

Harthouse's *High*

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Now, this gentleman had a younger brother of still better appearance than himself who had tried life as a Coronet of Dragoons and found it a *bore*, and had afterwards tried it in the train of an English minister abroad and found it a *bore*, and then strolled to Jerusalem and got *bored* there; and then had gone yachting about the world, and *got bored* everywhere.

(*HT*, II, ii, 158; italics added)

For James Harthouse, life among the “hard Fact fellows” (*HT* II, ii, 158), a euphuism for the kind of Bentham-inspired statistical analysis embraced alike by Gradgrind and Coketown manufacturers and bankers, is but one more “adventure” in an unsettled, “soft” life lived amidst the affluent, leisured homeless. Of course, there are the rich “strollers” and those from less affluent circumstances, the itinerant performers and barkers of Sleary’s Circus, of no fixed address. What distinguishes Harthouse from other itinerant characters in Dickens’ *Hard Times*, however, is that his wandering has a vaguely colonial trajectory: he has been to the “near East,” as a bureaucrat *in service*, and, as we shall discover, brings back part of the Orient that defines (simultaneously) his attitudes and practices. The fact that Harthouse, when first introduced to the reader, is defined by his *boredom*, a calculated form of resistance to everyday life, should not be lost on us. That this resistance is *narrated* as another kind of disappearance—for Harthouse vanishes after his exposure as Louisa Gradgrind’s seducer—should alert us to the relationship between an erased oriental influence and the whole question of Orientalism, as initially raised by the late Edward Said.

Said would have us believe that “Orientalism” is a set of calculated practices embedded in colonizing narratives that re-write the history of the orient in such a way as to privilege rationality, law, and a specifically western logic of subjectation:

My contention is that Orientalism is fundamentally a political doctrine *willed over* the Orient because the Orient was weaker than the West, which elided

the Orient's difference with its weakness [. . .]. As a cultural apparatus, Orientalism is aggression, activity, judgment, will-to-truth, and knowledge.¹

Somewhat later in his career, Said would argue that one of the supplementary consequences of imperialism is a radical hybridity of culture wherein colonial and colonized histories and geographies are so intertwined as to occlude any appeal to cultural, national, or social exclusivity. This strategic hybridity would make the Other, to borrow from a crucial passage in *Lord Jim*, "one of us," and hence *always-already* "an absorbed other," who only needed to be (presumably rationally) awakened to his originally composite status.²

And yet, despite Louisa Gradgrind's assertion that Harthouse is "a singular politician" (*HT* II, ii, 163), his singularity resides in the ease with which he agrees with any opinion on offer, thereby escaping the violent rejection that afflicts recalcitrant or slow-learning students at Gradgrind's Academy, singular labor union leaders who maintain threatened ideologies like Stephen Blackpool, or aging acrobats who miss their "tips," thereby necessitating replacement by younger bodies.

Harthouse's singularity consists, paradoxically, of a plural nature, the ability of the chameleon or parasite to disguise subversion by miming the values of a host so that his accommodating views seem indistinguishable from those of the dominant ideology. He is a man of *as if*, advancing the imaginative life, so threatened in *Hard Times*, albeit under cover. This duality is acknowledged in *Hard Times* by the narrator who observes Harthouse in terms of his uniqueness: "there never was before seen on earth such a wonderful *hybrid race* as was thus produced" (*HT* II, ii, 158; italics added). In a novel that celebrates those who have "become free from any alloy" (*HT* I, iv, 62) of sensibility in their single-minded constitution, Harthouse's calculated resistance to any singular ideology is made into a hybrid ideology narrated in terms of curious *transparency* that finds no place in the binary oppositions that Dickens and Said would seem to deploy. Harthouse has not been reduced to a cipher or statistic, as have workers and children in Coketown. Nor does he reduce the Other to statistical "mapping," as did—at least for Said who gives him a very rough time in *Orientalism*—the early Egyptologist, Edward William Lane whose *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians* was published for the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge in 1830, arousing an interest in the Middle East.

Harthouse appears initially as a potential electoral canvasser, "mapping" electoral strategy for an M. P., entirely synchronous with the increased interest in statistical

analysis as both an instrument of policy and a tactical electoral strategy, necessary to breaking down an *aggregate* into its composites.³ Of course, he is also ambitious, setting his sites on a role as a future Parliamentary Secretary to Gradgrind, but with the need to disguise that ambition beneath a compliant, easy-going, even *drifting* manner, that seems calculated rather than the consequence of any colonial suppression of his will. He is among those whom Ross Chambers might identify as a loiterer, strategically *errant* so as to avoid being in error.⁴ If the colonizing narratives of the West would either erase the Orient or reduce it to some hybrid status so as to erase its *independent singularity*, then this curious figure at the heart of *Hard Times*, Harthouse, insofar as he is a returning British gentleman with experience in the Foreign Service, would seem to be the revenge of Said's Orientalism. He is a hybrid who appears to "take it out" on his own indigenous British values of sincerity. One must ask if this is an example of what the CIA terms "blowback:" the agents of subversion return to haunt their sponsors, much as the Taliban, agents in resisting the Soviet Union's occupation of Afghanistan, return as more than ghostly presences after 9/11. And to be sure, Harthouse is a ghostly presence in a novel where measurement and precision is privileged.

