



MARXIST ELEMENTS IN CHARLES DICKENS'S NOVEL *HARD TIMES*

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Abstract

In this study Charles Dickens's novel *Hard Times* is analyzed in terms of the Marxist views. In this novel the author focuses on the issues related to Marxist notions that are based especially on labor, working classes and class struggles. By doing that, Dickens demonstrates the characters who are forced to work like machines at the hands of capitalist employers in such a way that the reader begins to comprehend that for getting rid of the oppression of capitalism the proletariat or working class should revolt. Thus, the Marxist elements become significant issues shown in the novel *Hard Times*. The present study is composed through literature review and aimed to reveal the effects of Marxist views in Dickens's novel. In this novel, one can realize that there are class differences and struggles that are related to Marxist thoughts. Like Marxists, the characters of the novel try to start a strike against the ruling class exploitation. To portray this exploitation Dickens states that the rules of bourgeois or capitalist employers do not permit their employees to behave like human beings who have wisdom and reason. Due to the capitalists, the workers' capacities and abilities are ignored. As a result, this study displays that in Dickens's novel *Hard Times* the influences of Marxist views are emphasized.

Keywords: Marxism, English Literature, Marxist Views.

Introduction

In 19th century different social classes and the gaps between these classes became the most significant social issue of Victorian age in England. Since this century witnessed the French Revolution, the results of this movement led to many changes in different sides of the social life. In other words, the revolution caused the industrial world to dominate the life of individuals. In the cruel hands of the rich, the workers who were the members of lower class were oppressed considerably. These workers continued to live like machines or robots in the factories. They were not equal in the society and they didn't have the right for living independently. Moreover, during this age even the kids were compulsory to work for surviving. Therefore, there was social and economic burden in the British society during that time.

Witnessing these problems, difficulties and inequalities in the society, one of the prominent Victorian age author Charles Dickens portrays the realities of this age obviously in his novel *Hard Times*. Dickens experienced poverty when he was a child and when he was grown; he witnessed lives of oppressed people in different countries where he went for trip. Thus, his novel represents the oppressed people who try to live in very harsh and hard conditions in industrial polluted town in which there are the rich and the poor, so wealth and misery. Oppression by the rich both economically and socially proves to capitalist environment.

Dickens attempts to depict the way for getting rid of these evil circumstances by using the Marxist views of starting revolt against all of these conditions. To him, the lower-class people especially workers should realize the inequality that they experience in all parts of the society for not destroying individuality in the hands of masters of industrial world. In other words, it is required that the workers should realize the exact value of their labor and freedom. The main purpose of this study is to show these Marxist views and expressions in the novel *Hard Times*. To carry out this aim, the characters' views, behaviors, utterances and dialogues are analyzed and by the help of literature review method the Marxist elements are attempted to demonstrate in this study.

1. Charles Dickens as an Author and Victorian Citizen

Born in 1812, Charles Dickens is a significant author of the 19th century, the time that is viewed as Victorian age. He wrote in all genres of literary work. He was also the "most beloved and distinctive novelist" (Aliabadi, 2007, 3). He is seen as a realist since he portrays the society of nineteenth century

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England vividly in his works. "His genius style in creating stories makes his novels among the most known writings in England" (Louis, 2006, as cited in Radja, 2014, 2).

Being John and Elizabeth's second child among eight, Charles got good education as his father wanted him to be an educated person. His success and progress led his teacher to pay attention to him and help him show more progress. Because of his father's job they move different places during her childhood. After getting education in Gatham, they moved to Chatham where Charles lived his happy times. After this good time, "a period of an intensive misery" (Radja, 2014, 29) influenced him deeply.

When they moved to London again, he suffered from working in difficult conditions since his father was imprisoned because of his debts. He experienced hard sides of life and also poverty. He left school and began to work at a factory in London. He had to earn money since the leader of their family wasn't with his family and her mother compelled him to bring money for his brothers and sisters. Due to this fact, he "was no sense working class, but his early works and most deeply felt experience in life was of hard work, poverty and the sense of being unworthy and morally unfit because of the poverty which had entrapped him" (Aliabadi, 2007, 10). During this periods Charles witnessed different social classes' lives and their struggle for living. Thus "Dickens's novels deal with a number of social issues and exemplify the problems of an industrial town in England" (Radja, 2014, 2). Moreover, as "the problem of poverty became a serious social and economic burden of English society of the late 19th century (Gholami & Joodaki, 2014, 44), Charles inevitably demonstrates this issue in his literary works. Additionally, living during the time of contrasts, that is, richness and poverty, workers and masters, he tried to show the difference and inequalities between different social classes existing during that era.

