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From a Strict Education to the Education of Imagination and Feelings: a Victorian Debate

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Introduction

Introduction

The lack of balance between the rational side of human beings and their emotional part is an issue which characterises a considerable part of British nineteenth-century literature and culture. Both the rise of technology and the spreading of Utilitarian theories managed to produce a generalised disproportion between intellect and emotions. On the one hand, the Victorians inherited the great cultural legacy based on the Romantic glorification of feelings, on the other, the technical and technological advancement of the period led them to focus almost exclusively on the logical capacities of the mind. Moreover, this tendency was apparent not only in the economic field, but also in the field of scientific and historical knowledge, which in the Victorian Age became increasingly vaster and more specialised and helped this social and cultural phenomenon to spread[1]. Furthermore, an additional yet fundamental cause of this phenomenon was a wrong sort of education since both formal and domestic education tended to stimulate children to develop their intellectual and logical capacities, to remember notions and to focus on causes and effects alone. This method risked erasing the most human part of the individual, namely the ability to feel and show affection and sympathy, the spontaneity, the imagination and the mutual understanding. Thus, because of this general undervaluation and underdevelopment of the feeling and emotional side, an increasing number of individuals were turning into cold mechanisms able to identify only the practical side of life and focus on the mere useful part of everything, becoming selfish, dry and disinterested in anything but their own advantage.

The underdevelopment of imagination and feelings, with its causes and consequences, is a motive which pervades many of the greatest and most representative novels of the century. One of the central figures who extensively deals with this theme is Charles Dickens who

1 Cf. W. E. Houghton, *The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870,* New Haven, New Haven University Press, 1957, p.12.

gives voice to this contemporary issue in a number of different ways, both as a novelist and as a journalist. His journalistic project ñHousehold Wordsò includes several articles which deal with the social situation of his country and with this overspread tendency of the inability of the English to feel and imagine. As a novelist, Dickens displays in his works a whole gallery of characters who show the many forms the disproportion between imagination and intellect might take. Not only did he deal with the problem through different genres, namely essays and novels, but also through different sub-genres: the outcomes of a wrong sort of education are presented in both his *Bildungsroman*, *David Copperfield* (1849-50) and *Great Expectations* (1860-61) and also in his social novel *Hard Times* (1854). It might be easy to assume that only the young protagonists of these novels, respectively David, Pip and Louisa, who are in quest of their own identity and need to be educated, are subjected to and misled by the consequences of an unbalanced education, yet various other characters are unconscious victims of it. As a matter of fact, the protagonists' *Bildung* is not to be considered as the only fundamental feature of the plot, because equally interesting is their interrelationships with the secondary characters. Moreover, in his two *Bildungsroman*, Dickens introduces an important feature in the characterisation of both Pip and David. Pipôs *Bildung* and frame of mind are constructed around a strong ambition which, by degenerating into snobism, manages to dry up his genuine affection towards those characters who authentically love him. In the characterisation of David, despite being less marked, snobism is present to the extent that the young David feels ashamed of his school-mate Traddles, a character who, eventually, becomes one of Davidôs closest friends.

Being a real cultural and social English issue, a real example of the results of a strictly rational education can be found in the *Autobiography* of John Stuart Mill. In 1873 this beautiful document shed a light on the question of education: since his early childhood Mill's father, James, taught his son to rely only on his intellectual capacities developing his analytical faculties to the utmost and consequently drying up his source of sensitivity and

emotions. Accordingly, in his twenties Mill experienced a long and deep mental crisis as he realised that he was unable to feel any kind of emotion and became disinterested in anything which previously gave him pleasure and satisfaction. Despite his awareness of the actual existence of feelings, Mill possessed merely the notion of feelings as a source of happiness having been subjected to an exclusively rational education. However, when he became aware of this deficiency, he managed to fill the void by reading Wordsworth's poems which displayed before him a completely new set of values thus helping him to improve both as an individual and as an intellectual.

Both in Dickens's fiction and in Mill's *Autobiography*, literature has a chief role as a possible means of correcting the imbalance between mind and feelings. In *David Copperfield*, Dickens displays how literature possesses the capacity of stimulating the imagination of the young David allowing him to endure the abuses of the Murdstones. In *Hard Times*, literature acquires a moral function which is displayed in the example of Mr Jupe who, through the entertainment of reading, is prevented from falling into utter despair. On the other hand, in Mill's experience, literature played a considerably formative role since poetry was the means through which he was able to overcome his mental crisis and it aided him to approach the sphere of emotions. Moreover, non-fiction writings of the time provided further theories on the ethical and educational function of art and literature which can be found in a number of nineteenth-century British essays and articles. Both George Eliot and Dickens and other Victorian essayists and intellectuals, such as John Ruskin, provide a number of possible strategies to correct the imbalance between mind and feelings through the agency of of art.

Hence, the aim of this dissertation is to investigate how the role of a correct education, with the aid of art and literature, came to be considered crucial in the solution to the problem of the disproportion between feelings and imagination on the one side and intellect on the other side, a problem which haunted the whole nineteenth-century cultural debate in England, and which deeply influenced Victorian fiction, non-fiction and real life, therefore becoming an important

cultural question of the period.

The first and second chapters will be devoted to Dickens's works. The first will focus on the analysis of the informal education of the young characters in his two *Bildungsroman*. In *David Copperfield* the characters of Dora Spenlow (Davidôs first wife), Clara Copperfield (Davidôs mother) and David will be analysed. In *Great Expectations*, the characters of Pip and Estella will be focused on. In the second chapter the negative results of the strict and practical education imposed to Louisa Gradgrind in the industrial setting of *Hard Times* will be analysed. In the third chapter, the *Autobiography* of John Stuart Mill will be considered as an example of the problem as an actual cultural phenomenon. Moreover, in each of the three chapters, the role of literature and its positive effects will be focused on. Finally, the last chapter will be devoted to the analysis of the theories provided by non-fiction, in particular *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) by John Ruskin, George Eliot's letter to Charles Bray (5th July 1859) and her essay *The Natural History of German Life* (1856) and finally, the articles by Charles Dickens published in ñHousehold Wordsò, namely *A Preliminary Word* (1850), *A Christmas Tree* (1850), *Frauds on the Fairies* (1853), and *Where We Stopped Growing* (1853).

Chapter One

Mind and Feelings in Charles Dickens's *Bildungsroman*

1. Mind and Feelings in Charles Dickens's *Bildungsroman*

1.1 *David Copperfield*

In 1850 Charles Dickens published *David Copperfield,* his "favourite child" as he himself calls it in the *Preface* to the ñCharles Dickensò Edition[2]. Many critics focused their attention on the first term in the expression "favourite child" arguing that Dickens was very much attached to this long first *Bildungsroman* of his because he inserted many autobiographical aspects and details such as the most dreadful, wounding and shameful experience of his entire life: the period of his youth he was obliged to spend in a bottle workhouse. Nevertheless, it is worth paying attention also to the second term in the expression "favourite child". For the first time in *David Copperfield* childhood comes to be an extremely important phase for Dickens's protagonist David. It is in his childhood that David begins to acquire the first notions of what life is and, more importantly, childhood is the period in which his future individual character is formed and educated. Therefore, the stage of infancy was essential in a novel belonging to a genre such as the English *Bildungsroman* in which the hero is usually introduced to the reader in his infancy[3]. Furthermore, it is important to underline the capital relevance of the role that a sound education plays in *David Copperfield*. In Dickens education is conceived as the full development of the intellectual faculties along with the capacity of the child of feeling emotions. If mind and feelings are not in harmony, this imbalance proves to be a disadvantage in the adult life. David achieves complete maturity and establishes the balance between his mind and emotions in his adulthood with the aid of characters who provide him with an education which does not aim exclusively at developing the protagonist's intellectual faculties, but which is also devoted to the development of his feelings. Hence, David successfully

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[2] C. Dickens, *Preface* to the ñCharles Dickensò Edition, [1869], in *David Copperfield*, [1849-50], London, Dent, 1965, p. xvii.

[3] Cf. F. Moretti, *Il romanzo di formazione*, [1999], Torino, Einaudi, 2006, p. 202.

although not easily overcomes the phase of infancy and increasingly approaches maturity. However, in *David Copperfield* Dickens also presents some secondary characters who, on the contrary, have never been able to overgrow their state of immaturity. Sharing the incapacity of becoming balanced and independent individuals, therefore, they are doomed to fail in life and to die at last. Both Clara Copperfield, David's mother, and Dora Spenlow, David's first wife, are represented as two young women who find it impossible to develop the maturity requested by their age and status, be it the role of mother or wife. Indeed these two female characters seem destined to succeed in just one single activity, that of naively and blindly loving those who surround them.

Let us begin by focusing our attention on the character of Clara Copperfield to understand how and why she cannot be considered as an actual mature woman. Clara is the first character introduced by the voice, or better by the pen, of the adult David who is writing his story retrospectively. The first episode he tells is when his mother and his aunt Betsey Trotwood first met in the day in which he was born. Since their first encounter aunt Betsy, a much strong-minded woman, treats and speaks to Clara as if she were a needing child:

> ôTake off your cap, child,ôsaid Miss Betsey, óand let me see youô.[4]

Furthermore, the reader is informed that Davidôs father ñhad once been a favourite ofò aunt Betsey's, ñ[é]but, she was mortally affronted by his marriage, on the ground that my mother was a ówax dollô. She had never seen my mother, but she knew her to be not yet twenty. [é] He was double my motherôs age when he married [é].ò[5] After the death of her husband Clara admits herself that she is ñbut a childish widow, and would be but a childish mother if she livedò.[6] Since this first introduction of Davidôs mother, it is clear that David and Clara are

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4 C. Dickens, *David Copperfield*, [1849-50], ed. J. Tambling, London, Penguin, 2004, Ch. I, p. 17.
5 *Ibid.*, p. 15.
6 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

considered almost on the same level of maturity by the other characters. Considered as a child and considering herself a child, Clara confesses to Miss Trotwood, who at this point addresses her even as ñbabyò, that she does not know how to run her own house properly, she adds that Mr Copperfield was teaching her how to do it and that she was willing to improve.[7] In this episode Davidôs mother shows her inadequacy as a wife and a mistress of the house, and moreover she plays the role of a school girl who is just beginning to learn how to do it.

