

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A PERSONAL AND NATIONAL *BILDUNG* AND ITS
NONLINEAR NATURE: CHARLES DICKENS'S *HARD TIMES* AND MATTHEW
ARNOLD'S *CULTURE AND ANARCHY***

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ABSTRACT: *Derived from the German philosophy of Bildung, literary works that can be categorized as bildungsroman have mainly focused on the individuals' maturation and education. This study aims to expand on this notion of Bildung and observe how an individual's maturation and education ultimately leads to the expansion of such action of becoming on a nationwide scale. By analyzing the relationship between the two different cases of bildung in action in Charles Dickens's Hard Times and Matthew Arnold's Culture and Anarchy, this study aims to analyze in depth the correlation between the individuals' maturation and the national bildung. The study examines the concepts of individual and national bildungs present in Dickens's Hard Times, both within the characters at play as well as the Victorian English society immediately following the Industrial Revolution period. Outside the literary and fictional realms, the study finds the notion of the two kinds of bildungs in Matthew Arnold's Culture and Anarchy. By comparing the two observations, the study ultimately suggests that the two bildungs do not necessarily share a chronologically linear relationship between each other.*

KEYWORDS: Bildung, Maturation, Character Development, Culture, Education, Victorian Era

INTRODUCTION

In Charles Dickens's *Hard Times*, the societal aspects and issues of the Victorian era are made visible through the medium of novels. A twenty-series novel, the publication of the work was a commercial success during Dickens's day, not to mention the fact that the contents of the work concerned integral aspects of the society during the latter periods of the Industrial Revolution. The novel provides the readers with a subtle representation of the utilitarian English society and its detrimental aspects through the author's incorporation of figures that are representative of the varying ideologies presented within the novel. Strictly speaking, the novel can be viewed as a social experiment that builds on an ideological and socioeconomic spectrum modeled by the author who was verily interested in the social issues through his first-hand personal experiences. According to John Forster, Dickens was driven to be critical about the harsh social realities in England at an early age with his father's incarceration in the debtor's prison and his own experiences of turbulent and unstable lodging and work experiences at factories. Likewise, Dickens gained a profound interest in writing through taking various writing professions (i.e. legal clerk, journalist, etc.). In conjunction with the representative characters and ideologies exhibited in the aforementioned novel, as well as the voice of a social critic underlying the text, it is interesting to note that critiques on the overly utilitarian aspect of the Victorian era also came from the voice of Matthew Arnold in many of his works. In particular, this essay seeks to concern itself with the social criticism and recommendation

provided by Arnold in his essay *Culture and Anarchy* and how they are illustrated in Dickens's abovementioned novel. The two texts provide a valuable critique of the Victorian era and its obsessive overvaluation of utilitarian and pragmatic facts during the latter half of the Industrial Revolution. Branching off from these social critiques on differing styles, this essay seeks to argue that the two texts share the voice of recommendation on a certain *balance* between *fact* and *fancy*, the *Hebraistic* and the *Hellenistic*, and *another thing needful* and *the one thing needful*. Matthew Arnold highlights the importance of Porro Unum est Necessarium (or the one thing needful) in his essay *Culture and Anarchy*. Likewise, Dickens highlights the concept of a balance between fact and fancy in his novel by visibly entitling Chapter One of Book One of his novel *The One Thing Needful* and the first chapter of Book Three as *Another Thing Needful*. Moreover, this essay will attempt to argue that the concept of *Bildungsroman* and *Bildung* exists in both texts and that these notions found in the works relate not only on an individual level but also on a national and global level.