To be sure, *Hard Times* lends itself to the kind of *structural* readings that privilege the binary oppositions that have long dominated critical views of Dickens' achievement. Schools provide the spaces where students pass or fail, and industrial cities like Coketown do seem internally divided between the master/owners of industry and the slaves that they employ. In other words, *structural opposition*, at least initially, *appears* to be one of the products reproduced both *by* and *in* *Hard Times*. In a kind of homage to the penchant for organization and "hard facts," then it might be useful to look at one binary opposition that appears to generate meaning: the respective "hard" values of Coketown and the "softness" of Sleary's Circus, which at least at the outset, would seem to represent the diversion of spontaneous "play" for children subjected to extreme discipline:

SCHEDULE A: ANTAGONISTIC PRACTICES

Coketown Manufacturing	Sleary's Circus
1. urban	1. suburban
2. hard/dictatorial	2. soft/consensual
3. facts	3. fancy
4. productive work	4. play/entertainment
5. competitive use of time	5. wasting time/idle
6. fixed facilities	6. itinerant performers
7. repetitive acts	7. spontaneity
8. boundless energy	8. recurrent fatigue

9 importance of historical name/reputation 9 assumed (stage) names

At least superficially, the organization of the novel according to the values of its apparently antagonistic axes of sociality seems to yield critical rewards, insofar as it provides information that *defines* the attitudes of characters and their relationship to each other in an apparently polemical novel. Yet the reader of *Hard Times* should be particularly wary of any “system” that might reduce a complex set of values to easily, too easily I shall argue, defined, “hard” oppositions. For those *apparent* oppositions generate the very oppression that *Hard Times* would appear to critique. And my argument will imagine Harthouse as the “orientalized” agent (in some double sense) of these antagonisms, enabled by that “orientalization,” that subverts Said’s popular Orientalism.

These binary oppositions that seem to simultaneously engender and represent alternate values in the putative dialectics of *Hard Times* is matched by another, complimentary “set” that is not binary at all, but participates in the possibility of a shared identity between Coketown and Sleary’s Circus, an identity that would give the lie to the denigration of Sissy Jupe’s company by Gradgrind and Bounderby:

SCHEDULE B: SHARED PRACTICES

Coketown Manufacturing	Sleary’s Circus
1. vaulted ceilings (schoolroom and bank)	1. vaulted ceilings (tent)
2. energy measured in horse power	2. acrobatics assisted by horses
3. machine oil smell of Coketown	3. “Nine oils” as body lineament
4. “breaks” children who misidentify “horse”	4. breaks horses for child acrobats
5. industrial pollution obscures identity	5. cosmetics obscures identity
6. abandoned children (to education)	6. abandoned child (to education)
7. hidden past crime (Bounderby)	7. hides present crime (Tom)
8 homeless (multiple homes of the rich)	8. homeless (a portable tent only)
9. <i>ad hoc</i> family of economic interests	9. <i>ad hoc</i> family of performers
10 return of Bounderby’s disowned mother	10 return of orphaned Merrylegs

* * *

In other words, the closer we read, the more the values and dynamics of Gradgrind’s Academy and those of his financial cohort, Bounderby, and even the spaces in which they are conducted seem to *resemble* rather than oppose those of Sleary’s Circus. Both Coketown and its recreational counterpart consume a lot of oil, be it industrial machinery, or the bodies of aging performers like Sissy Jupe’s father with his consumption of Nine Oils (a brand name) to lubricate his aching joints. If the river flowing through Coketown is dyed a metallic hue as a consequence of industrial

pollution, so the performers in the circus exhibit artificially made-up and painted torsos that render them as grotesques, as equally alienated from an individuated “self,” as are Coketown laborers and young students. If the blast furnaces of Coketown manufacturers give the town the appearance of the “unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage (*HT*, I, v, 65), so the performers beneath Sleary’s large tent are bedecked in the costumes of a similar fairyland, “made up with curls, wreath, wings, white bismuth, and carmine” (*HT*, I, vi, 72). What my two schedules suggest is that the two putatively antagonistic environments read structurally—the hard discipline of education and the so-called “play” of the carnivalesque—are really not as dissimilar as they originally appear. In Schedule B, the emergent similarities that are repressed in the oppositional structural/ideological paradigms of so much formative criticism dedicated to *Hard Times* are graphically displayed in such a way as to reveal a kind of opposition to the oppositions posited in Schedule A, the “model schedule” as it were of generations of critics of the novel as attached to ideology as are Gradgrind and Bounderby.⁵