Accordingly, thus far, Clara is but a young woman who has not yet been able to overcome the stage of immaturity since her mental and physical development has remained unbalanced despite her marriage, a new-born baby and the loss of her husband. On the one hand, the fault of this behaviour is not exclusively hers since all the other characters who surround her never stop treating her as a child (first her husband, then Peggotty and finally Miss Trotwood, and also David retrospectively remembers and therefore describes his loving mother as an inexperienced girl). On the other hand, as Professor Andrews argues, she appears to be willing to resist to leave behind her immaturity and eventually become an actual woman.[8]

Nonetheless, a change in Claraôs personality and behaviour can be traced further on when she meets and falls in love with the ñgentleman with the black whiskersò[9], the dreadful Mr Murdstone, whose name describes perfectly his main features and anticipates what happens later in the novel. At the beginning of their relationship, Clara keeps on behaving childishly and as Davidôs peer and to be extremely loving and maternal towards her son, so that during his stay at Peggottyôs brotherôs who lives in a boat-house in Yarmouth, David still considers his mother as a friend and a point of reference and comfort. Nevertheless, her first alteration can be seen when she has to say farewell to her son who is leaving with Peggotty to visit his nurseôs brother. David recollects that ñwhen the carrier began to move, my mother ran out at the gate, and called to him to stop, that she might kiss me once more. I am glad to dwell upon

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7 Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 20.

8 Cf. M. Andrews, *Dickens and the Grown-Up Child*, London, Macmillan, 1994, p. 137.

9 C. Dickens, *David Copperfield* cit., Ch. II, p. 33.

the earnestness and love with which she lifted up her face to mine, and did so.ò Apart from her childish character, Claraôs motherly behaviour in this scene is utterly normal; David continues:

> As we left her standing in the road, Mr Murdstone came up to where she was, and seemed to expostulate with her for being so moved. I was looking back round the awning of the cart, and wondered what business it was of his.[10]

Mr Murdstone does not want Clara to be so emotional. Here Mr Murdstoneôs mission with Clara is only hinted at as David will be absent from home and accordingly the reader has to follow him. But when David returns, he perceives at once that the usual harmony at home has been altered: his mother has eventually fell under the spell of Mr Murdstone who has imposed on her a rigid discipline of firmness and utter self control which aims at erasing any manifestation of love in her and changing the loving child into a strict woman. But if the aim of Mr Murdstone had really been to teach Clara to behave as an adult giving her the right means to face life and understand reality in a mature way, Dickens would not have chosen such a name, with the word ómurderô in it, for him. As a matter of fact, Mr Murdstone introduces mere tyranny in Clara and Davidôs home, endeavouring to bend them under his will and ultimately to forbid any possible sign of affection:

> [é]a coach drove up to the garden-gate, and [Mr Murdstone] went out to receive the visitor. My mother followed him. I was timidly following her, when she turned round at the parlour-door, in the dusk, and taking me in her embrace as she had been used to do, whispered me to love my new father and be obedient to him. *She did this hurriedly and secretly, as if it were wrong*, but tenderly; and, putting out her hand behind her, held mine in it, until we came near where [Murdstone] was standing in the garden, where she let mine go, and drew hers through his harm.[11]

This scene perfectly describes how Claraôs fear of her husband leads her to behave in a preposterous way with her son, and how her blind love towards her husband leads her to be

[10] C. Dickens, *David Copperfield* cit., Ch. II, p. 39.
[11] *Ibid.*, Ch. IV, p. 58 [italics mine].

unable to see the damages Murdstone is causing. Furthermore, she is compelled to show her affection to David in a secret way, without realising, however, that this is wrong and unnatural for a mother. She does it as if she were a school girl whose misdeeds risk being discovered by the teacher.

Mr Murdstone and later his sister Miss Murdstone are the two characters chosen by Dickens to represent just the opposite of Claraôs values. They completely lack imagination and most of all human sympathy, since rigidity and severity have replaced their capacity of feeling any sort of emotion; therefore, in this sense it might be claimed that they are the anticipation of Mr Gradgrind in Dickensôs later social novel *Hard Times*. Accordingly, the Murdstones prove not to be the correct solution to the immaturity of Clara who, despite their firm teachings, her will to improve, and her need for her new husbandôs approbation, is unable to become as inflexible and severe as Mr Murdstone wants her to be. So, if Claraôs behaviour is inadequate to her age, Murdstoneôs methods are inadequate to correct any sort of wrong conduct. Through the characters of the Murdstones Dickens shows how important and how difficult it is to balance the right amount of discipline on the one side, and feelings and affections on the other side, in the recipe of a sound education.

In spite of the Murdstones and her strives, Clara proves to be unable to change into a woman. When Miss Murdstone is asked to bring some changes in the housekeeping, for the first time Clara feels that her role as the mistress of the house has been abused as she has not been consulted beforehand. Her rebellion against the Murdstonesô decision is the first and last moment in which Clara indirectly declares that she wants to be treated as an adult. However, immediately after, Mr Murdstone harshly addresses her:

> ñClara, [é] you surprise me! You astound me! Yes, I had a satisfaction in the thought of marrying an inexperienced and artless person, and forming her character, and infusing into it some amount of that firmness and decision of which it stood in need. But when Jane Murdstone is kind enough to come to my assistance in this endeavour, and to assume, for my sake, a condition something like a housekeeperôs, and when she meets with a base

return ï [é]ò[12]

This passage shows how he is perfectly aware of the weakness of Claraôs mind and therefore he is able to psychologically manipulate her; as a matter of fact she is overwhelmed by this answer of his, and fearing his disapproval, she accordingly bends again under her husbandôs will and Jane Murdstone is free to dispose of Clara's house at her pleasure.

Then Mr Murdstone decides to separate his wife from David sending him to a boarding school called Salem House to be correctly educated. When David is allowed to return home, he immediately perceives again that something has changed, or better that everything has changed now:

> Ah, what a strange feeling it was to be going home when it was not home, and to find that every object I looked at, reminded me of the happy old home, which was like a dream I could never dream again! The days when my mother and I and Peggotty were all in all to one another, and there was no one to come between us, rose up before me so sorrowfully on the road, that I was not sure I was glad to be there [é].[13]

Further on he eventually understands that not only did the harmonious atmosphere of his home vanished, but also his motherôs loving and tender behaviour towards him disappeared:

> I remarked that my mother, though she smiled when Peggotty and I looked at her, became more serious and thoughtful. I had seen at first that she was changed. Her face was very pretty still, but it looked careworn, and too delicate; and her hand was so thin and white that it seemed to me to be almost transparent. But the change to which I now refer was superadded to this: it was in her manner, which became anxious and fluttered.[14]

Clara is always the unconscious victim of the Murdstonesôregime: a victim in all senses since at last she dies living her last days ñuncertain in her mind, and not happyò. When she gives birth to Mr Murdstoneôs son, Peggotty hopes that:

> ñ[é] she would get better, but she was more delicate, and sunk a little every day. She used to like to sit alone before her baby came, and then she cried [é]. I think she got to be more timid, and more frightened-like, of late; and that a hard word was like a blow to her. But

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 61.
[13] *Ibid.*, Ch. VIII, p. 119.
[14] *Ibid.*, p. 122.

> she was always the same to me. She never changed to her foolish Peggotty, didnôt my sweet girl.ò[15]

Peggottyôs simple but moving way of remembering the last days of her childish mistress describes how Clara tried to cope with her immaturity and improve as a wife and mother. However, her change was never for the better since Mr Murdstone and his sister only imposed fear and terror on her mind in the effort to replace love with firmness and control, the only two characteristics which, according to them, make the difference between a respectable individual and a common one. Furthermore, by saying that Clara never changed to her, Peggotty underlines the fact that the Murdstonesômethod merely altered the surface of Claraôs character, and it is easy to understand that Clara simply behaved according to her husbandôs wish because of her fear of him and as a mere habit to prevent his anger and reproaches, but that, as a matter of fact, she always remained herself with Peggotty and the characters who gave her affection. It is clear that Davidôs mother strives to cope with her immaturity, but that she finally fails[16] since she never finds either a right way to overcome it, or a character, be it a husband or a nurse, capable of teaching her how to be the woman her age and roles required. And it is clear, actually, that Murdstoneôs manners finally kill her. Therefore, Clara Copperfield can be considered the first victim of a wrong sort of education, utterly unable to foster any harmony between feelings and her intellectual faculties, the balance necessary to enter actual adult life.

If we now focus our attention on Dora Spenlow, Davidôs first wife, we will see she shares a good number of characteristics with Clara. The first time David sees Dora, he is completely overwhelmed by her physical appearance:

> She was more than human to me. She was a Fairy, a Sylph, I donôt know what she was ï anything that no one ever saw, and everything that everybody wanted. I was swallowed up in an abyss of love in an instant.[17]

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15 *Ibid.*, Ch. IX, pp. 142-143.
16 Cf. M. Andrews, *op. cit.*, p. 136.
17 C. Dickens, *David Copperfield* cit., Ch. XXVI, p. 397.

David describes his future wife in terms of a creature which does not belong to reality, but to the world of childish imagination. Not only does she resemble a fairy, but she is also described as ñ[é] the captivating, girlish, bright-eyed lovely Dora.ò[18], and she has a ñdelightful little voice, the gayest little laugh, the pleasantest and most fascinating little ways [é]ò and she is ñrather diminutive altogether.ò[19] It is clear that Dora, in her physical appearance and pettish yet enchanting manners[20], is considered a child since her first appearance in the novel. Her behaviour has a spell-binding influence on David: the more Dora is childish, the more Davidôs love towards her increases.