In his book *Formative Fictions: Nationalism, Cosmopolitanism, and the Bildungsroman*, Tobias Boes presents the idea of a cosmopolitan interpretation of the German *Bildungsroman* and relates it to the significance the concept, as a *performative notion*, can hold in demonstrating the process within a story where it can be seen as a linkage between an individual sense of *Bildungsroman* and that of a more historical and transnational one (Boes 2). Building on this idea, the concept of *Bildung* presented in Dickens's *Hard Times* not only relates to the various characters found in the *process of becoming* but also to the larger scale of a national identity and need for *culture* or a more flexible mindset (as argued by Matthew Arnold), or an agreeable equilibrium between *fact* and *fancy*. Arnold views *culture* as the great help out of our present difficulties as it is a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concerns us, the *best* which has been thought and said in the world and through such knowledge, turning a stream of *fresh and free thought* upon our stock notions and habits (Arnold 6, emphasis added). Hence, to provide more clarification on the argument of this essay, it may be wise to align Arnold's belief that culture needs a *free play of thought* and a continuous *pursuit of perfection* through the *best* that has been thought of with Dickens's voice that fancy, a concept that can be interpreted as one that represents notions such as *imagination*, is crucial in bettering not only an individual's life but the whole of society. Furthermore, Arnold's belief that the realms of *Hellenism* and *Hebraism* need to coexist and cooperate in order to bring about a fruition of betterment on the English society, and the world in general, can be understood along the lines of Dickens's suggestion that both fact and fancy are equally *needful* and necessary in maintaining a better world for individuals as well as for societies. The underlying idea, despite the slightly contrasting yet coordinated variables between Arnold and Dickens's suggestions in their respective writings, is that there is a certain responsibility and necessary motivation required of individuals and societies in constantly *pursuing* a better state of things, or *becoming* a better state of themselves. In essence, these estimate appropriately to the concept of *Bildung*, a *process of becoming*.

The Concept and Genre of *Bildungsroman*

Prior to understanding the mechanisms that manifest the concept of *Bildung* in the two works, it only seems wise to expound a more detailed scrutiny on the subject matter of the *Bildungsroman* genre. The term *Bildung*, or the image of *man in the process of becoming* in the novel, as we know it, originates from the German concept of *Bildungsroman*, which was predominantly founded upon the image of emerging man in Goethe during the German Enlightenment (Bakhtin 19). According to Mikhail Bakhtin, the conception of the

Bildungsroman was made possible with the formulation of various novel *types* during the second half of the eighteenth century (19). Bakhtin observes that there were initially three types of novels that contribute to and somewhat overlaps with the formation of the *Bildungsroman* novels that came to existence during the latter half of the eighteenth century: the travel novel, the novel of ordeal, the biographical (autobiographical) novel (10). These types are further diverged appropriately to subcategories that are defined according to the variables found in the process and concept of the emergence of man. While the idea of *bildung* can be understood as a literary concept, it can, has found linkages in wider disciplines. In his writing, Joseph R. Slaughter argues that the idea and concept of the *German Bildung*, which is the free development of the human passions [that] lead[s] to a harmonious personality and to harmonious co-operation between free men and accentuates the notion that such reasoning is crucial in understanding the value of human rights and the pursuit of achieving them (Slaughter 6). The term has shifted from fields, genres, and subcategories, and yet, the underlying definition of the term has stayed, in its essence, unaltered. This not only explains humanity's aggregate desire of the betterment of our race, but also amplifies its significance on various individual levels as well as national and global levels. With this understanding of *Bildung*, we can move on to observing how it relates to the *Bildung* present in Dickens's *Hard Times* and the concept of *culture* in Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*.

Bildung In Matthew Arnold's Culture and Anarchy

Arnold's text capitulates throughout his work the idea that *culture* is the solution to the current societal problems in England, and that these are not necessarily a social problem but a problem of cultural regression apparent. Given that *culture* is to better a given situation to achieve a state more perfect than the previous status quo, *culture* is (according to Arnold) ultimately what is needed to achieve an equitable and widespread social good. Furthermore, Arnold suggests that the English class system is categorized as thus: the aristocracy, the middle class, and the laboring/working class. He acknowledges that every class wants its own profit and interests against those of the other. Nonetheless, he notes that amongst these conflicting classes there exists a *humane* class that seeks his idea of *culture* instead of such practical matters: they see *culture* as a machinery that extends and leads to something better, not merely a machinery that is an end in itself. This desire to achieve a better state, in its essence finds great accordance with the notion of *Bildung* and finds harmony in that Arnold's writing emphasizes the need for *Bildung* in the current English society and recommends ways to achieve such need. With this in mind, we can safely argue that to Arnold, the *Bildung* of the English society of the time, or for any society for that matter, is to achieve a certain equilibrical state or a balanced condition between the *Hellenistic* and *Hebraistic* realms of culture and society through all the aids of observing, *reading*, and thinking. Arnold's insistence on the act and experience of reading and its influence in achieving his definition of culture is prevalent in the text: And yet, futile as are many bookmen, and helpless as books and reading often prove for bringing nearer to perfection those who use them a man's life of each day depends for its solidity and value on whether he reads More and more he who examines himself will find the difference it makes to him This, however, is a matter for each man's private conscience and experience. If a man without books or reading, or reading nothing but his letters and the newspapers, gets nevertheless a fresh and free play of the best thoughts upon his stock notions and habits, he has got culture. Through such contemplative measures, as opposed to ones that are more dedicated to violent actions (as witnessed in the French Revolution), a society needs to recognize the value and meaning of the *bildung* in their actions and their consequences. Specifically, an action on the part of a crowd