Some profound questions should arise insofar as one “model” seems not only contradictory to the other, but somehow existing within its stated structural composition. The “deadly statistical clock” (*HT* I, xv, 133) which measures socially and educationally productive time may be a different representation of time than the “missed tips” (*HT* I, vi, 73), the split-second timing of the leaping or balancing acrobat, but the machinery of industry and body are wearing down in tandem, with age and repetition. This incipient fatigue and weariness from overwork that affects acrobats as well as Stephen Blackpool and bored students is of course a philosophical *value*, no where better illustrated than in the response of Louisa Gradgrind to her father’s suggestion that she marry the petitioning Bounderby: “what does it matter” (*HT* I, xv, 131)? Deprived of all fancy, hope, or personal will, Louisa accedes with a kind of calculated *indifference*, much as does the current, overly fashionable response from adolescents in western countries to imposing requests: “whatever.”

Surely, this is a kind of *metaphysical indifference* which, like *boredom* considered metaphysically as Heidegger in fact did, articulates either the impossibility of a choice or the inability to make one’s choices matter.⁶ Harthouse in his chronic boredom would seem, at least initially, to have no defined place in a novel whose characters seem to be driven by someone else’s *program*. His resistance to all that is programmatic is initially narrated in generic terms. The reader has no sooner encountered him than he is told that Harthouse belonged to a “wonderful hybrid race” (*HT* II, ii, 158), a description that opens an incredible range of possibilities in an environment that is over-saturated with

classifications, where even the

little Gradgrinds had cabinets in various departments of science too, they had a little *conchological* cabinet, and a little *metallurgical* cabinet, and a little *mineralogical* cabinet, and the specimens were all arranged and labeled.

(*HT* I, iii, 55; italics added)

In a novel in which Mrs. Gradgrind in her last words urges her children to “go and be something *logical* directly” (*HT* I, iv, 61; italics added), the logos is obviously highly privileged. One learns by being obedient to codes and classifications.

But Harthouse, engaged to perform statistic analysis and canvassing among the group of liberals who have fallen under the sway of utilitarianism, sees this not as a profession, but as one more role in a life dedicated to performance. Having wandered about the world in a variety of positions, each of which has eventually bored him, James Harthouse—given his travels as yachtsman, military *attaché*, occasional diplomat to the Middle East, and now a Parliamentary Secretary *in situ*—is in some sense ontologically *errant*. And it is precisely this homelessness that paradoxically immunizes him against easy rejection. He is a prototype of that British amateur, a creature of Empire, ready to brush up on the Blue Books for whatever is “going” at the time. And boredom being one of the postures that condescension assumes when it is threatened by insurrection or indifference, Harthouse has been well-served by itinerant experience, a kind of genuine “otherworldliness” that is one of his gifts to Coketown. Ostensibly dedicated to life “among the hard Fact fellows” (*HT* II, ii, 158), Harthouse pretends to share the statistical interests of the new M.P. for Coketown for whom he will serve as Parliamentary Secretary while all the time perverting his real role to that of a mere *factotum*. When invited to define (and hence to classify) his real ideological convictions, Harthouse is compliant with (Louisa’s) “whatever” is on offer: “I assure you that I am entirely and completely of your way of thinking [. . .] on conviction” (*HT* II, ii, 159). Although he has already found his work “all to be very worthless” (*HT* II, ii, 162), Harthouse nonetheless *feigns* ideological conviction, by becoming a provisional believer, a man of “as if:”

‘I am quite as much attached to it, *as if* I believed it. I am quite ready to go in for it, to the same extent *as if* I believed it. And what more could I possibly do, *if* I did believe it?’

(*HT* II, ii, 163)

To be sure, James Harthouse is precisely what Louisa Gradgrind ironically terms

him, “a singular politician” (*HT* II, ii, 163), but his singularity resides in the ease with which he agrees with any opinion on offer, thereby escaping the rejection that afflicts recalcitrant or slow-learning students, singular labor union members who disagree with both labor and management, or aging acrobats from Sleary’s Circus whose missed timing leads to a premature retirement. His singularity consists, then, precisely in his dual nature, the skill of the chameleon or parasite to disguise subversion by miming the values and activities of host so that his views can never be distinguished from those of the fashionable (because apparently dominant) ideology. Like clowns and acrobats in the circus, he is a man of *as if*, thereby advancing the imaginative life that otherwise would have no chance of survival in Coketown, dedicated as it is to obedience to a constitutive logic that is dependent upon *essences* that can be measured, weighed, and observed.