During Davidôs courtship Doraôs frivolous talk and behaviour, which are most visibly clear when she speaks to her spaniel dog Jip, are strongly marked; yet, they become increasingly stronger as the marriage approaches. As soon as David is compelled to tell his future wife that he needs to work to grant the conditions of a decent life together, Dora falls in ñan agony of supplication and protestation [é] with a horrified expression of faceò[21], a quite exaggerated reaction to the prospects of their future situation as a married couple, and she even faints when David explains to her that they might probably encounter some difficulties on their path together. After their marriage, her frivolity becomes increasingly disturbing, both for David and for the reader. Nevertheless, David is surprised and troubled by the fact that everyone around his wife treats her as if she were a toy or a plaything: ñ[...] they all seemed to treat Dora, in her degree, much as Dora treated Jip in his.ò[22] And again, when he tries to find a solution to this irritating situation claiming that she is not a child and that she deserves to be treated rationally, Dora begins to behave in a whimsical and spoilt manner. This sort of conduct does not possibly fit marriage or, as Professor Andrews claims, any sort of adult

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18 *Ibid.*, p. 399.
19 Ivi.
20 Cf. Ivi.
21 Cf. *Ibid.*, Ch. XXXVII, p. 546.
22 Cf. *Ibid.*, Ch. XLI, p. 610.

relationship, being it extremely disabling[23] and confirming the fact that Dora cannot perform the role of the wife since she is and will always be considered as a mere beautiful ornament because of her frivolous manners.

Davidôs each single act of kind remonstrance against her childishness, which is now in their married life even more apparent, causes a small crisis in Dora, and any effort to treat her as an adult, namely in a rational way, proves useless. Dora, as she herself declares, did not marry ñto be reasoned withò[24] and not only are the other characters willing to consider her as a little girl, but she herself is not willing to grow up and enter womanhood embracing that intrinsic part of adulthood which inevitably involves rationality. Therefore, being unable to face the role of a wife, Dora invents a term to define her in-between situation, she will be Davidôs *child-wife*. This neologism has the function to include the two opposite sides of Doraôs character: on the one hand, the term gives her the status of a wife; on the other, it justifies her inadequacy for this role and allows her to preserve the childishness which is the core of her identity. Using this compromise, Dora is apparently able to reconcile her personality to her status of married woman, in short, to reconcile her private and social life.[25] As a matter of fact, despite her efforts to understand and learn, and despite Davidôs patience, Dora is incapable of learning and practicing even some basic mathematical notions. She strives against numbers, which ñ*would not* add upò[26] causing her a painful headache, but she eventually surrenders and retreats to her *child-wife* comfortable condition which at this point appears to be her only safe refuge against the defeats of mature life. Nevertheless, even this compound noun does not really describe her since she proves to be only a child and never a wife, whose social status is given her only by her wedding ring and by the fact that she lives with her husband. As David admits to himself:

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23 Cf. M. Andrews, *op. cit.*, p. 143.
24 C. Dickens, *David Copperfield* cit., Ch. XLIV, p. 643.
25 Cf. M. Andrews, *op. cit.*, p. 144.
26 C. Dickens, *David Copperfield* cit., Ch. XLIV, p. 652.

> I did feel, sometimes, for a little while, that I could have wished my wife had been my counsellor; had had more character and purpose, to sustain me and improve me by; had been endowed with power to fill up the void which somewhere seemed to be about me; *but I felt as if this were an unearthly consummation of my happiness*, that never had been meant to be, and never could have been.
> [é] Thus it was that I took upon myself the toils and cares of our life, and had no partner in them. We lived much as before, in reference to our scrambling household arrangements [é] and Dora I was pleased to see was seldom vexed now. She was bright and cheerful in the old childish way, *loved me dearly*, and was happy with her old trifles.[27]

This passage shows how Doraôs childishness and immaturity do not fit marriage, yet it also underlines a fundamental feature of her characterisation. She has the capacity of dearly loving David, a gift which, according to Dickens, is of capital importance and which needs to be preserved in adulthood.

Although very young, Dora contracts a physical illness which keeps her in bed and eventually kills her. During her last days, Dora appears to be wiser than she used to, and one morning she tells David something unusual for her:

> ñI am going to speak to you, Doady. I am going to say something I have often thought of saying, lately. You wonôt mind?ò with a gentle look.
> ñMind, my darling?ò
> ñBecause I donôt know what you will think, or what you may have thought sometimes. Perhaps you have often thought the same. Doady, dear, *I am afraid I was too young*.ò[é]
> ñ*I am afraid, dear, I was too young. I donôt mean in years only, but in experience, and thoughts, and everything. I was such a silly creature! I am afraid it would have been better, if we had only loved each other as a boy and girl, and forgotten it. I have begun to think I was not fit to be a wife*.
> [é] But if I had been more fit to be married I might have made you more so, too. Besides, you are very clever, and I never was.ò
> ñWe have been very happy, my sweet Dora.ò
> ñI was very happy, very. But, as years went on, my dear boy would have wearied of his child-wife. She would have been less and less a companion for him. He would have been more and more sensible of what was wanting in his home. She wouldnôt have improved. It is better as it is.ò
> ñOh, Dora, dearest, dearest, do not speak to me so. Every word seems a reproach!ò
> ñNo, not a syllable!ò she answers, kissing me. ñOh, my dear, you never deserved it, and I loved you far too well to say a reproachful word to you, in earnest ï it was all merit I had, except being pretty ï or you thought me so. [é]ò[28]

In this last moving speech, it appears as if Dora had finally realised the lack of maturity which

[27] Cf. *Ibid.*, Ch. XXXVIII, pp. 563-564 [italics mine].
[28] Cf. *Ibid.*, Ch. LIII, pp. 772-773 [italics mine].

prevented her to be a good wife. Perhaps her illness which confined her in her room, gave her the necessary time to reflect upon her condition and such reflections led her to produce an awareness which until then was quite unimaginable in her. The fact that she was not ready for marriage, inexperienced and above of all not educated correctly to leave the protected house of her infancy, pushed her to assume the wrong attitude and manners during her life with David. Moreover, the faults for her being so childish are not to be traced only in Doraôs character, it is easily perceptible that all the characters who surround her are guilty of treating her as an eternal child who has to be protected from the dangers, sacrifices and disappointments of real life. Initially, both his fatherôs conduct and her education produce such an unfitting lack of firmness in her adulthood[29]; then comes her husband who, despite growing frustrated with her childish behaviour, accepts her as his *child-wife* as a parent accepts the whims of a spoilt daughter. Even the strong-minded aunt Betsey and the firm Miss Murdstone, who is for some time Doraôs confident, are won by her manners: the first treats her as a child as everybody else, the latter sometimes relents in her rigidity.

It can be assumed then that there is no *Bildung* for Dora and that only David, being the protagonist and the hero of the novel, will be able to reach maturity. Moreover, it can be affirmed that Dora is a perfect example of an unbalanced education: her imaginative faculties and her capacity for affection, which is even naïve sometimes, have been growing out of proportion, subduing completely her rational development, which has never achieved a higher level, precluding her the accomplishment of any task required by a married woman. In this Dora is very similar to Clara Copperfield. They both share a naïve and overwhelming love for those who surround them, but Dora is much more lucky than Clara, since she never experiences the pain and suffering of an unloving husband such as Mr Murdstone. They both seduce men who blindly love them, namely Mr Copperfield and David, and in their role as wives Dora and Clara are unable to manage their houses despite their husbandsô teachings.

[29] Cf. M. Andrews, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

Further and most essentially, they are both described as childish and their manners as pettish. However, even though they produce the same reactions in some characters (aunt Betsey, for instance, uses almost the same words to prevent Dora from crying that she used with Clara when they first met[30]) Doraôs childish features are much more emphasised and almost taken to the extreme. They are both destined to remain exactly as they are: under the strict regime of the Murdstones, Clara only superficially changes and adapts her personality to her second husbandôs requests; in the same way, when David tries to teach something to Dora or to speak rationally to her, she surrenders at the first difficulty and continues to be a *child-wife*.

Finally, both Dora and Clara are allowed to remain young forever. Claraôs death might contain a double significance: firstly, her death proves that to a certain extent the soul which is accustomed to indulging only in affections cannot be compelled to bear a strict tyranny of inflexibility and sternness; secondly, and this is implied in Doraôs death as well, her death proves that such individuals cannot possibly fit society and therefore they cannot survive. Hence, Clara's and Dora's illnesses might be considered as an expedient used by Dickens to demonstrate how fundamental a correct proportion between feeling and intellect is, to the extent that a radicalised disproportion of one of them might prove to be fatal:

> a loving heart without wisdom proves to be a disability. It kills Clara and Dora. [é]. The loving heart, unafraid of expressing itself openly is [é] associated with childhood and the childlike. The process of growing up, the acquisition of wisdom, firmness, self-discipline, respectability, involves developing a reserved character. Respectable adulthood is reserved, it learns to mask its feelings.[31]

Dora and Clara prove to be unable to learn the most important lesson David will learn, to correctly mask and control their feelings. Therefore, their hearts stay undisciplined, which means they were in an imbalanced relationship with the intellect. Their feelings stay unmasked and are not ruled by a sound wisdom[32].

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30 Cf. C. Dickens, *David Copperfield* cit., Ch. I, p. 17 and Ch. LII, p. 746.
31 M. Andrews, *op. cit*., p. 159.
32 Ivi.

Yet, it is essential to underline that both Clara and Dora share a characteristic which is extremely special and dear to Dickens (the same gift which belongs to characters such as aunt Betsey): they share the capacity of deeply and truly loving those who surround them (as displayed, for instance, in the moving scene of Doraôs death). This gift is successfully preserved in their adulthood both by David and Agnes, Davidôs second wife. They are able to prevent their hearts from being hardened. And that powerful source of the energy of feelings whose origin, according to Dickens, is to be traced back to the age of childhood is never extinguished in them.

Let us now focus our attention on the protagonist of Dickens's first *Bildungsroman*. It is right from the first recollections of his childhood that David begins to write his retrospective narrative. In the first chapters of the novel the reader encounters Clara Copperfield and Peggotty, Davidôs nurse, the two fundamental female characters in Davidôs infancy, and follows David's impressions of the world around him. Before the arrival of the Murdstones, David lives in a bliss of maternal love: as argued before, Clara is an extremely loving and sensitive character and Peggotty is the female character who, along with aunt Betsey, will always take care of him. It might be assumed therefore that this familiar harmony created by Peggottyôs and Claraôs great affection and attention is the origin of the good nature that characterises David throughout the whole novel. Moreover, Peggotty has an important role in the early education of David because she is the one who is always ready to answer Davidôs childish doubts and questions and who listens to him while reading from his books about crocodiles and alligators, therefore sharing these important moments with him.

