see the true reality of things (Eagleton, 1976; Rawls, 1987).

Hands and machines are brought together because the Hand, as an organ, is to the human body what a manufacturing machine is to the factory or mill. This capitalist representation of the worker is illustrated in the following passage: “The work went on, until the noon-bell rang. More clattering upon the pavements. The looms, and the wheels, and the Hands, all out of gear for an hour” (HT, 58). As an instrument of manipulation, the hand ranks with other machines used to do similar work. Since machines cannot pretend to be tired, Hands in Coketown are not expected to be wearied.

Hands in *Hard Times* are said to be mute and, according Karl (2019), that muteness, in the medieval sense of the word, can be synonymous with silence, irrationality or disability. Thus, a mute human being can be compared to a stone or an animal devoid of reasoning. Moreover, muteness is one of the qualities of the hand as an organ. On the human body, the

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hand can only make gestures, movements and express a mute or sign language. It cannot articulate words; it cannot communicate through sounds. The mouth, for instance, performs all vocal tasks and helps the whole body produce articulated sounds that facilitate communication. The hand, on the other hand, is unable to perform these phonic roles. Workers should then be called Hands because they are not considered worthy of phonic communication. In a sense, they are rendered mute and used like the hand to serve the interests of the whole human body.

It can also be inferred that capitalists in Coketown view workers as subordinates in that the Hand can be cut off from the body without being able to claim the life of the whole body. From this perspective, workers are seen as dependent agents whose absence does not affect the system a great deal, since there are many potential workers outside of the system who hope to play the same role. Workers are thus seen as mere parts of a machine. Any defective part is replaced by a new one or an old one that has once been removed for inefficiency or other unknown reasons.

For the worker and his consciousness, the ideology of the Hand convinces him of his subordinate status. He accepts being reduced to the role played by his hand since it is the only organ which functions in an instrumental mode alongside machines. This dominant discourse creates in the worker an inferiority and under-being complex which teaches him to be content with what is offered to him by his employer. As the hand cannot think, it is conceivable that thoughts that define reality ought to come from elsewhere. Thus, the worker in Coketown is indoctrinated by master-and-servant ideology and ends up accepting the reality created by the dominant discourse, which is the ultimate goal of the employer (Montchane & Chevènement, 1973; D'Encausse & Schram, 1965). To this end, a veil is also put over the eyes of workers which prevents them from seeing truth as shown through Blackpool and his Union in *Hard Times*.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The article has shown that the Hand represents both a synecdoche, as a figure of speech, and an ideology, as a capitalist means to exploit workers. It has explored roles played by the Hand as an organ on a human body and has underscored that a part cannot fully represent a whole as it fails to embody certain vital values that define the whole. The analysis has, therefore, posited that the use of synecdoche in the context of *Hard Times* is ideologically driven. To this end, the use Hands to name workers has been a discourse that justifies exploitation and oppression as the Hand is viewed as a part of a machine. It has been shown that by taking themselves for Hands, workers end up manifesting qualities of muteness and servitude in the same way the two hands serve interests of the whole human body.

The article has, however, revealed that the use of Hands negatively affects both employers or capitalists and workers. Employers sink in evil practices whereas workers indulge in misery and resignation. Dickens' use of Hands to name workers in his fictional industrial England, informs the use of a different name charged with values of complementarity and mutual respect that can possibly give rise to true consciousness for the employer (capitalist) and the worker. As such, the Hand can be used appreciatively to represent the worker in a factory or enterprise since its derogatory synecdochical usage goes against the respect of human dignity. It, therefore, goes to the advantage of the 21st century capitalists to design a different discourse that moves away from the mechanisation of human beings to the humanisation of workers and even of machines. The Hand becomes, in this respect, a real source of power to produce wealth for both the employer and the worker. Social justice is then rendered and the worker's dignity and self-worth are restored. Only to

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this end can it be said that Charles Dickens' synecdochical representation of the worker has been a denunciation of bad effects and dangers of Industrial Revolution in England and in the world.

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