As a figure of ideological hybridity in a novel that celebrates those who have “become free from any alloy” (*HT* I, iv, 62), Harthouse offers resistance to the utilitarian method which is essentially rhetorical, canonical (insofar as it regards knowledge as dependent upon classification), and theoretical, at least as practiced by educational institutions and the leadership of the United Aggregate Tribunal, the regional labor union. In practice, at least in *Hard Times*, the utilitarians and “hard fact folk” are *disjunctive* insofar as they would banish all who do not comply or adhere. But what defines Gradgrind’s newly engaged future Parliamentary Secretary is a kind of social capital that must be “kept up” or maintained and cultivated by exercising the various correlations generated by the novel’s polarities (my Schedules A and B) as simultaneously opposed and complimentary. Like so many parasites with a derivative existence, he must concentrate upon *functionality* rather than *finality*. More conjunctive than competitive, Harthouse is figuratively everywhere (just as he is ideologically all over the place), perfecting the *adaptive* life.

His polymorphous identity clearly extends to Harthouse’s *libido* which appears equally hybrid. Though he will come near to seducing the unhappy Louisa Gradgrind, he is also attracted to her brother, Tom, and this attraction is narrated in potentially sexual terms: “he showed an unusual liking for him” (*HT* II, ii, 164). A precursor of the attorney Jagers of *Great Expectations* with his more than casual interest in one of the “boys” who periodically gather for dinner at the guardian’s house (large parts of which are locked away along with his other secrets), Harthouse quickly embraces the “whelp’s” vulnerability to “groveling sensualities” (*HT* II, iii, 163). He introduces Tom Gradgrind to his own exotic tastes when they spend a curious night together in *Hard Times*:

What with a cooling drink *adapted* to the weather, but not so weak as cool; and with a *rarer tobacco* than was to be seen in these parts, Tom was soon in a highly free and easy state at the end of the sofa, and more than ever disposed to admire his new friend at the other end.

(*HT II*, iii, 165; italics added)

The couple establishes a curious “intimacy” (*HT II*, iii, 165), intimated, but not precisely elaborated in Dickens’ narrative. This includes reciprocal winks with Tom Gradgrind’s “shut-up eye,” as unmanageable under the influence of what is surely a narcotic tobacco offered him by Harthouse as is the perpetually roving and unfocused eye of the verbally slurring and smearing Sleary. The ensuing “giddy drowsiness” (*HT II*, iii, 169) produces an opium-induced dream before the young “whelp” is awakened by a swift kick and sent home by his seducer. The text fades out so that the episode is indistinguishable from the induced dream, until Tom Gradgrind awakens with the words “very good tobacco. But it’s too mild” (*HT II*, iii, 169), presumably now an addict as he is to gambling. Harthouse has an uncanny ability to recognize the addictive personality. Their shared exotic oriental indulgence induces an uncharacteristic indifference in his guest, a careless disregard which Dickens describes as “lounging somewhere in the air” (*HT II*, iii, 169) that might be a metaphor for Harthouse’s career in fact. In other words, Tom behaves *as if* he were set free to passively respond to his host’s request for information—a host for whom *as if* constitutes an ethical value. And yet no critic to my knowledge has addressed the curiously addictive power that James Harthouse exerts over both sexes as well, obviously, as the father who initially engages him as a future Parliamentary Secretary.

Both the philosophy and the addictive substance are among the gifts that Harthouse has brought back from a tour of duty in Egypt. And given what we know of opium as an agent by which the British colonizers extracted concessions from China during the nineteenth century, Harthouse’s particular deployment of “blowback”—you seduce your own in the same way that you addicted an Other—is a marvelous instance of the incipient reflexivity of the colonizing imperative, a reflexivity that escapes Said’s Orientalism. He returns to the United Kingdom as a political operative, a semi-involuntary vocation, but in the process inverts the colonial impulse (order, utility, management, the classification of knowledge, an educational bureaucracy) with the aid of a stereotypical imported stimulant designed initially for export sales. Harthouse is the carrier of an oriental sensibility that is apparently just as seductive as was the

colonial impulse and his “hybrid” desires seem of a type with the kind of ontological hyphenation that Roland Barthes has addressed in a slightly different context in his collection, *Incidents*, wherein homosexuality and colonialism are effectively elided.⁷

To be sure, the culture had been prepared for this kind of cultural reflexivity by the fashionable interest in Egyptology, abetted by men like Richard Dodd whose oil portrait, *Sir Thomas Phillips Reclining in Eastern Costume* (1842–43), features an opium pipe held by a lounging British oligarch as part of the costume. Somewhat later, Christopher Dresser, the first full-fledged British designer to visit the Orient and fall under the sway of Japanese *yakimono*, designed a commercially successful terracotta flask for Wedgwood that clearly shows the influence of red Egyptian pottery that he had collected.⁸ As both Egypt and Palestine were under nominal Turkish control at the time, there is often a mid-nineteenth century conflation of the Ottoman with the interest in Egyptology that was to later attract the attention of George Eliot whose memorable the Rosetta Stone of *Middlemarch* served as a metaphor for that novel’s many attempts to re-petition Origins.