David has an even deeper experience of affection, mutual help and sympathy when he first meets Peggottyôs heterogeneous family. Her brother, the bachelor Mr Peggotty, lives in a boat-house in Yarmouth, a house which might be considered as a homely refuge for unlucky souls, since he lives there with little Emôly and Ham, his niece and nephew who are both orphans and with Mrs Gummidge, an old widow who constantly complains about her misfortunes and

whose dead husband was Mr Peggottyôs partner on a boat. However, despite their misfortunes and losses, the members of this unusual family have been able to recreate a home of their own thanks to the great generosity of Mr Peggotty who, furthermore, will be able to save Emily from the shameful situation caused by Steerforth later in the novel, creating, once again, a new life for himself and his niece in Australia and comfortably arranging Mrs Gummidgeôs future.

The scenes and incidents described in the chapter of the novel devoted to Davidôs short permanence in Yarmouth are extremely important for the *Bildung* of the protagonist as they give him the first perspective of what it means to be struck by losses, injustices and misfortunes and to be able, however, not to turn mean and cruel, but to keep sympathy and generosity intact in oneôs own heart. Being deeply conscious of the strength belonging to the genuine and uncorrupted heart of a child, Dickens gives words to this sympathy and generosity through Emily who, in an exemplary way, tells David of her future hopes to become a lady and to be able to reward her family:

> [é] ñyour father was a gentleman and your mother is a lady; and my father was a fisherman and my mother was a fisherman's daughter, and my uncle Dan is a fisherman.ò
> ñDan is Mr. Peggotty, is he?ò said I.
> ñUncle Dan-yonder,ò answered Em'ly, nodding at the boat-house.
> ñYes. I mean him. He must be very good, I should think?'
> ñGood?ò said Em'ly. ñIf I was ever to be a lady, I'd give him a sky-blue coat with diamond buttons, nankeen trousers, a red velvet waistcoat, a cocked hat, a large gold watch, a silver pipe, and a box of money.ò
> I said I had no doubt that Mr. Peggotty well deserved these treasures. I must acknowledge that I felt it difficult to picture him quite at his ease in the raiment proposed for him by his grateful little niece, and that I was particularly doubtful of the policy of the cocked hat; but I kept these sentiments to myself.
> Little Em'ly had stopped and looked up at the sky in her enumeration of these articles, as if they were a glorious vision. We went on again, picking up shells and pebbles.
> ñYou would like to be a lady?ò I said.
> Emily looked at me, and laughed and nodded ñyesò.
> ñI should like it very much. We would all be gentlefolks together, then. Me, and uncle, and Ham, and Mrs. Gummidge. We wouldn't mind then, when there comes stormy weather.- Not for our own sakes, I mean. We would for the poor fishermen's, to be sure, and we'd help 'em with money when they come to any hurt.ò This seemed to me to be a very satisfactory and therefore not at all improbable picture. I expressed my pleasure in the contemplation of it, and little Em'ly was emboldened to say, shyly,
> ñDon't you think you are afraid of the sea, now?ò
> [é] I said ñNo,ò and I added, ñYou don't seem to be either, though you say you are,ò - for

> she was walking much too near the brink of a sort of old jetty or wooden causeway we had strolled upon, and I was afraid of her falling over.
> ñI'm not afraid in this way,ò said little Em'ly. ñBut I wake when it blows, and tremble to think of Uncle Dan and Ham and believe I hear 'em crying out for help. That's why I should like so much to be a lady. [é]ò [33]

In this passage not only does Emily express her gratefulness towards her uncle dreaming of material rewards to him, but she also explains that the reason why she wishes she would like to become a lady is to improve her family's conditions of life. She is the example of how it is possible to preserve hope, generosity and humanity in spite of misfortunes.

Another sound influence in Davidôs *Bildung* is his aunt Betsey Trotwood. Apparently she seems to be a rigid and severe character when she first appears at the beginning of the novel. The reader is informed that when Mr Copperfield married Clara, Betsey was ñmortally affronted [é] on the ground that my mother was óa wax dollôò[34] This disappointment of hers leads her not to meet her once favourite nephew any longer. Nevertheless, as soon as she meets Clara the day of Davidôs birth, the sweetness and gentle beauty of Clara win over Betseyôs sternness. When David seeks a refuge in her house at Dover after escaping from the factory in London in which he was forced to work by Mr Murdstone, David is not rejected by his aunt. He is welcomed, helped and above all he is released from the dreadful presence of the Murdstones thanks to aunt Betsey. She is fundamental in Davidôs cultivation of good and positive feelings and in his path towards the imposition of some discipline on his heart as she teaches him three important lessons. Miss Trotwood gives her nephew her first and probably most important piece of advice when she is taking leave from David who is going to live in Mr Wickfieldôs house in Canterbury. She tells him:

> 'Trot, [é] be credit to yourself, to me, and Mr Dick, and Heaven be with you! [é] *Never,* [é] *be mean in anything; never be false; never be cruel.* Avoid those three vices, Trot, and I can always be hopeful of you.'[35]

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33 C. Dickens, *David Copperfield* cit., Ch. III, pp. 47-48.
34 *Ibid.*, Ch. I, p. 15.
35 *Ibid.*, Ch. XV, p. 234 [italics mine].

While growing and facing the hardships and sufferings of life, David will try to a great extent to preserve his heart unpolluted bearing in mind his auntôs words. Later in the novel, as David has become a young man and has to start his professional career, he meets his aunt who has arrived in London to arrange his entrance into the DoctorsôCommons. During supper Betsey tells David:

> ôIt is in vain [é] to recall the past, unless it works any influence upon the present. Perhaps I might have been better friends with your poor father. Perhaps I might have been better friends with that poor child your mother, even after your sister Betsey Trotwood disappointed me.ô[é][36]

Here aunt Betsey is talking about some strong regrets she feels about her past. However, if the first sentence of the quotation is read in isolation from the context, it is clear that this is the second lesson David learns from his aunt. Davidôs ability to learn from the mistakes of the past in order to make better choices in the present, is better displayed at the end of the novel when he eventually realises that Agnes, Mr Wickfieldôs daughter who David met in his childhood, is his real kindred soul and it is exactly from the mistakes of his past infatuation for and marriage with Dora that he is able to comprehend that his future is with the woman who has always been his best confident and friend. Actually, aunt Betsey had tried to warn David against the immaturity of his marriage with Dora:

> óAh, Trot!ô said my aunt, shaking her head, and smiling gravely; óBlind, blind, blind!ô[é] and without knowing why, I felt a vague unhappy loss or want of something overshadow me like a cloud.[37]

The words ñBlind, blind, blind!ò will haunt Davidôs thoughts for a long span of time as he comes to realise by degrees that his marriage with Dora will be unhappy. Nevertheless, the experience of the failure of his marriage helps him to recover from his blindness and to

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[36] *Ibid*., Ch. XXIII, p. 356. Davidôs aunt refers to Betsey Trotwood which was supposed to be the name of Clara and Mr Copperfieldôs child if she had been a girl. In the first chapter aunt Betsey is extremely disappointed by the fact that David is not a girl and cannot be named after her.

[37] *Ibid*., Ch. XXXV, pp. 509-510.

restore his clear sight to fully understand that, in his manhood, he needs a ñcounsellor, a guide, an intellectual companion; in short [that] he must settle for Agnesò[38] because, as Dickens cleverly points out through the mouth of Anne Strong, ñthere can be no disparity in marriage like unsuitability of mind and purpose.ò[39] In the process of his *Bildung*, David also encounters negative and mean characters. The Murdstones are the first negative figures in the novel. As argued before, their trying to bend Claraôs will finally kills her. Nevertheless, their influence upon David is not so fatal as upon his mother because he is able to find the correct means and solutions to prevent them from bending him as well. After the marriage between Clara and Mr Murdstone, he and his sister take the charge of David's education. Yet their method is completely wrong and unsuccessful with David as it is based on the mere capacity of the boy of remembering notions. In fact, David learns nothing, becomes ñsullen, dull, and doggedò[40] and is only saved by his fatherôs books:

> [é]I should have been almost stupefied but for one circumstance. [é] My father had left a small collection of books in a little room upstairs, to which I had access (for it adjoined my own) and which nobody else in our house ever troubled. From that blessed little room, Roderick Random, Peregrine Pickle, Humphrey Clinker, Tom Jones, the Vicar of Wakefield, Don Quixote, Gil Blas, and Robinson Crusoe, came out, a glorious host, to keep me company. *They kept alive my fancy, and my hope of something beyond that place and time*, -they, and the Arabian Nights, and the Tales of the Genii,- and did me no harm; for whatever harm was in some of them was not there for me; I knew nothing of it. It is astonishing to me now, how I found time, in the midst of my porings and blunderings over heavier themes, to read those books as I did. It is curious to me how I could ever have consoled myself under my small troubles (which were great troubles to me), by impersonating my favourite characters in them -as I did- and by putting Mr. and Miss Murdstone into all the bad ones- which I did too. I have been Tom Jones (a child's Tom Jones, a harmless creature) for a week together. I have sustained my own idea of Roderick Random for a month at a stretch, I verily believe. I had a greedy relish for a few volumes of Voyages and Travels -I forget what, now- that were on those shelves [é]. *This was my only and my constant comfort*. When I think of it, the picture always rises in my mind, of a summer evening, the boys at play in the churchyard, and I sitting on my bed, reading as if for life. Every barn in the neighbourhood, every stone in the church, and every foot of the churchyard, had some association of its own, in my mind, connected with these books, and stood for some locality made famous in them.[41]

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38 V. M. Bell, *The Emotional Matrix of David Copperfield*, [1968], in ñStudies in English Literature, 1500-1900ò, Vol. 8, No. 4, pp. 633-649, p. 634.

39 C. Dickens, *David Copperfield* cit., Ch. XLV, p. 668.

40 *Ibid.*, Ch. IV, p. 66.