or a society needs to come about as machinery that functions as a bridge to another realm and not merely be utilized and treated as an end in itself. Without such recognition of a hopeful future or a realm that exists beyond the machinery, the *bildung* may not and cannot successfully exist. It is through such contemplative measures that concern a humane spirit that brings about the educational or transformational dimension of a movement to a more heightened one. A severely practical and political movement much like the French Revolution can only suffice as an end in itself and merely result into a consequential change, not a holistic and humanely spiritual growth or a process of *becoming*.

Bildung in Charles Dickens's Hard Times

An acutely similar understanding of *Bildung* and recommendation for the English society during the Victorian era is presented in Dickens's novel. As mentioned above, *Hard Times* provides us with a social experiment that incorporates the usage of fictional characters that are representative of the differing ideologies of the time. Although the working class is rather underrepresented, they serve a purpose on its own as the socioeconomic model put together by Dickens provides us not only with a purposeful yet incomplete depiction of the social life in Victorian England. Moreover, the model serves to provide a subtle satire and criticism against the burgeoning social problems. Unlike F. R. Leavis who sided with John Ruskin in considering, in his writing *Hard Times: An Analytical Note*, the work as a masterpiece [which] of all Dickens's works is the one that has all the strength of his genius, together with a strength no other of them can show that of a completely serious work of art, M. S. Yoo, in her writing *Ideology of Hard Times*, sides with numerous other scholars who criticized the work to have underrepresented the laboring class in the novel and therefore cannot stand as a complete representation of the whole of the English society at the time.

In its essence, the novel can be perceived as a *bildungsroman*, yet its definition and meaning can be disseminated and permeated throughout the wide array of features the novel seeks to relate to. In fact, *Hard Times* is often quoted and studied by numerous scholars from a wide inventory of disciplines, ranging from economic studies to political science and public health studies to sociology, not to mention the language and literature fields. For example, the notion of *Bildung* can be analyzed in the realm of character analysis in the transformation of some figures such as Louisa and Mr. Gradgrind. Likewise, the same concept can be reused in understanding the social concepts and ideologies presented in the novel: the idea that utilitarianism alone cannot suffice, and hence the necessary demand for that another thing needful.

The development of character, the process and progress of *becoming*, the formulation and effect of *fancy* in an individual is perhaps most profound in the character of Louisa. In the novel, Louisa embodies the transition from utilitarianism to something else that embodies the another thing needful notion of *fancy* and imagination, or the concept of *spontaneity of conscience* as pragmatically defined by Arnold's usage of the term *Hellenism* (Stone 1). Louisa's upbringing, especially that of her and her father's dependence on the normative value of *facts*, reflects the rigidity and definitive senses of the concept of *Hebraism* and the *strictness of conscience* present in Arnold's text. In such sense, we may attempt to endow a certain generalization (for the sake of a more comprehensive argument) on Louisa's behalf that the Victorian era and society was profusely focused on the utilitarian worldview rather than one which was adequately peppered with the *Hellenistic* flexibility and free play of thoughts, or more straightforwardly *the one thing needful* (Dickens 3, emphasis added). While it is rather clear

that Louisa's development as character within the narrative embodies the main features of a *Bildungsroman*, it may be wise to take note of a more complex approach Dickens takes upon Louisa and that it is one that is less linear and more nonlinear (or even cyclical) in its nature. Bakhtin argues that all types of *Bildungsroman* or formation novels consider a time-space element in their process of becoming (Bakhtin 19-20). In accordance this notion, we can visually picture that Louisa's final destination as a place or spatial notion of *becoming* is her *home*: she ends up back at her home with Sissy Jupe who could be regarded as the epicentral initiator of the concept of *fancy* (or *Hellenism*, if we are to broadly view its flexibility and autonomy regarding the play of thoughts in conjunction with Arnold's ideas). The nonlinear or cyclical nature of the *bildung* presented in Louisa posts significance in that it presents the notion that a personal *becoming* is achieved only through one's return to his or herself through extensive reflection, physical retrace of one's own beginnings, or understanding of the past. Michael Minden points out the discussion of the masculinity of the genre and the absence, as well as the presence, of the feminine *Bildung*. This subcategory is missed out in Bakhtin's views on the *Bildungsroman*, however, and it is crucial to our discussion as Louisa serves as one of the predominant man who emerges as the one who becomes if we are to take *Hard Times* as a novel of formation (in its individual level as well as in a larger scope of things). While this refers to an individual and personal level of *bildung*, on a more national or societal level, the nonlinear or cyclical nature of a *bildung* can signify that a particular state can be considered as one that has acquired more formation or more education (in the definition of *bildung* as a process of formation, education, experience, becoming, etc.), even if such state is one that had taken place or existed in the past. In other words, a *bildung* does not necessarily limit itself to a notion of temporal progress wherein one who acquires experience and moves on further in time is generally better off in the future, but it indicates that a *bildung* is achieved through intermittent periods of oscillations, vacillations, and fluctuations. Furthermore, it also poses the possibility of the *bildung*'s regression in terms of the achieved state of things.