Imperialism and the alleged erasure of some allegedly “real” Middle East beneath a welter of obscuring statistics, colonial mapping, and the hyphenated “Anglo- (colony to be supplied)” that neutralize the Orient is at the heart of Said’s narrative of occidental hegemony, in such a way that literature is made complicit in colonialism. But there is another side: the return of the wandering native in a subversive role that opens gaps in texts that appear as “master” texts of Said’s Orientalism. The critique of the extreme privileging of utilitarian philosophy that accompanied the Industrial Revolution with its demands for educational, sexual, and productive “management” in terms of inputs and outputs has been dominant in the critical judgments of Dickens’ novel over the years. And yet these critiques are far less sophisticated and subtle than those deployed by Harthouse.

James Harthouse is crucial to the deconstruction of a number of the novel’s binary structural “sets,” but because he vanishes following his “outing” as a seducer with the same suddenness with which he initially arrived on the Coketown political scene, he appears as a kind of vanishing mediator. He disappears within Dickens’ text, much as does his manipulated partner, Tom Gradrind, within the clouds of an opium-induced dream, so that presence and absence are elided:

He had another odd dream of being taken by a waiter through a mist, which, after giving him some trouble and difficulty, resolved itself into the main street in which he stood alone. He then walked home prettily easily, though not

yet free from an impression of the influence of his new friend—as if he were lounging in the air, in the same negligent attitude, regarding him with the same look.

(*HT II*, iii, 169)

For Tom, as for most readers one suspects, Harthouse lingers as a mere residual “impression” in a novel filled with penetrating industrial sounds and bizarre sights, the commanding voice of a schoolmaster hammering facts into the heads of recalcitrant learners, and the loudly repetitive pride of Bounderby. The would-be future Parliamentary Secretary is a figure of the mists and fog which, in Dickens’ work, often spawn those who loom larger than life even as they seem so passively pre-occupied.

The combination of “loading time” by affecting a disinterested boredom; lounging about in a slightly disheveled (but never unfashionable) wardrobe without any obvious purpose; and remaining impassive to the passage of time—“what will be, will be” (*HT II*, viii, 207)—suggests that the humble Harthouse works without ever really working, a kind of self-induced, wakefulness, not unlike that of the Orlick of *Great Expectations* who sleeps standing upright, yet throws himself at Biddy. In a novel dedicated to calculations, Harthouse “troubled himself with no calculations” (*HT II*, viii, 208) seemingly surviving by a remarkable *indifference*, “a tolerable *management* of the assumed honesty within dishonesty” (*HT II*, vii, 194; italics added), not unlike my Schedule B which seems to exist within Schedule A in my antagonistic/competing models of values in *Hard Times*. A bureaucrat *in situ*, always considering himself to be “on a *public kind of business*” (*HT III*, ii, 255; italics added), Harthouse belongs to a culture of *management*, that Walter Benjamin has characterized as the life of the “perpetual assistant,” with its ominous overtones implicit in the use to which Kafka was later to put the type.⁹ He is committed to a balanced self-maintenance in a novel of radical learning and quite radical performances, a curiously disruptive “there-ness.”

In some sense, Harthouse is an earlier version of the Inspector Bucket of *Bleak House* who combines the roles of surveillance with the ostensible duties of a civil servant, thus presumably ideologically neutral. Value is shifting from what can be accumulated (as assets or historical tradition), classified and worked, to the perceptive “reading” and timely response to information that has been repressed. Harthouse’s sexual and ideological ambiguity—“so devoted and so distracted” (*HT II*, xi, 235)—is repeated of course in Bucket’s uncanny ability as a ventriloquist. Bucket, it will be recalled, can mime both Hortense’s French accent and thus “do the police in different voices,” as Jo the Crossing Sweeper reminds his listeners.

Nicos Poulantzas has argued in a series of brilliant essays on the growth of the bureaucracy that dominant ideologies (represented by oligarchs and in the nineteenth-century, a burgeoning middle class of second and subsequent sons in government service) often adopt a class-neutral stance (politically) or a scientific veneer beneath which to carry out its work in the interests of projecting a falsely *disinterested objective* that is patently dishonest.¹⁰ The mimed objectivity is precisely what secures for the bureaucracy its crucial deniability, the deniability of the powerfully *functional*. The bureaucracy was already becoming a kind of invisible force by the mid-1840's in the wake of so many newly constituted Parliamentary Commissions as well as the needs of Empire. And the power of this invisibility is that it is contagious, inducing a similar invisibility or transparency in those whom the bureaucracy touches, as we realize from the disappearing proceeds of *Jarndyce and Jarndyce* in *Bleak House*. Convinced of "everything being hollow and worthless" (*HT* II, vii, 195), Harthouse confesses that "he is ready to sell myself at any time for any reasonable sum" (*HT* II, vii, 198). Scorning the world, his only joy is obtained in perfecting the renunciation of it.