41 *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67 [italics mine].

Books are the first means of escape for David and they have such a strong power upon his young mind that they manage to help him by developing his imagination, accordingly protecting him against the awful measures of the Murdstones. Not only do his father's books keep David's imagination alive, but they also bring him solace and hope. Through the episode of the reading of the books belonging to Davidôs father, Dickens shows how fundamental it is to develop the imaginative faculties of the young mind of a child through reading and to preserve them in adult life. Dickens was not the only nineteenth-century British intellectual who acknowledged the capital importance of reading as a means of both intellectual and moral self-development. In 1865 a small volume by John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, was published with the two lectures on the importance of reading he delivered in 1864. The first lecture, entitled *Sesame ï Of Kings' Treasuries*, is devoted to male education and here Ruskin explains how, according to him, great treasures are hidden in books. According to Ruskin, the author conveys through his book a message which is true, useful and helpful to the reader:

> A book is essentially not a talking thing, but a written thing; and written, not with a view of mere communication, but of permanence. [é] a book is written, not to multiply the voice merely, not to carry it merely, but to perpetuate it. The author has something to say which he perceives to be true and useful, or helpfully beautiful.[42]

Although Ruskin and Dickens find different functions in the experience of reading, it can be argued from this quotation that both authors defend reading as an instrument of self-improvement. For Dickens, on the one hand, reading enriches both the mind and the soul with new possibilities and perspectives, increasingly filling the mind with wisdom and the soul with feelings. On the other hand, according to Ruskin, the reader can find in the words of the author a message which is ñhelpfully beautifulò. In Davidôs case, the experience of reading his fatherôs novels does help him to find some solace from his fears of the Murdstones by identifying himself with the heroes who fight against the villains, portrayed in his imagination

[42] J. Ruskin, Lecture I: *Sesame ï Of Kings' Treasuries*, in *Sesame and Lilies*, [1865], in *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E.T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, London, George Allen, 1905, 39 Vols., Vol. 18, pp. 53-108, p. 61.

as the Murdstones, who are eventually defeated. The power of Davidôs imagination gives him the courage not to surrender under the rigid and insensitive manners of his step-father as his mother did. It might be assumed that the books of Davidôs father are, along with the good examples and pieces of advice he finds in characters such as Peggotty and his aunt Betsey, the shields which protect his loving heart from future attacks, mistreatments, cruelties and injustices.

As for David's response to the negative characters in the novel, it is worthwhile to report what Franco Moretti says about the English *Bildungsroman*. Moretti affirms that the first impressions of the protagonists, which are developed during their childhood, are always preserved and believed to be true despite experience: ñ[é] nel romanzo inglese le esperienze più significative non sono quelle che alterano, ma quelle che *confermano* le scelte compiute dallô óinnocenzaô infantile.ò[43] This what happens to David when he discovers the manipulations of Uriah Heep and James Steerforth. In their first encounter, David is immediately aware of the meanness and falseness which characterises Heep. David describes the eyes of Mr Wickfieldôs business partner as sleepless and similar to two red suns, furthermore he is pale-faced, he keeps repeating that he and his mother are extremely humble people and in order to show this he usually bends obsequiously while talking. In this case, Davidôs first impression of Uriah Heep is completely correct and will be confirmed by his later experience of the pure evil character of Heep, who will ruin Mr Wickfield, rob Miss Trotwood and try to marry Agnes. However, this issue about Davidôs first impressions becomes more difficult to handle when it refers to a character who is not as purely evil as Heep. It might be claimed that James Steerforth is characterised by two personalities: on the one hand, his good side appears when he protects David from the abuses of his schoolmates at Salem House, on the other, his evil and opposite side appears when he seduces Emily and

[43] F. Moretti, *op cit.*, p. 202.

leaves with her. At Salem House Steerforth convinces David to spend his money on some items he can later share with his roommates. Steerforth manages to do so through his natural capacity of seducing and charming, as a matter of fact David recalls one night:

> I heard that Miss Creakle was regarded by the school in general as being in love with Steerforth; and I am sure, as I sat in the dark, thinking of his nice voice, and his fine face, and his easy manner, and his curling hair, I thought it very likely. [é]
>
> 'Good night, young Copperfield,' said Steerforth. 'I'll take care of you.' 'You're very kind,' I gratefully returned. 'I am very much obliged to you.' [...]
>
> 'Good night, sir,' I replied.
>
> I thought of him very much after I went to bed, and raised myself, I recollect, to look at him where he lay in the moonlight, with his handsome face turned up, and his head reclining easily on his arm. He was a person of great power in my eyes; that was, of course, the reason of my mind running on him. No veiled future dimly glanced upon him in the moonbeams. There was no shadowy picture of his footsteps, in the garden that I dreamed of walking in all night.[44]

David is charmed by Steerforth and describes him as a fascinating character, moreover, he makes two references to his weakness for girls, anticipating and hinting at what will happen later. In the second half of the novel, Davidôs protector seduces Emily. However, when Steerforth is found dead after a shipwreck, David does not rage against all the sufferings caused to his friend by his bad conduct; on the contrary, David wants to remember him at his best[45] and after Steerforthôs death he says:

> What is natural in me, is natural in many other men, I infer, and so I am not afraid to write that I never had loved Steerforth better than when the ties that bound me to him were broken. In the keen distress of the discovery of his unworthiness, I thought more of all that was brilliant in him, I softened more towards all that was good in him, I did more justice to the qualities that might have made him a man of a noble nature and a great name, than ever I had done in the height of my devotion to him. Deeply as I felt my own unconscious part in his pollution of an honest home, I believed that if I had been brought face to face with him, I could not have uttered one reproach. I should have loved him so well still -though he fascinated me no longer -I should have held in so much tenderness the memory of my affection for him, that I think I should have been as weak as a spirit-wounded child, in all but the entertainment of a thought that we could ever be re-united. That thought I never had. I felt, as he had felt, that all was at an end between us. What his remembrances of me were, I have never known -they were light enough, perhaps, and easily dismissed -but mine

[44] C. Dickens, *David Copperfield* cit., Ch. VI, pp. 98-99.
[45] Cf . *Ibid*., Ch. LVI, p. 801.

of him were as the remembrances of a cherished friend, who was dead.[46]

Even while facing this terrible disappointment David is able to preserve in his mind the image of the Steerforth who protected him at Salem House. There are two possible explanations: on the one hand, his affection towards Steerforth is so strong that it prevents him from feeling hatred for his friend and Dickens wanted the hero of his story to be totally good. Maintaining Davidôs character coherent with this characterisation, it might be claimed that Dickens makes his protagonist less realistic as his humanity and sympathy might appear rather exaggerated. Since David's description of Steerforth at Salem House, David does not appear to be fully aware of this side of his friend at first, and when he has to face it directly, his reaction might be considered unexpected and perhaps even unnatural. On the other hand, the description of the dead body of Steerforth matches with Davidôs memory of his friend sleeping at Salem House, a memory belonging to the period in which the protagonist knew the best part of Steerforth, that is to say, his sincere friendship and affection which created the bound between the two boys. Therefore, it is possible that Dickens wanted to remind the reader that Steerforth was capable of affection and love, and that the terrible episode of Emilyôs seduction does not succeed in drying up Davidôs affection towards his old friend.

In conclusion, both the formal and domestic education of David are rather unusual and irregular since he neither has parents who can take care of his domestic upbringing, nor is he given the possibility to attend school regularly. Nevertheless, if on the one hand his education is considerably uncommon, on the other David encounters many remarkable teachers and counsellors who fill the void left by the lack of a traditional education. It is from characters such as Peggotty, Mr Peggotty, little Emily and above all Aunt Betsey that David learns that despite sufferings and injustices, it is possible for him to prevent his heart from erasing human sympathy, generosity and affection. It can be claimed that in David the two sides of the

[46] *Ibid.*, Ch. XXXII, pp. 461-462.

human being, the intellectual faculties and the capacity for affection, are perfectly balanced together, therefore in his adulthood, David preserves his humanity and sympathy despite the mistreatments, injustices and terrible losses he had to face since his early childhood, both growing wiser and preserving that capacity of loving which was the greatest of his mother's gifts. Furthermore, David eventually succeeds in imposing some discipline upon his undisciplined heart which pushed him to ñhis most serious mistaken impulse[:] his immediate and complete commitment to Dora, at the first sight of whom he feels his fate sealed forever.ò[47] As a matter of fact, at the end of the novel David finally realises that Agnes, the patient and sensible young woman who has always been in love with him, is his real kindred soul:

> she is both the clear-eyed understanding for which he has always groped and the unselfish fortitude to give his sensibilities purpose and direction. In marriage to Agnes, David achieves the integration of personality to which the hero of the novel of youth typically aspires.[48]

[47] J. H. Buckley, *Season of Youth: the Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding*, London, Harvard University Press, 1975, p. 39.

[48] *Ibid.*, p. 42.