This ties in well with Arnold's critique of the English society in the Victorian era as *culture* at the time was at the verge of (or was already in the process of) a cultural regression. In conjunction with this, Arnold's discussions of the epochs of concentrations and of expansions, which he elaborates in his essay *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time*. In the mentioned essay, Arnold argues that out of a highly active and movement based event such as the French Revolution fruitful productions equal to that of the eras of Greece, or out of that of the Renaissance, with its powerful episode the Reformation did not come about and only ended up as a it took a political, practical character. Undoubtedly, in order for us to link the *bildung* present in Dickens's portrayal of Louisa and that of Arnold's essay, we must retain our previous argument that Dickens's depiction of *fancy* and Arnold's *Hellenism* (or the *spontaneity of conscience*) is in accordance with one another to some extent. And likewise, that the concept of the utilitarian obsession on *facts* and empiricism is, in a similar vein, one that accords with Arnold's pragmatic concept of *Hebraism* (or the *strictness of conscience*). Consequently, and as such, this matrix is utilized in the rather incomplete and unsettled social spectrum presented in Dickens's *Hard Times*. Although the depiction of the English society of the time in the novel has been dubbed as incomplete, especially in the sense that its description of the laboring and working class is deficient, the depiction of the English class system in the novel still serves as an important reference point in studying the heightened industrial epoch of the Victorian era and cooperate well with Arnold's own depiction of the system. For example, Dickens paints Bounderby as an aristocratic middle class, or one that has authoritative powers due to his capitalistic influence on the working class. In contrast to this, the Gradgrinds and James

Harthouse is a middle class family and an upper-class aristocrat respectively. Mrs. Sparsit represents the aristocrats who have fallen in capitalist value but retains a certain residuum of sentimental value (to figures like Bounderby and Bitzer). Moreover, we also see a subcategory of the laboring class Rachael and Stephen Blackpool represent the classic working class while Slackbridge represents the authoritative working class who sits awkwardly in between the capitalist employers and the base of laborers. The significance of the English class structure presented through the combination of the characters is that they can also be used to illustrate Arnold's divisions of classes into the *Barbarian* aristocrats, the *Philistine* middle class, and the *Populace* laboring class. This Arnoldian depiction of the social spectrum in Dickens's novel then allows us to find access to the identification of a *humane* cluster of people (according to Arnold) and their role in providing a trajectory of *bildung* in their respective developments. In *Culture and Anarchy*, Arnold refers to this supra-pool of people in the following passage:

Therefore, when we speak of ourselves as divided into Barbarians, Philistines, and Populace, we must be understood always to imply that within each of these classes there are a certain number of aliens, if we may so call them, persons who are mainly led, not by their class spirit, but by a general humane spirit, by the love of human perfection; and that this number is capable of being diminished or augmented (emphasis added) (Arnold 37).