After two years of working at blacking factory Charles started to get study at Wellington Academy in London, then he continued studying at Mr. Dawson's school. "From 1927 to 1828, he worked as a law office clerk and then as a shorthand reporter at Doctor's Commons" (Louis, 2006, as cited in Radja, 2014, 29). When he was twenty-two, he married Catherine Hogarth. "With her, he had ten children and he was a good father for these children. In 1858, after twenty years of marriage he and his wife separated" (30).

He started his career as a journalist. After his first book *Sketches* (1836), he wrote his classical novels. His novels include *The Pickwick Papers* (1836), *Oliver Twist* (1837), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838), *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840), *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843), *Dombey and Son* (1846), *David Copperfield* (1849), *Bleak House* (1852), *Hard Times* (1854), *Little Dorrit* (1855), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), *Great Expectations* (1860), *Our Mutual Friend* (1864), *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870). In these novels the readers may see "the social history of nineteenth century England" (Aliabadi, 2007, 9).

The circumstances of his life caused Charles to write about evil effects of industrialism and class violence that emerges from "worker-master relations." He wants his readers to comprehend the cruelty of the masters to te workers and to feel the exploitation caused by the employers since he displays what this class witnessed in the evil hands of cruelty. His early life experiences of the period of Industrial Revolution shapes his imagination for writing his works. Especially his childhood memories of blacking factory where he needed to work inspired much of his literary writings. Moreover, "The months in which Charles lived alone and worked in the blacking warehouse were traumatic and the intense feeling Dickens had of injury and abandonment shaped his fiction in profound ways" (Aliabadi, 2007, 4).

His trips to different countries, like United States and Canada and after cities, like Manchester cause him to understand and sympathize the life conditions of slaves and labors. These trips affected his works and he wrote about different classes of people. Dickens "exposed the harsh reality of industrialization using realistic and naturalistic mode of writing" (Gholami & Joodaki, 2014, 645). Although Dickens was a member of middle class in the society, he "sympathized with the plight of the poor, and through his writing as he sought to bring awareness to Victorian society of the injustice and harsh condition of living experienced by the poor" (Gholami & Joodaki, 2014, 645). Therefore, his most prominent novels demonstrate that in nineteenth century England, lower classes were deprived of being members of society and the poor experienced the harsh sides of industrial world. "From 1858 till his death, Dickens travelled throughout England and the United States lecturing and reading from his works. He died in 1870" (Louis, 2006, as cited in Radja, 2014, 30). His friends Thomas Carlyle said about him "He was a sympathizer to the poor, the suffering and the oppressed; and by his death, one of England's greatest writers is lost to the world" (Harvey, 1967, as cited in Utomo, 2013, 7).

2. Victorian Age

Charles Dickens living in nineteenth century is an English writer who reflects the nineteenth century's social issues in his works. As this century refers to Victorian Age, Dickens's works exemplifies the



circumstances of this age. "Victorian era refers to the reign of the Queen Victoria (1837-1901)" (Radja, 2014, 18). During the reign of this queen, Britain changed due to the Industrial Revolution and she became the strongest country in the world. Queen's "character and moral standards restored the prestige of the British Monarch but gave the era prudish reputation" (Gholami & Joodaki, 2014, 645). Dickens's writings that were the product of this era, both demonstrate the rise of Britain and Victorian society.

Because of rapid changes, that is, scientific and technological innovations in all parts of the country the society of the era were affected too much. There were three classes during that time. The three social classes were "the Church and aristocracy, the middle class and the working class" (Taibi, 2008, as cited in Radja, 2014, 21). The lower class included the working class and the poor. Since there were three different social classes as a result of economic reasons the families were unhappy. "The workers in the Victorian period were members from the lower class. The conditions of working were bad" (Radja, 2014, 20). Even the kids were forced to work during that period.

The upper class referred to the factory and natural resources owners. They employed the labors and they have the control of political power of this time. The middle class referred to a group of merchants and small farmers. This people have the power that increased by way of enhancement of industrialists and owners of factories. Thus, they were "the people who were poor in previous times and become powerful and self-made men afterwards" (MyDowall, 2006, as cited in, Radja, 2014, 22).