1.2 *Great Expectations*

Great Expectations was published between 1860 and 1861, ten years after the publication of *David Copperfield*. As *David Copperfield*, it is a novel belonging to the genre of the *Bildungsroman*, hence, also in *Great Expectations* education is of primal importance for the *Bildung* of the protagonist. Yet, in this novel Dickens deals not only with the difficult achievement of maturity of the protagonist, but also with the evil and insidious forces which might preclude and frustrate his *Bildung*.[49]

Pip is an orphan child, the only thing which reminds him of his parents and five little brothers is their tombstones from which he tries to draw their physical appearance:

> As I never saw my father or my mother, and saw any likeness of either of them [é] my first fancies regarding what they were like, were unreasonably derived from their tombstones. The shape of the letters of my fatherôs, gave me an odd idea that he was a square, stout, dark man, with curly black hair. From the character and turn of the inscription, "*Also Georgiana Wife of the Above*," I drew a childish conclusion that my mother was freckled and sickly. To five little stone lozenges, each about a foot and a half long, which were arranged in a neat row beside their grave, and were sacred to the memory of five little brothers of mine, -who gave up trying to get a living, exceedingly early in that universal struggle [é].[50]

Therefore, Pipôs family and roots are all buried in the churchyard near the marshes. The first description Pip gives of himself follows the bleak tone of the image of his familyôs tombstones: ñthe small bundle of shivers growing afraid of it all and beginning to cry, was Pip.ò[51] Having no family, he lives with his supposedly eldest sister, Mrs Gargery, and her husband, Joe, who are two opposite characters. While she is blaming, ever-complaining, rigid, impolite, unable to express any form of affection towards her family, Joe might be instead defined as a sort of good giant, a child-like blacksmith who deeply and truly loves Pip whom Joe treats as an equal, not as an inferior as Mrs Gargery does. Moreover, Joeôs affection for

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49 Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.
50 C. Dickens, *Great Expectations*, [1860-61], ed. C. Mitchell, London, Penguin, 2003, Ch. I, p. 3.
51 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Pip is displayed through small but significant details, as when he shows his astonishing and supporting pride in Pipôs poor way of reading. Many of the adult characters who appear at the beginning of the novel are much more similar to Mrs Gargery rather than Joe. Mr Wopsle, the clerk at church, Mr Hubble, the wheelwright and Uncle Pumblechook always find a reason to reproach and vex Pip who is considered not to be grateful enough towards his sister who devoted herself to bring him up ñby handò[52]. In this situation of thorough injustice therefore, Pip cannot find any peace of mind except for the moments spent in the kitchen with Joe, his ñfellow-suffererò whom Pip considers as ña larger species of child, [é] and more than my equal.ò[53] This description of Joe shows the character in his own essence, a good-natured, kind-hearted and mild blacksmith who has preserved his child-like qualities in his adulthood.

The dark atmosphere of the first chapter is suddenly intensified by the appearance of a fearful and dreadful man, a convict just escaped from the Hulks[54] who obliges Pip to steal a file from Joeôs forge in order to cut the chains around his feet. In accomplishing this dangerous task Pip feels both terrified by the possible consequences if his mission fails and extremely guilty towards Joe for robbing from his forge thus betraying his only friend. Nonetheless, in this case fear is more powerful than scruple and Pip brings the file and a discreet amount of food to the convict the next morning at dawn. When the convict receives the unrequested food his attitude towards Pip changes completely, namely he stops frightening and threatening Pip and begins calling him ñmy boyò and ñmy friendò[55]. This kind act of the boy who brought the convict unrequested food is the episode which gives start to the plot of *Great Expectations* as Magwitch, the runaway convict, will reveal himself as the real benefactor of Pipôs future large fortune. Accordingly, with the only exception of Joe and the escaped prisoner, Pip is unfairly tormented by the characters who should protect him, namely his sister and Uncle

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52 *Ibid.*, Ch. II, p. 7.

53 *Ibid.*, p. 9.

54 As reported in the notes to volume I of *Great Expectations* cit., the hulks were dismantled ships unfit for service moored in the Thames off Woolwich and at other ports around Britain and used to provide extra prison accommodation.

55 *Ibid.*, Ch. III, pp. 19 and 20.

Pumblechook who, at Christmas dinner, which should be one of the most cherished celebrations for children, compare Pip to a pig, believe that he is a mere trouble for his sister and look at him with indignation and abhorrence[56].

However, the mistreatments and abuses to which Pip is subjected does not delete the kindness and generosity of his innocent heart. In fact, Pip's humanity is almost completely spoiled by a peculiar encounter. Pip is introduced by Uncle Pumblechook to Miss Havisham, an aristocratic lady who spends a secluded life in her manor called Satis House. She allows few people to visit her and the only figure who shares the isolated life she leads is her adopted daughter Estella. Miss Havisham has a sorrowful and gloomy past as she was abandoned by her fiancé the day of their marriage. Accordingly, this wound led her to refuse life and to stop the flow of time in her house at twenty minutes to nine, the moment in which she was abandoned. For this reason the rooms of Satis House are still arranged for her wedding day. However, as the effects of time cannot be prevented, her wedding dress, the banquet and the whole house in general appear as symbols of complete decay. Not only is the house in complete ruin, but also Miss Havisham herself, who has been wearing her wedding dress since the day of her marriage, is the embodiment of decay:

> I saw that everything within my view which ought to be white, had been white long ago, and had lost its lustre and was faded and yellow. I saw that the bride within the bridal dress had withered like the dress, and like the flowers, and had no brightness left but the brightness of her sunken eyes. I saw that the dress had been put upon the rounded figure of a young woman, and that the figure upon which it now hung loose had shrunk to skin and bone.[57]

The disappointment caused by her fiancéôs refusal was such to erase in Miss Havisham any sort of emotion by replacing her feelings with cold calculations, manipulations and ñsick fanciesò[58]. As a matter of fact, since her wedding day, Miss Havishamôs aim in life is to make as many men as she can suffer by projecting and venting on them all her frustrated hate, and

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56 Cf. *Ibid.*, Ch. IV, pp. 26-28.
57 *Ibid.*, Ch. VIII, p. 58.
58 *Ibid.*, p. 59.

Estella is the means through which she wants to take her revenge against men. Her adopted daughter, therefore, has been educated since her early childhood to be, as G. B. Shaw wrote, a ñborn tormentorò characterised by ña cold disdainò[59] aimed at producing misery in other people, the same misery Miss Havisham has been experiencing since the day of her marriage. When Pip is introduced to Miss Havisham and her house he immediately notices that there everything is in decay and he is struck by the fact that daylight is completely excluded from the rooms in which she lives, the proof that she has excluded everything in her life except what she needs for her final aim. When Pip encounters Estella he is requested to play cards with her while Miss Havisham watches them. During their first meeting Estella shows her total disdain for her guest calling him ña stupid, clumsy labouring boyò.[60] Since this moment and because of Estella's scornful words a great change takes place in Pipôs soul. As Pip and Estellaôs card play is over, Pip is asked to visit Miss Havisham again the following week and is led outside by Estella:

> I took the opportunity of being alone in the courtyard to look at my coarse hands and my common boots. My opinion of those accessories was not favourable. They had never troubled me before, but they troubled me now, as vulgar appendages [...]. I wished Joe had been rather more genteelly brought up, and then I should have been so too. [Estella] came back, with some bread and meat and a little mug of beer. She put the mug down on the stones of the yard, and gave me the bread and meat without looking at me, as insolently as if I were a dog in disgrace. I was so humiliated, hurt, spurned, offended, angry, sorry, -I cannot hit upon the right name for the smart -God knows what its name was, -that tears started to my eyes.[61]

For the first time Pip is ashamed of his own appearance, of his ignorance and of his humble origins finding the cause of all his present miseries in Joeôs status. This might be considered Pipôs first mistaken judgement: he does not blame Estella for her disdainful behaviour towards him, but scorns instead Joeôs simple roots and social condition because he is their product. Furthermore, if on the one hand Joe is the cause of Pipôs present miserable condition,

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[59] G. B. Shaw, *Preface* to *Great Expectations*, in *The Complete Prefaces 1930-1950*, ed. D. H. Laurence and D. J. Leary, London, Penguin, 1997, 3 Vols., Vol. 3, pp. 300-313, p. 311.

[60] C. Dickens, *Great Expectations* cit., Ch. VIII, p. 61.

[61] *Ibid.*, p. 62.

on the other, his sisterôs methods of bringing him up are the cause of his overdeveloped sensitivity:

> My sister's bringing up had made me sensitive. In the little world in which children have their existence whosoever brings them up, there is nothing so finely perceived and so finely felt as injustice. It may be only small injustice that the child can be exposed to; but the child is small, and its world is small, and its rocking-horse stands as many hands high, according to scale, as a big-boned Irish hunter. Within myself, I had sustained, from my babyhood, a perpetual conflict with injustice. I had known, from the time when I could speak, that my sister, in her capricious and violent coercion, was unjust to me.[...] Through all my punishments, disgraces, fasts, and vigils, and other penitential performances, I had nursed this assurance; and to my communing so much with it, in a solitary and unprotected way, I in great part refer the fact that I was morally timid and very sensitive.[62]

In this passage Pip traces back the origins of his sensitivity to his sister's way of bringing him up. Because of her unfair punishments and reproaches Pip developed a particular awareness towards injustice. Therefore, he is perfectly aware that Estellaôs behaviour towards him is unfair, however, according to him, this is not because of Estellaôs proud and scornful nature but because he is a common boy. As a matter of fact, Pipôs evaluation of his sister's unfairness is correct, yet he appears unable to correctly evaluate Joeôs merits in his upbringing, namely his unconditioned love and support. Furthermore, in his mistaken evaluation of Estella's disdainful behaviour towards him, Pip cannot rely on a wise and protecting figure such as aunt Betsey who can warn him against his mistakes. On the contrary, he is influenced and pushed in the wrong direction by Miss Havisham whose only goal is to increase Pip's sufferings. Despite Estellaôs behaviour, after his first visit at Satis House Pip is charmed by Miss Havisham and falls in love with the beautiful but cruel Estella and since then his childish generosity and humanity will be overshadowed by his great expectations.