This capacity of being diminished or augmented relates back to our argument that the *bildung* is one that is of a nonlinear or even a cyclical nature more so than a merely linear one. An exemplary figure of this *aliens* who are led by a *general humane spirit* and *the love of human perfection* present in *Hard Times* is Louisa. Nonetheless, there are other characters that provide an interesting contrast when observed as a compositional dataset Mr. Gradgrind and Bounderby. Mr. Gradgrind provides a successful *bildung* trajectory at least in the span of the novel, while Bounderby does not show a progress much less any sort of positive development towards a *human perfection* Bounderby can even be classified as a regression of *culture* in the perspective of Arnold and serve as proof to the alien cluster of people and their capacity of being diminished or augmented. In the novel, Mr. Gradgrind representatively stands for the ethical theory of utilitarianism and even pragmatism. Nonetheless, his departure from the theory does not necessarily mean disbanding and abandoning of the faculty of *facts* or the *Hebraism* consciousness: it merely signifies the consummation of the two departments *Hellenistic* concern on the free play of thoughts and the *Hebraistic* regard for form and rigidity in terms of a stable structure. This apparent *balance* is created within some of the figures present in the novel, while many despite the chances and occasions of opportuneness presented to them defy grasping the blessed balance of the two aforementioned concepts and continue sustaining their dissected dichotomy in their own terms. Despite the embarrassment of revealing his innermost secrets behind the fabrication of his past and autodidactic myth of a *self-made man*, Bounderby continues to live a social life of a *Barbarian*, a *Philistine*, or the *Populace* whichever he may ultimately choose to be in the trajectory of life (or choose to retain and remain for temporary periods of time) and yet never be one that is fully enlightened of *humanity* according to Arnold. The significance of identifying and being able to identify the *humane spirit* is the true essence of a *bildungsroman* and a recommendation of such *humane spirit* to a society is meaningful in the sense that the process of becoming and bettering one's self in the spiritual pursuit of perfection is applicable to any society and any individual at any given point in time and location.

In essence, the two texts corroborate not only on their desire and suggestions on attaining *culture* but also on the necessary need for the blessed flexibility of the mind and the free play

of thoughts and the concept of *fancy*. Furthermore, the two texts are speaking of the same idea in two different ways, and both providing their recommendations with a sense of urgency and agency, all the while underscoring the voice of critique prevalent in both writings. In the very final lines of the novel, Dickens intervenes and urgently notifies us with an appeal to a seemingly impending dilemma:

Dear reader! It rests with you and me, whether, in our two fields of action, similar things shall be or not. Let them be! We shall sit with lighter bosoms on the hearth, to see the ashes of our fires turn grey and cold. (Dickens 342)

Here, we see that Dickens turns his attention from the characters presented in the novel and faces the readers, recommending them to take the issues to their own hands and attempt to contribute to the betterment of the world in their own respective ways. The significance of the inclusion of Dickens's (or the voice of the narrator, who is not necessarily Dickens) own voice at the ending of the novel is that the statement confirms the readers' assumptions that the novel in its entirety can be understood as a social critique and one that is relayed with a recommendation as well. This confirmation also enables us to realize that the characters of the novel are quite necessarily the ideas and ideologies they represent more than a well-rounded fictional character that requires a separate in depth literary character analysis. In addition to this, through the author's interventional closing, we as readers come to realize that *Hard Times* is, in its very essence, a nineteenth century Victorian novel where authors generally take more consideration of the *real* society than the one that is present in the novel. The woe and discomfort of the author are relayed to the general public through the publication and the medium of novels and their writings. In other words, the authors were much more interested in providing the *bildung* to the actual nation or society than other literary aspects of their writings. Dickens in particular, incorporates this specific ending to beckon the readers to *become* more aware of the social issues and necessary civic virtues.

CONCLUSION

As we have intensively discussed the concept of *Bildung* can be interpreted not only as an individual development and transformation but one that can be observed from a more socioeconomic perspective and from one that is not only on a national or statewide scale but one that delineates boundaries of place and jurisdiction in terms of geopolitical aspects as well as those of the temporal notion. Arnold believed that such pursuit of perfection in the name of *culture* and *humane spirit* would eventually help us understand differences between one another as individuals and as global societies. Hence, the idea of a *Bildung* in the social realm is and can be utilized, understood, and imagined by anyone anywhere that belongs to any country at any point in the time period of human history. In fact, it does not simply assert itself to a specific epoch or a particular era that works centrifugally with a certain invention, scientific discovery, or a technological breakthrough at the time, but one that works in a centripetal pattern concerning the whole of human history. In this sense, the *Bildung* presented in Dickens's *Hard Times* works in conjunction with the idea of bettering oneself continually for a more perfect state with the best thoughts out there as Arnold delicately puts it. Hence, the two texts work to corroborate the need of *culture* in an overly utilitarian society a predicament that is also prevalent in a modern capitalistic world as well. The *bildung* presented and emphasized by the two writers instill the idea that the pursuit of *culture* and sustaining a balance between

worldviews and ideologies is important as *bildung* is not a temporal and linear but a more nonlinear and cyclical concept that can bring about a diminishing effect if not taken seriously.

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