The rapid changes in science and technology in Victorian age inevitably affected the literary works of this period. Additionally, the leading form of literature became the novel in Victorian age. These works primarily reflected the social problems and real conditions of daily life of Victorian age. The authors of this age wrote about the lives of the people who were divided into three classes. They displayed the real difficulties of the poverty. In their works, the changes after Industrial Revolution were shown obviously. Since the gap between the social classes was certain during the era, most of the Victorian works dealt with this issue and difficult lives of lower-class people.

3. Marxism and Literature

Marxism is "a system of economic, social, political philosophy based on ideas that view social change in items of economic factor" (Mirunalini & Devi, 2017, 13). Being a social theory, Marxism is Karl Max and Friedrich Engels's economic, political and social doctrines. It is based on labor, social actions and class struggle. To Marxists, to destroy the conflicts a classless society should be established. In Marxist theory, the most significant element is class struggle that emerges among the members of working class since they sell their labors to employers. This struggle is so considerable because it put forward the class oppression that hinders society's development. To Marxists, this oppression will lead to a revolt by the workers for establishing a classless society.

Marxism is antithesis of capitalism. "Marx claims that the species-being of man consists in labor and that man is alienated to the extent that labor is performed according to a division of labor that is dictated by the market" (Rosen, 1998, 1). In Marxism the dominant feature is public ownership of means of production. Under Capitalism, the proletariat and working class only own their capacity to work. They have right only to sell their labor.

To Marx, a class is defined by the relations of its members to the means of production. Marx thinks that the workers get minimum wage for surviving with their family. This is caused by the capitalist system. The workers act like slaves and they are alienated because they haven't any control over their labor or product that they produce. Due to this fact, to Marx, a proletariat or socialist revolution must occur. The reason for this revolt can also be seen as that the workers under capitalist class become miserable. They even lose their religious beliefs. Moreover, the bourgeois class objects to freedom of working class.

Marxists have sympathy for the working class and proletariat. To them, the condition of workers is the same all over the world. So, their position is universal. To them, there should be class consciousness or class awareness in order not to come across a class revolt. The ruling class controls the society's means of production, the superstructure of society and its ruling ideas. To Marx, exploitation is an element of capitalism and free markets. The profit gained by the capitalist is the difference between the value of the product made by the worker and the actual wage that the workers receive. In other words, capitalists pay workers less than the real value of their labor. Because of this fact, the workers become isolated day by day. Thus, alienation is an unavoidable result of capitalism. The working circumstances do not allow workers to feel and think.

In capitalist societies the workers sell their labor but they do not own the means of production. The workers' salary is not enough when their labor is compared with the production. The bourgeois own the



means of production. So, they exploit the proletariat. In capitalist societies different classes have different lives and even their education is different. With the beginning of industrialism, the position of people began to change, that is, the capitalists began to rule the workers. Then the capitalists started to ignore the workers capacities and abilities.

However, what the workers produced is so important determining the value of them. Since the workers work so much and in so hard conditions, other people should give them importance and appreciate their work. "The resistance of working classes toward oppression from the capitalist sometimes triggers a revolution in which working class wants to change their life and get a better life" (Utomo, 2013, 17). In other words, the continuous struggle causes revolt "in which the proletarian class will win and non-class society will spread" (Helemejko, 9). Additionally, Marxist concepts are stated as "class consciousness, sacrifice, revolution, social antithesis and social injustice" (Stearns & Burns, 2011, 1).

The literature after Industrial Revolution affected by the changes in many fields of life in Britain. Using Marxist theory "the society of the writer will be reflected on his/her writings" (Radja, 2014, 12). Mainly, he/ she tends to demonstrates social and economic progress. Moreover, these writers display the gap being so significant issue between the social classes. They also "focus on the representation of social conflicts between capitalist and working classes" (Utomo, 2013, 16). To them, capitalist society causes to destroy the humanity of the individuals.

4. Marxist Elements in *Hard Times*

In Charles Dickens' novel *Hard Times* (1854), the Marxists elements may be seen. It includes the effects of Industrial Revolution of the 1840s. There are class differences and class struggles. People lead to live like machines or robots and they begin to be alienated. The novel *Hard Times* begins with the life philosophy of a wealthy merchant Thomas Gradgrind in the industrial city of Coketown, England.

Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, Sir! (Dickens, 1854, 1)

As seen above, one of the major characters, Mr. Gradgrind devotes his life to rationalism, self-interest and fact. He wants teachers to teach the student only facts of life in school. He raises his oldest children, Louisa and Tom according to this philosophy and never allows them to interest in fanciful or imaginative things. Mr. Gradgrind believes that human nature only can be governed by rational rules. He represents spirit of Industrial Revolution and bourgeois in the novel. He treats people like machines. He finds school and takes one of the students, Sisy Jupe, after her father disappears. Nevertheless, he wants to raise this girl with his thoughts, since the most important thing in the world is facts.

As to me, said Tom, tumbling his hair all manner of ways with his sulky hands, I am a Donkey, that's what I am. I am as obstinate as one, I am more stupid than one, I get as much pleasure as one and I should like to kick like one. (45)

Here one of Gradgrind's oldest children Tom states that he resembles a donkey since he should not use his feelings and stick to only facts in life. Because of his upbringing he should behave like an animal. His father teaches his children only the truths and indicates that they should not wonder. Mr. Gradgrind wants their children to be model that resemble each other. Nevertheless, his life philosophy does not help his children and make them robots. Since Gradgrind does not want his children to behave according to their feelings, he marries his daughter Louisa with his wealthy friend Bounderby. He states that the marriage is a reasonable thing to do. To him, Louisa's emotions are not important. Mr. Gradgrind's life philosophy leads to a mismatched marriage.

I was born with inflammation of the lungs and of everything else, I believe that was capable of inflammation", returned Mr. Bounderby. "For years, ma'am, I was one of the most miserable little wretches ever seen. I was so sickly, that I always moaning and groaning. I was so ragged and dirty, that you wouldn't have touched me with a pair of tongs. (Dickens, 1854, 13)

In the quotation above another important character, Josiah Bounderby tells his childhood story to Gradgrinds. He states that when he was born, like his parent, he was poor and miserable. After he was abandoned by his mother as an infant, his grandmother began to take care of him. Nevertheless, he can not stand her treatments and ran away. Telling his life story Mr. Bounderby wants to indicate that he is a self-made man and boastfully declares this fact. Now he is a wealthy man in Coketown. He is owner of a factory



and a bank. From his childhood poverty he has risen to become a banker and factory owner in Coketown. He is not only wealthy but also powerful. His social mobility demonstrates the social mobility in nineteenth century England. Formerly in England, birth or bloodline determined the social hierarchy. But in an industrialized, capitalist society, wealth determines who has the power. His own ambition enables Bounderby to rise from poverty to become the wealthy owner of a factory and a bank. Josiah Bounderby is more interested in money and power than in facts. To him, his determination and self-discipline lead to his power.

In the novel the lowest laborers in Coketown's factories are called "Hands". One of the hands is Stephen Blackpool. He is working in Mr. Bounderby's factory. He struggles with his love for Rachael who is also a factory worker. He can not marry her since he is already married a drunken woman who disappears for months. Stephen asks Bounderby if he can divorce. "But it's not for you at all. It costs money. It costs a mint of money" (67). As seen, Blackpool learns that only the wealthy men can do this. Stephen Blackpool is a man of honesty and compassion. He lives a life of poverty.

Oh my friends, the down-trodden operatives of Coketown! Oh my friends and fellow-countrymen, the slaves of an iron-handed and a grinding despotism! Oh my friends and fellow-sufferers and fellow-workmen and fellow-men! I tell you that the hour is come, when we must rally round one another as One united power and crumble into dust the oppressors that too long have battered upon the plunder of our families, upon the sweat of our brows, upon the labor of our hands, upon the strength of our sinews, upon the God-created glorious rights of Humanity and upon the holy and eternal privileges of Brotherhood! (123)

In the quotation above one of the hands named Slackbridge tries to form a union for strike in the factory. He wants his friends to aware of their bad position. He thinks that the ruling class exploits them. To him, they should earn as much as their labor. They are used like machines and to stop this inhuman working a strike is necessary. They are alienated because they have no control over labor or product which they produce. But another hand, Stephen refuses to join this because he feels that a union strike would only increase tensions between employers and employees. There is a labor dispute that shows the strained relations between rich and poor. There begins a class struggle and the workers want to get rid of high-class oppression. Like Marxists' belief, the oppression of the working class leads to a revolt by the workers and the establishment of a classless society.