Before the acquaintance with Miss Havisham and Estella, Pipôs original expectation was to follow in Joeôs footsteps first becoming his apprentice and then an honest blacksmith. Miss Havisham knows from Pip himself that he wants to become Joeôs apprentice therefore she decides to help him, although Pip has already begun to change his mind about his future,

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[62] *Ibid.*, Ch. VIII, p. 63.

namely his hopes to become Joe's apprentice have been replaced by the new hope to become uncommon in order to be loved by Estella. The scene of Miss Havisham and Joeôs meeting at Satis House to arrange Pipôs apprenticeship shares many similarities and a fundamental difference with a particular episode in *David Copperfield*. David remembers that while approaching the house of Doraôs aunts he felt ashamed of his greatest friendôs hair:

> Excellent fellow as I knew Traddles to be, and warmly attached to him as I was, I could not help wishing, on that delicate occasion, that he had never contracted the habit of brushing his hair so very upright. It gave him a surprised look -not to say a hearth-broomy kind of expression- which, my apprehensions whispered, might be fatal to us.
> I took the liberty of mentioning it to Traddles, as we were walking to Putney; and saying that if he WOULD smooth it down a little-
> 'My dear Copperfield,' said Traddles, lifting off his hat, and rubbing his hair all kinds of ways, 'nothing would give me greater pleasure. But it won't.'
> 'Won't be smoothed down?' said I.
> 'No,' said Traddles. 'Nothing will induce it. If I was to carry a half-hundred-weight upon it, all the way to Putney, it would be up again the moment the weight was taken off. You have no idea what obstinate hair mine is, Copperfield. I am quite a fretful porcupine.'
> *I was a little disappointed, I must confess, but thoroughly charmed by his good-nature too. I told him how I esteemed his good-nature; and said that his hair must have taken all the obstinacy out of his character, for he had none.*[63]

Whereas in *Great Expectations*:

> "Have you brought his indentures with you?" asked Miss Havisham.
> "Well, Pip, you know," replied Joe, as if that were a little unreasonable, "you yourself see me put 'em in my 'at, and therefore you know as they are here." With which he took them out, and gave them, not to Miss Havisham, but to me. *I am afraid I was ashamed of the dear good fellow ,-I know I was ashamed of him,- when I saw that Estella stood at the back of Miss Havisham's chair, and that her eyes laughed mischievously*.[64]

Both David and Pip are ashamed of somebody who is extremely dear to them. Because they are both concerned with the possible negative judgement of the characters they are meeting they both behave as snobs. Nevertheless, Davidôs shame of Traddlesôs hair is counterbalanced to a great extent by the charm of Traddlesôs good-natured and sincere answer which turns Davidôs reproach into a friendly compliment. On the other hand, Pip is not won by his affection towards Joe but he is bewitched by Estellaôs mischievous eyes. Pipôs snobbish vein

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63 C. Dickens, *David Copperfield* cit., Ch. XLI, p. 597 [italics mine].
64 C. Dickens, *Great Expectations* cit., Ch. XIII, p. 101 [italics mine].

is far stronger than Davidôs, as a matter of fact Davidôs shame lasts only for a brief moment, whereas Pip continues to be ashamed of Joe for a long time after this episode, also extending this feeling to everything that belongs to his home and humble origins. Later on during his apprenticeship at Joe's forge, Pip is informed that the day of his coming of age he will come into a large sum of money thanks to a benefactor whose identity must remain unknown. In Pip's imagination the identity of his benefactor is mistakenly attributed to Miss Havisham: Pip supposes that she wants him to move to London to be educated as a gentleman in order to marry Estella. Yet, when Joe is going to visit him in London, Pipôs attitude has not changed since he arrived in the great metropolis because once more he feels ashamed of Joeôs manners and appearance which do not fit properly the society he meets.

So far, Pipôs *Bildung* has evolved around a fundamental pivot. Initially he is an orphan child who has to cope with the injustices and abuses committed by adult characters who were supposed to protect him, yet he can still rely on the positive example of Joeôs humanity. However, his encounter with Miss Havisham and Estella, two characters who are represented in complete opposition to human sympathy, is the starting point of Pipôs snobbish ambition. Pip soon develops

> [é] an excessive respect for the power of money [...]. He loves against all reason a proud beauty who never can or will reciprocate his affection. [é] Pipôs vanity and wilful self-delusion echo a fierce pride tempered by a stronger imagination. And his restless ambition dimly mirrors a more alarming, because unremitting and ultimately self-destructive, energy.[65]

If Pipôs ambition negatively degenerates into snobism, nevertheless he still possesses, as Buckley states, a form of energy and the capacity of imagination which, despite being dangerously self-destructive, prove that his heart has not dried up yet. Therefore, it can be claimed that Pip and David share the characteristic of possessing an undisciplined heart. Yet:

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[65] J. H. Buckley, *op. cit*., pp. 45-46.

> Though the young David has to learn the value of the undisciplined heart, he commands a large measure of sympathy from the beginning [...]. He is essentially kind and good. A gentleman by nature and without deliberate effort. Pip [é] has a more complex development to describe, a conquest of selfish pride and self-delusion, snobbery, hypocrisy, and timorous feelings of guilt.[66]

Pipôs heart is not only undisciplined, but also misled by a series of negative values which prevent him from being a real ñgentleman by natureò as David. Estella, ñthe born tormentorò as described by Shaw, is the chief agent of Pipôs degenerated ambition. Being educated since her early childhood to be the cause of menôs sufferings, she is the product of Miss Havishamôs vengeful intentions, who has stolen ñher heart away and put ice in its place.ò[67] She possesses an incredible, almost bewitching power over the young protagonist throughout the novel. As a matter of fact, anytime they meet Pip's original and frustrating feeling of being common continuously emerges in him, yet, although she arouses such negative feelings, the blinding infatuation he feels for her is so powerful that he admits that he loves her ñagainst reason, against promise, against peace, against hope, against happiness, against all discouragement that could be.ò[68] Because of Miss Havishamôs education Estellaôs heart is a mere organ meant to grant her survival, therefore it has no tenderness, no human feelings, no humanity[69] and, as a consequence, she is to be loved and incapable of loving, only possessing the notion of feelings but never feeling any:

> "It seems," said Estella, very calmly, "that there are sentiments, fancies, -I don't know how to call them,- which I am not able to comprehend. *When you say you love me, I know what you mean, as a form of words; but nothing more. You address nothing in my breast, you touch nothing there*. I don't care for what you say at all.[é]"[70]

Estella is never affected or touched by any kind of emotion, she is only aware of the existence of feelings, but she has never experienced any of them. Emotions exist only in the theoretical

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66 *Ibid.*, p. 53.
67 C. Dickens, *Great Expectations* cit., Ch. XL, p. 399.
68 *Ibid.*, Ch. XXIX, p. 232.
69 Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 237.
70 *Ibid.*, Ch. XLIV, p. 362 [italics mine].

forms of words for her, but they completely lack any meaning or sense which is exactly how Miss Havisham had meant her to be. It can be argued, therefore, that Miss Havisham and Estella manage to spoil almost completely Pipôs generosity and humanity.

Let us now focus our attention on the good characters of *Great Expectations.* As argued before, Joe Gargery is the first character who has a positive influence in Pip's *Bildung*, yet he is not the only example of humanity and kindness in the novel. As Pip settles in London he discovers that Herbert Pocket is the same boy who once challenged him to fight at Satis House when they were children. During their second encounter, Pip's vein of superiority leads him once again to pass a mistaken judgement. As a matter of fact he describes Herbert as a character who

> [é] had a frank and easy way with him that was very taking. I had never seen any one then, and I have never seen any one since, who more strongly expressed to me, in every look and tone, a natural incapacity to do anything secret and mean. There was something wonderfully hopeful about his general air, and *something that at the same time whispered to me he would never be very successful or rich*.[71]

Pip is aware that Herbert has many positive characteristics, namely his frankness and his incapacity of being mean or false, yet something in Herbert suggest that he has no possibility to be successful in life. However, although Herbert's manners and features suggest that he has no possibility to have a successful career, Pip does not feel ashamed of Herbert because he does not belong to a humble family. Therefore, the sense of superiority in Pip does not prevent him from befriending Herbert whom soon becomes his ñintimate companion and friendò[72] and they begin to spend a life rather above their means. Their increasing debts produce a sense of guilt in Pip who decides to help his friend by employing a part of his fortune in Herbert's behalf:

> [...] because he was my young companion and friend, and I had a great affection for him, I wished my own good fortune to reflect some rays upon him, and therefore I sought advice

[71] *Ibid.*, Ch. XXII, pp. 176-177 [italics mine].
[72] *Ibid.*, Ch. XXV, p. 203.

> from Wemmick's experience and knowledge of men and affairs, how I could best try with my resources to help Herbert to some present income, -say of a hundred a year, to keep him in good hope and heart, -and gradually to buy him on to some small partnership.[73]

This can be considered Pipôs first act of generosity and kindness after the early episode in which he brought food to the escaped convict. It might be assumed that Herbertôs friendship is the key element which begins softening Pipôs heart who is now able to feel grateful towards the real gentleman by nature who first showed him affection and support when Pip arrived in London. Furthermore, Herbert states a truth which is fundamental in Pip's *Bildung*: Herbert quotes his father's principle according to which ñno man who was not a true gentleman at heart, ever was, since the world began, a true gentleman in mannerò[74]. Therefore, through the generous act of helping Herbert, Pip behaves kindly for the first time after his childhood, and more importantly, he behaves according to the definition of the true gentleman stated by Herbert's father.

Nevertheless, Pipôs heart is not fully released from snobbery and vanity yet. At the age of twenty-three Pip eventually discovers that his real benefactor is not Miss Havisham, as he mistakenly supposed, but Magwitch who worked extremely hard in order to grant Pip an education and to enable him to become a gentleman as a reward for that small and unrequested act of generosity when Magwitch had just run away from the Hulks. Pip is overwhelmed by the revelation of the fact that his fortune does not derive from the aristocratic lady, but from the wretched escaped convict who earned his money by working as a sheep-farmer, a stock-breeder and other trades in Australia. As a consequence, Pip reacts to Magwitchôs words with abhorrence:

> All the truth of my position came flashing on me; and its disappointments, dangers, disgraces, consequences of all kinds, rushed in such a multitude that I was borne down by them and had to struggle for every breath I drew.[é]
> The abhorrence in which I held the man, the dread I had of him, the repugnance with which I shrank from him, could not have been exceeded if he had been some terrible beast.[é]

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73 *Ibid.*, Ch. XXXVII, p. 295.
74 *Ibid.*, Ch. XXII, p. 185.

> Nothing was needed but this; the wretched man, after loading wretched me with his gold and silver chains for years, had risked his life to come to me, and I held it there in my keeping! If I had loved him instead of abhorring him; if I had been attracted to him by the strongest admiration and affection, instead of shrinking from him with the strongest repugnance; it could have been no worse. On the contrary, it would have been better, for his preservation would then have naturally and tenderly addressed my heart.
> My first care was to close the shutters, so that no light might be seen from without, and then to close and make fast the doors.[75]

This resentment towards the nature of Pipôs fortune is due to Estellaôs influence upon the protagonist. As Magwitch confesses that nobody else contributed in helping him earn his fortune, Pip realises that Miss Havisham is not his real benefactor as he supposed and accordingly, he finally understands that he was not originally meant to become a gentleman in order to marry Estella. As a result, his great expectations are completely destroyed.