This is to be sure a potentially subversive passivity, not the quietism that for Said, was the abject response of oriental natives to western colonialism and narrative *occupation*. Dickens uses a marvelous metaphor that encompasses the absence of any stabilizing ideology and the danger to those confined thereby when he compares Harthouse with "the drifting icebergs setting with any currents anywhere" (*HT* II, viii, 207). His proclivity to be "idly gay on *indifferent* subjects" (*HT* II, ix, 221; italics added), even when under considerable duress, implies a dedication to *indifference* which I would argue, is both sexual and intellectual. In one sense of course, Harthouse is the presence of the *transparent* literary critic who, once exposed, *moves on*, the ultimate vanishing mediator, with his "rare tobacco," a metaphoric agent of exposure enabling a consistent reading of character. The desire to be, at least for a while (before his own exposure), a "public man" is not so unusual when we consider the career of Harold Transome of George Eliot's *Felix Holt, the Radical*, who returns not from Egypt, but from a stint in Turkey where he had saved the life of an Armenian. Like Harthouse, Transome's experiences and personal relationships have been so diffuse as to obscure the possibility of any defining ideology. In *Hard Times*, with Harthouse, are we looking at he leisurely (critical?) reader of extant forms of sociality potentially emerging as the critical *public* intellectual *at leisure*, but exposed as an interested predator before becoming a genuine threat to the culture? He is "outed," as it were, from his dispassionate posture, exposed as being "in a more *ridiculous* position" (*HT*

III, iii, 256; italics added) even though, given the drifter that he is, such is part of his ontology as a consequence of an heretofore unacknowledged desire.

Both Transome and Harthouse whose return and subversion of their respective houses exposes the hidden secret of an unacknowledged historical relationship, share an educational exposure to the Orient, fashionable among ne'er-do-well sons of the landed at mid-century. And they return to Great Britain with a restless absence of commitment to any family order or historical propriety that they subvert by a sequence of enquires and belated discoveries under the cover of apparent, but only apparent, political ambition. Though their attitudes, absence of ideology, and personal habits have been "orientalized" as a consequence of exposure to the Orient, appearing to the British as a kind of negation of rational values, this negation would be entirely different from that which Edward Said's model of colonizing narratives of the Orient advances.

For this is a strategic, potentially hegemonic negation rather than the negation/repression of the Orient-as-other at the hands of British colonialism that in Said's model, projected its own fantasies upon the Middle East. This is the real subject of the 2008 exhibition at the Tate Britain, "The Lure of the East" which catalogues the sanitized Orient in such a way as to appear *always-already* British. Harthouse rather appears as very British, yet dwelling among the things that *are*, but can never be known, classified, measured, or timed. His aphorism is appropriately, perhaps, a Heidegger-like "what will be, will be" (*HT* II, viii, 207).

Although not specifically addressing the Middle East, any more than Said addresses the Far East even though purporting to address Orientalism,¹¹ François Jullien in his lovely book, *Vital Nourishment: Departing From Happiness*, an analysis of the thought of the fourth century B. C. E. Chinese sage, Zhuanghi (one of whose admirers was Oscar Wilde), advances the notion that Oriental classical philosophy emphasizes the maintenance of a *capacity* for life (even after life) rather than dividing the world into oppositional categories like transcendence/worldliness; good/evil; active/passive.¹² To hold onto an ideology for Zhuanghi is to be unable to let it go. And thus began the privileging in Oriental philosophy of a life dedicated not to acting or intervening, but rather to help or assist that which comes *naturally*, by exposing what is already there. One subsidizes harmony and balance in external and internal relationships, necessary to nourishing existence *in the present*. Hence for Jullien, there is an emphasis in Oriental intellectual and medical thought of balancing influences and inputs and the development of physical and spiritual *capacities* rather than upon analytical interventions. No ideology can ever reflect "life" in the sense of true life which is

represented as a constant flow in which one tries, maybe like the goldfish in a bowl in Chinese classical art or the reclining pasha with his opium pipe (filtered through water of course). One survives by a delicate bonding that is continually adjusting itself to demands of an always foreign medium in which one finds oneself. This is an existence that emphasizes *subtlety* over *analysis*. But it is an existence in which one identifies with his enemies, knowing that they need each other. Of course this also would be an appropriate metaphor for a parasitical relationship or for the literary critic and the text which have an equally mutually dependent relationship. Ideological criticism seldom recognizes this dependency.