Look how you considers of us and writes of us and talks of us and goes up wi' yor deputations to Secretaries o' state 'bout us, and how yo are awlus right, and how we are awlus wrong, and never had'n no reason in us sin ever we were born. Look how this ha' grown an' grown, Sir, bigger an' bigger, broader an' broader, harder an' harder, fro year to year, fro generation unto generation. Who can look on't, Sir and fairly tell a man 'tis not a muddle? (134)

Even if Stephen does not want to join the strike, he goes to Bounderby's bank and they talk about the strike of the Hands. Stephen states that they have not been allowed to use their minds since they were born. They are used like machines from generation to generations. Stephen wants to show the employer that the hands are used up and are not treated like real human beings.

It contained several large streets all very like one another 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 same pavements, to do the same work and to whom every day was the same as yesterday and to-morrow and every year the counterpart of the last and the next. (19)

Here the narrator gives the sight of an industrial city Coketown. There are factories. Since most of the people are from lower classes, they are workers in factories. With the bell of factories, the workers immediately go to work. Their only habit is to use their hands and they are not allowed to use their minds. Like streets in Coketown, people should be the same like robots. They should not have feelings and imagination. So, everyday becomes the same for the workers of the factories in Coketown. The Industrialism in Coketown creates a social muddle and there is not an easy solution to it.

This again, was among the fictions of Coketown. Any capitalist there, who had made sixty thousand pounds out of sixpence, always professed to wonder why the sixty thousand nearest Hands didn't each make sixty thousand pounds out of sixpence and



more or less reproached them every one for not accomplishing the little feat. What I did you can do? Why don't you go and do it? (Dickens, 1854, 105)

As seen above the industrial place Coketown is governed by capitalist employers. The factory owners earn more than they have and more than what their employees earn. The profit gained by the capitalist is different. The value of the product made by the worker and the actual wage that the worker receives are different from the profit. The narrator indicates that if the capitalist employers can increase their income why the workers also do not this easy thing. To him the workers also should use their minds and have what they actually deserve. In the novel, the ruling class controls the society's means of production, the superstructure of society and its ruling ideas.

Conclusion

When Charles Dickens's novel *Hard Times* is analyzed, it is seen that Marxist elements and thoughts are used in this literary work. In the novel people are allowed to behave only according to some rules of bourgeois and capitalist employers. The ruling classes do not permit the lower-class people to feel and think. So, these rules lead them to behave like machines or robots. Capitalists pay workers less attention than the real value of their labor. The workers become alienated gradually. The proletarian class sells their labor power and they do not own the means of production. The workers' salary is not enough when their labor is compared with the production. Therefore, the employers exploit the working class. The workers want other people to give them importance and appreciate their hard work.

In *Hard Times* with the beginning of Industrialism the position and life circumstances of people began to change. There emerge class struggles. The capitalists began to rule the workers and they ignore the workers capacities and abilities. Therefore, the workers want to strike in order to get rid of the oppression of capitalist employers. Due to these kinds of Marxist issues, Dickens's fictionalized world can be dealt with its relation to Karl Marx's social philosophy. *Hard Times* reflects class consciousness, sacrifice and social injustice of the nineteenth century Victorian age. Doing that, Dickens portrays the social truths of this period vividly. In his novel the oppressed people, especially workers found a voice, that is, finally they comprehend that they should behave like human beings, not machines. For achieving their goal, the characters in the novel realized that they must revolt against the bourgeois.

Additionally, when analyzed in terms of Marxist views, it may be said that both Dickens's novel *Hard Times* and Marx's ideal notions requires revolution and sacrifice. In the novel, in the hands of capitalism the workers experiences inequality and oppression. Moreover, not only Dickens portraits the bad living conditions of workers but also the characters from the middle and upper classes in Industrial town. Thus, the author is successful in reflecting the problems and interests existing in real life in Victorian age.

Moreover, Dickens portrays his philosophy on values with which every individual are equal. He also uses a satirical language for criticizing the industrialized world. Criticizing this world, he leads readers to hope for a revolution in both social and economic fields. This requirement is realized by the lower classes' members at the end of the novel. In sum, in the novel *Hard Times* Dickens is seen to be opposed to the poor and workers' oppression by the rich or masters. This opposition is reflected by the way of the author's Marxist views in the novel.

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