

## Discuss and contextualize the sleary's circus

Hard Times by Charles dickens was first published in 1854. Hard Times appeared in 'Household words' in weekly instalments between April and August. Through Hard Times Dickens shows the other side of the flourishing Victorian England. He shows the smoke and oppression of Industrial England and emotion crushing facts of utilitarian world. Hard Times has a great social purpose. George Gissing said in Charles Dickens a critical study, "from his duty, as he conceived it, of teaching a moral lesson, Dickens never departs." The idea for his yet unwritten novel "laid hold of me by the throat in a very violent manner" Dickens wrote and he vowed in writing Hard Times, "to strike the heaviest blow in my power" for the English industrial worker. After visiting Preston in the midst of twenty three week textile strike and reading about labor conditions in Manchester, he invented Coketown.

Coketown is embodiment of industrialization and utilitarianism. Dickens emphasizes this in his description of Coketown "It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves forever and ever and never uncoiled...you saw nothing in Coketown but what was severely workful." Sleary's circus is the principle antithesis of Coketown, an alternative view of Gradgrind's way of life. While Coketown is coloured with grim red and black imagery, Sleary's circus is colourful and cheerful. Coketown is a mechanical place, circus is a blend of man, animal and imagination. It embodies fluidity of life. The people of Coketown are constantly engaged in production. It's a constant grind, whereas circus gives recreation. It is cathartic and it celebrates spontaneity and provides enjoyment.

It therefore becomes a life giving antithesis of Gradgrind's abstract schemes of education and life. Gradgrind's house is called 'the stone lodge'. Stone lodge was "a calculated, cast up, balanced and proved house" whereas Pegasus Arms has a fancy sign of a winged horse used as a symbol. Steven Connor says "the signboard is in fact a series of metonymies moving through the arms, legs and wings of Pegasus, the inscription beneath the picture, and into the details of the framed and glazed Pegasus inside the bar, with an energy that makes it difficult to see the bar sign as stable and self contained. In Gradgrind's house nobody touches each other whereas circus presents an overwhelming sight of affection with all the hugging, crying and caressing. The Gradgrind family appears disintegrated and the family members alienated to each other; where Mr. Gradgrind is unable to understand his daughter, Tom uses his own sister and Mrs. Gradgrind is shown as a totally derisive and incapable mother. Whereas circus reminds us of an affectionate, huge joint family, who are ready to adopt Sissy after she is abandoned by her father. Joseph Gold said, "Sleary's circus is the image of a society as a family where interdependence is assumed as an essential characteristic to the survival of both the individual and the whole."

Dickens describes the circus people as illiterate, rakish, untidy but having "a remarkable gentleness and childishness". Sleary's slurs and lapses shows he is still a child at heart. He is a man of both head and the heart, as he realizes what's best for Sissy and sends her with Gradgrind. He has a holistic vision. The

**Comment [L1]:** Always underline the name of a text.

**Formatted:** Underline

**Comment [L2]:** Awkward language use

**Comment [L3]:** A critical essay must be objective. This sounds like you agree with Dickens's viewpoint. Contextualize using writers' role in industrial England, Preston strike etc and use terms like "Dickens felt" or "Dickens believed" to indicate subjectivity.

**Comment [L4]:** Since the topic is Sleary's Circus, start with the line "Sleary's Circus is the principle antithesis..." and then continue.

**Comment [L5]:** Remember to use capitals for all the various establishments and people in the book: Coketown, Pegasus' Arms, Sleary's Circus, Tom, Bounderby etc.

**Comment [L6]:** Of the unfettered imagination.

**Comment [L7]:** Whenever you quote a critical mention which essay the extract is from and in which book that essay is located.

**Comment [L8]:** Contextualize.

inefficient language of sleary and the circus people reinforces that though they may have flaws but they are capable of working and surviving in the world, while remaining on the fringes of society. And therefore boulderby is not able to fool these people with his lies of rising from the gutter and being a self made man. According to Steven Connor, "the circus people's manner of speaking with their private slang (outlandish to Gradgrind's ears) seems to emphasize the resistant material quality of language, rather than the communication of specific meaning."

With Sleary's circus, Dickens emphasizes the theme and purpose of this novel; the importance of fellowship, the education of heart over the education of head and importance of individual over the importance of institutions. And he goes on to show the victory of intuition over reason and heart over head. We see in the end that Bouldersby is deflated and Gradgrind and Tom become dependent upon Sleary's circus for Tom's escape. Bitzer who ~~is bits and pieces of information~~ **embodies the mechanical learning and factual knowledge of Gradgrind's school** tries to stop Tom but he is not allowed to stand up to the circus. He is defeated by the same horse of which he had given a very concise and scientific definition to Gradgrind in the initial chapters of the book. **At that time Gradgrind asks Sissy to suffice her understanding of the horse with this definition, who dealt with horses on a daily basis and obviously had a better understanding of them.** So, Bitzer's defeat ironically brings about the difference between scientific **reality-description of a horse** and **a horse as the-a living creature.**

In hard times Dickens subverts the utilitarian system, industrialization, laissez faire & even trade unions and reiterates his faith in the common man through Sleary's circus. He shows that humanity knows how to manage without facts. Dickens said in his speech in Birmingham, 1870' "I have little faith in the people who govern...but great confidence in the People whom they govern."

Critics however argue that Dickens shows too much deliberate purity in opposition of utilitarianism, he is accused of ~~manipulation-manipulating~~ the plot and character of the novel to establish his point. J.B. Priestley said. "the truth is Dickens did not know enough about industrial England...as it is, Coketown belongs to propaganda and not to creative imagination."

But the complexity of novel and the satisfying development of plot clearly show Dickens's creative genius. F.R. Leavis has argued that this is Dickens's greatest novel. Dickens like Carlyle or Ruskin has three aims; need to make society and literature interact to improve the condition of England, to re-examine prevailing economic doctrines and expand actual public responsibility and to suggest humanitarian alternative to the first and second problem. This solution, Dickens offers us in Sleary's circus; preservation of home and hearth, of love, art, creativity, fantasy, intuition and of course the individual over the institution.

**Comment [L9]:** Awkward use of language

**Comment [L10]:** Talk a little more about Sissy Jupe's role in the latter part of the novel and comment very very briefly on Dickens's portrayal of women. That criticism can then connect directly to the criticism about his lack of adequate knowledge you have in the second to last para.