Is it possible that in fact Harthouse is metaphorically the presence of the critic in Dickens' text who, when exposed by other critics like Sissy Jupe and Mrs. Sparsit, simply *moves on*, along with the "rare tobacco" that induced the exposure of the novel's secrets? Are we looking at the leisurely critical reader of sociality and ideology potentially emerging as a kind of public (insofar as he is a bureaucrat of sorts) intellectual, but exposed as a predator before he can become a threat to the culture? These admittedly rhetorical questions may be relevant insofar as Harthouse's unaligned indifference displaces all of the ideologies of *Hard Times*, answering Mrs Grandgrind's rhetorical questions when, before her death, she wonders aloud "if there is any Ology left, of any description that has not been worn to rags" (*HT II*, ix, 225).

Imaginable as a profound instance of alienation, Harthouse could perhaps be more usefully considered not only as the so-called "split" that defined mystified subjects as sites of misrecognition—what Althusser calls an imaginary relation to the real conditions of production—but also of a distancing from the self that makes possible criticism as a mode of recognition, the recognition of a misrecognition, as it were.¹³ The so-called "split" that from one perspective is a metaphor of his hybrid nature would come thereby to designate a curious relationship to any concept of *difference*, such that the two sides of the relationship (my Schedule "A" and Schedule "B") can neither be absolutely separate nor seamlessly joined. Harthouse's recognition of the objects (Tom and Louisa Gradgrind) as living "inauthentic lives," constitutes the critical subject (Harthouse) as other than the inauthentic Other (that his employ by Gradgrind might otherwise suggest). He instead becomes something like the other's Other. The subject is thereby *implicated* in the inauthenticity of the object, expressed in *Hard Times* as an interrupted claim: Harthouse's aborted love for Louisa Gradgrind, perhaps the one instance of authentic love (a love for which he risks all, after all!) in *Hard Times*. And even here, by risking all for the love of Louisa, he is identified with her brother Tom, a

compulsive gambler whom he recognizes as such on their night on the sofa with the “rare tobacco.”

As with contemporary advocates of digitalizing all library books, the Gradgrinds of the world would reduce all reproducible knowledge to the nineteenth-century equivalent of pixels. Every reproduction—childhood included—would become an aggregate, a “data-base” to be mined. Gradgrind would imagine the medium of communication as totally indifferent to the message: matter (the book or childhood) no longer matters. And Harthouse with his imported truth serum inducing an oriental “high,” is its curious embodiment, even its (surely paradoxical) *active* principle which abducts children, no less than indifferent schoolmasters, with an equally seductive affection. But we critics, similarly, have long regarded Harthouse’s passivity as indifferent to the novel’s meaning.

Harthouse’s curious ontological transparency, negation, accommodation—all are applicable—seems to partake of the absence of will of those “orientalized” victims rendered passive or cynical by colonizers of lands just as children, at least for Dickens, were rendered passive quietists by an educational system that would colonize young minds in *Hard Times*. But this detachment, not unlike that of the literary critic resistant to ideological criticism, and attempting to keep his distance, is often inextricable from devotion (his genuine devotion to Louisa Gradgrind), the devotion to a system that he recognizes even while misrecognizing himself in it.

Dickens began his last, incomplete novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, in a foggy opium den filled with Malay attendants, a bit of the colonized Far East blown back to British shores. The identity of the dreamer “high” on an oriental stimulant is obscured, and the reader never knows who is narrating the dream with certainty. Suspended, he may be the victim of a crime, the critic of his subjective/objective disappearance, a true vanishing mediator or one of two sides of an apparent, but only apparent, “split” of a “singular” personality who misreads himself as a plurality after an induced (and hence strategic) disappearance.

NOTES

All citations from *Hard Times* are from the Penguin edition, edited by David Craig (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986) with the volume, followed by the chapter, and then the page number in that order. Portions of this essay were initially delivered orally at a meeting of the Dickens Fellowship of Japan at Kyoto University in October of 2007. The author wishes to thank, especially Toru Sasaki, Yasuhiko Matsumoto, and Yuji Miyamaru for their comments and queries during what Dickens would have called the postprandial dedications of that lovely

assembly.

- 1 Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978), p. 204. Said's argument imagines orientalism as a "willed" doctrine and this willing is invariably reductive of its object.
- 2 Of course Said's later notion of "hybridity" might be regarded as either the obedience of the colonized object (evidence of absorption by the invasive colonizer) or alternatively a mode of defensive identification so as to avoid further aggression. The later posture would more nearly resemble Freud's model of introjection, the calculated identification with an Other as a mode of strategic defense. Said can only read "hybridity" as abject compliance, a compulsory loss of identification. See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993).
- 3 The notion of the *divisible aggregate* as a principle of organization of the masses that owes something to utilitarian philosophers was also necessitated by the enlarged electoral rolls mandated by the First Reform Bill. Mark Francis, *Herbert Spencer and the Invention of Modern Life* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007) argues that the use of sociological "modeling" as an analytical tool owes much to the attempt to reconcile morality (as a measurable virtue) with the Bentham/Mill model of utilitarianism that regarded only empirical knowledge as trustworthy, because verifiable. Statistical analysis thus became part of the so-called "commonsense" school of (mostly) Scottish philosophers attempting to mollify the conditions of the poor in the absence of what Spencer was to call the "Unknowable." Statistical (mechanical) judgment came to displace Divine judgment, the result being a new discipline of *sociology*.
- 4 Ross Chambers, *Loiterature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), especially pp. 3–83.
- 5 Among those critics who see *Hard Times* in terms that privilege competing ideologies are F.R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1948), Phillip Collins, *Dickens and Education* (London: Macmillan, 1963) and J. Hillis Miller, *Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963). Even more recent critics of *Hard Times*, undoubtedly influenced by these readers who see the novel in terms of antagonistic values, tend to overlook Harthouse whose absence of ideology is in fact an ideology. The "vanishing mediator" vanishes from the novel's plot as easily as he vanishes from critical appreciation.
- 6 Martin Heidegger identifies three different kinds of boredom. The first (*Gelangweiltwerden von etwas*) is what we might term situational boredom like that which occurs when a flight is delayed and the departing passenger has too much time on his hands. As soon as the situation changes, the boredom would come to an end. The second type (*Sichlangweilen bei etwas*) involves being bored with something. This is the recognition that comes say, with the knowledge that I have wasted time spent at a party. Only the third type of boredom (*es ist einem langweilig*) in which the whole being becomes indifferent and bothersome in its lack of *being* enables radical transformation, because only then is the self brought to a naked encounter with itself. I recognize that this *indifference* is *me*, and that I am imprisoned by it. This third type of boredom reduces the world to such sameness that I attempt to realize myself in an act of liberation, such as, I would argue, Harthouse's assumption of risk in his pursuit of Louisa. See Martin Heidegger, *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics, World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker

(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 136–49.

- ⁷ Roland Barthes, *Incidents*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) elaborates on a kind of homosexual “cruising narrative.” This genre arises from phenomena that propose a cluster of what might be termed *potentially fraught* relationships insofar as they are loaded with the possibility of sudden suspension or discovery. At the service of a dominant colonial power abroad, his sympathy with his situation is reproduced in binding another to his “service,” but as a form of love or affection rather than colonial domination. The colonizer comes to “love” the natives, recognizing this affection as potentially subversive, metaphorically assuming the risk of being “outed” as one who has “gone native.”
- ⁸ See Judy Rudoe, “Dresser and His Sources of Inspiration”, in *Christopher Dresser: A Design Revolution*, ed. by Michael Whiteway (London: Victoria & Albert Press, 2004), pp. 81–114.
- ⁹ Walter Benjamin, “Franz Kafka”, in *Selected Writings: II (1927–34)*, ed. by Michael Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), p. 799.
- ¹⁰ Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and the Social Classes* (London: New Left Books, 1973), pp. 139–40. Poulantzas’ intriguing argument would imagine the state bureaucracy as being a curious *hybrid*, both of the people in terms of its origins, yet capable of a strategic distance from the people on those occasions when it must represent “the people” as an aggregate or *force* that is unanswerable to anyone save itself. Considered in this way, the legendary boredom of those who belong to the bureaucracy is part of an ontology; they are involved but must maintain deniability in order to function as (occasionally) a *betrayor* of their origins, no less than does Bunderby.
- ¹¹ For a useful summary of various critiques of Said’s work with commentary, see Daniel Martin Varisco, *Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2007). Varisco reminds readers that Said’s curious “Orientalism” applies exclusively to the Middle East; a large part of the Orient is omitted, an omission not unlike certain strategic omissions in Said’s own biography. Varisco correctly suggests that the conflicts set forth in *Orientalism* are “binarily escalated by indiscriminately opposing linguistic bundles.”
- ¹² See François Jullien, *Vital Nourishment: Departing From Happiness* (Brooklyn: Zone Books, 2007) Jullien’s books are especially useful in describing the transformation of certain characters in British fiction, like Conrad’s “Tuan Jim” or the Flory of Orwell’s *Burmese Days* who internalize notions of oriental “balance” and the need to “balance power” which invariably appear as subversive to their British colonial cohorts. Hence Harthouse’s posture, practices, and values seem very anticipatory of certain motifs in what is now termed “post-colonial literature.” A perfect metaphoric representation of this privileging of balance by extraordinary acts of physical contortion might be found in Mowgli of Kipling’s *Jungle Book*, the ambidextrous mongoose who escapes colonization by a combination of local knowledge and the ability to leap forward, backwards, up, or down—almost, like Tom after imbibing Harthouse’s *high*, floating in the air.
- ¹³ Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”, *Essays in Ideology* (London: Verso, 1984), pp. 1–61.