If Joe and Herbert have fundamental and positive influence on Pip, Magwitchôs return is the essential turning point in the protagonist's *Bildung* because his ñregeneration begins when his fear of Magwitch becomes a fear for Magwitchò[76]: thanks to the convictôs generosity and unrepressed affection, Pip gradually begins to feel grateful towards him and when Magwitch risks being imprisoned he organises his difficult escape from England. Yet, their journey is unsuccessful and they are forced to come back to London where Magwitch is arrested. Furthermore, the convict is severely injured during a fight in which he kills Compayson, Miss Havishamôs fiancé who abandoned her the day of their marriage. Therefore, because of his severe injuries Magwitch has to lay in the prison infirmary where Pip constantly pays him visits. During the time they spend together, Pip's changed attitude is most apparent:

> [é] he was ever ready to listen to me; and it became *the first duty of my life* to say to him, and read to him, what I knew he ought to hear.
> [é]The kind of submission or resignation that he showed was that of a man who was tired out. I sometimes derived an impression, from his manner or from a whispered word or two which escaped him, that he pondered over the question whether he might have been a better man under better circumstances. But he never justified himself by a hint tending that way, or tried to bend the past out of its eternal shape.
> It happened on two or three occasions in my presence, that his desperate reputation was alluded to by one or other of the people in attendance on him. A smile crossed his face then,

[75] *Ibid.*, Ch. XXXIX, pp. 319-323.
[76] J. H. Buckley, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

> and he turned his eyes on me with a trustful look, as if he were confident that I had seen some small redeeming touch in him, even so long ago as when I was a little child. As to all the rest, he was humble and contrite, and I never knew him complain.
> [é]The trial came on at once, and, when he was put to the bar, he was seated in a chair. No objection was made to my getting close to the dock, on the outside of it, and holding the hand that he stretched forth to me.[77]

And this is the conclusion of Magwitch's brief trial:

> His eyes were turned towards the door, and lighted up as I entered.
> "Dear boy," he said, as I sat down by his bed: "I thought you was late. But I knowed you couldn't be that."
> "It is just the time," said I. "I waited for it at the gate."
> "You always waits at the gate; don't you, dear boy?"
> "Yes. Not to lose a moment of the time."
> "Thank'ee dear boy, thank'ee. God bless you! You've never deserted me, dear boy."
> I pressed his hand in silence, for I could not forget that I had once meant to desert him.
> "And what's the best of all," he said, "you've been more comfortable alonger me, since I was under a dark cloud, than when the sun shone. That's best of all."[78]

It is clear that Pip's attitude has completely changed: now the time he spends with his benefactor is extremely important for Pip and this new attitude shows that his snobism has been deleted by Magwitch's love. Therefore, Pip is now able to be grateful towards his benefactor and his heart is ready to fully erase his shame for Magwitch, for his origins and for Joe. This change is also displayed when Pip, going back to his village, admits:

> Many pleasant pictures of the life that I would lead there, and of the change for the better that would come over my character when I had a guiding spirit at my side whose simple faith and clear home wisdom I had proved, beguiled my way. They awakened a tender emotion in me; for my heart was softened by my return, and such a change had come to pass, that I felt like one who was toiling home barefoot from distant travel, and whose wanderings had lasted many years.[79]

In order to describe what he now feels on going back home Pip uses the simile of the travel. Arguably, it can be claimed that, throughout the novel, Pip makes both a physical and an inner travel. Physically he moves from the marshes where he was born to London to become a gentleman and eventually goes back to his home village. This movement in space reflects the

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77 C. Dickens, *Great Expectations* cit., Ch. LVI, pp. 455-456 [italics mine].
78 *Ibid.*, pp. 459-460.
79 *Ibid.*, Ch. LVIII, p. 477.

development of the internal movement of the protagonist: from being a vexed and constantly reproached child but dearly loved by Joe who provides him with good examples of tenderness and affection during his childhood in the marshes, Pip becomes increasingly snobbish in London, yet he finally restores his original humanity, kindness and generosity and is able to erase any form of shame for his humble roots when he goes back to his village. Pip arrives home the day in which, after Mrs Gargery's death because of Orlickôs violent blow, Joe and Biddy are going to be married. Pip shows his gratitude admitting that he ill repaid their past efforts to help him, thus proving once again how deeply he has changed:

> "[é] Joe and Biddy both, as you have been to church to-day, and are in charity and love with all mankind, *receive my humble thanks for all you have done for me, and all I have so ill repaid*! And when I say that I am going away within the hour, for I am soon going abroad, and that I shall never rest until I have worked for the money with which you have kept me out of prison, and have sent it to you, don't think, dear Joe and Biddy, that if I could repay it a thousand times over, I suppose I could cancel a farthing of the debt I owe you, or that I would do so if I could!"[80]

After Joe's marriage, Pip goes back to London where he has to sell all he possesses in order to pay his debts and becomes clerk at Clerriker & Co. with his friend Herbert. Through his inner journey, not only has Pip finally learnt not to despise his humble origins, but he has also been able to overcome his mistaken judgement about Herbert:

> I must not leave it to be supposed that we were ever a great House, or that we made mints of money. We were not in a grand way of business, but we had a good name, and worked for our profits, and did very well. We owed so much to Herbert's ever cheerful industry and readiness, that *I often wondered how I had conceived that old idea of his inaptitude, until I was one day enlightened by the reflection, that perhaps the inaptitude had never been in him at all, but had been in me*.[81]

From this passage it is clear that Pip has finally changed his consideration of Herbert recognising that initially he completely misjudged someone who has proved to be a dear friend and that the inaptitude he perceived did not belong to the frank Herbert but to himself.

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[80] *Ibid.*, p. 479 [italics mine].
[81] *Ibid.*, p. 480 [italics mine].

In conclusion, as Hornback underlines, *Great Expectations* can be considered a novel of friendship conceived as a process of learning[82]. In his difficult *Bildung*, Pip initially learns to disdain his friends under the negative influence of Estella and ñthe more he learns, intellectually, about the things which will óraiseô him in ósocietyô, the more he forgets about human sympathyò[83] becoming increasingly selfish and vain, clearly expressing Dickensôs concern with the powerful corruption of money. At first, Pipôs imagination is misled by Miss Havisham, but then Herbert and Magwitch teach him the value of friendship. The positive effects of Magwitch's and Herbert's friendship and affection are so powerful upon Pip's heart that they not only replace coldness and selfishness with sympathy and kindness, but they also lead the protagonist to pity Miss Havisham who damaged and polluted the ambitions of his childhood. As a result, at the end of the novel, the strength of Pip's humanity is such that it is able to affect even Miss Havisham's dryness of heart. As a matter of fact, Pip has learnt compassion enough to forgive Miss Havisham who finally dies regretting the evil she caused to Estella and Pip[84], and this displays how, according to Dickens, forceful emotions such as compassion and sympathy can influence even a heart as cold as Miss Havisham's. Through his relationship with Magwitch and Herbert, Pip wins back the original affection he felt for Joe at the beginning of the novel. Therefore, it might be claimed that snobbery is a fundamental stage of Pipôs *Bildung* as a condition which is necessarily to be overcome in order to reach maturity and wisdom. Yet, not only does Pip experience a deep change, but also Estella's cold heart undergoes a process of alteration. At the very end of the novel Pip encounters an extremely different Estella who tells him that now ñ[é] suffering has been stronger than all other teaching, and has taught me to understand what your heart used to be. I have been bent and broken, but -I hope- into a better shape. Be as considerate and good to me

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82 Cf. B. G. Hornback, *Great Expectations: a Novel of Friendship*, [1986], New York, Twayne Publisher, 1987, p. 39.

83 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

84 Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

as you were, and tell me we are friends.ôò[85] The pain and sufferings experienced by Estella have shaped her heart which is no longer cold and selfish but human and loving, the result of a process similar to the one defined by George Eliot in *Adam Bede* as ñthat growing tenderness which came from the sorrow at work within.ò[86]

In Dickens's two *Bildungsroman*, *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, as argued by Malcolm Andrews and B. G. Hornback, the education of imagination and feelings is of capital importance. Although through different experiences, David and Pip realise that intellect alone cannot support a successful achievement of wisdom which ñis not a matter of knowing, [é] it is rather a matter of feeling what we know: of imagination and sympathetic understanding.ò[87] In Dickens imagination is not a faculty which ñlets us fabricate lies, rather it lets us see the wholeness of the cloth. Imagination is that wise faculty through which we comprehend the otherwise confusing world around us.ò[88] As a matter of fact, Pip's misled imagination prevents him from seeing the truth in what happens around him leading him to misjudge Herbert and to feel ashamed of Joe. For this reason, according to Dickens, the imaginative and intellectual faculties are to be correctly developed because if ña loving heart without wisdom proves to be a disabilityò[89] as in the example of Clara and Dora, a learned and sophisticated mind without feelings is a disability as well. At the end of *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations* David and Pip succeed in achieving the essential balance between mind and feelings which is the ultimate and necessary step in order to enter maturity.

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85 C. Dickens, *Great Expectations* cit., Ch. LVIII, p. 484.
86 G. Eliot, *Adam Bede*, [1859], ed. M. Reynolds, London, Penguin, 2008, Ch. L, p. 531.
87 B. G. Hornback, *op. cit*., p. 39.
88 *Ibid.*, p. 16.
89 M. Andrews, *op. cit*., p. 159.

Chapter Two

The Results of a Strict Education in Dickens's Social Novel

Hard Times

2. The results of a strict education in Dickens's social novel *Hard Times*

Dickens did not express his concern with the necessity of a sound education which cherishes the equal development of both mind and feelings exclusively in his two *Bildungsroman. Hard Times*, Dickens's social novel, published in 1854, deals with the development of that Victorian phenomenon which Sussman defines as ñthe mechanized worldò[90]. Throughout the nineteenth century the wide diffusion of technology and the increasing mechanisation of industry were leading to a more and more mechanised society in which not only were the industries adopting the repetitive routine imposed by the use of machines, but also ordinary life was being affected by this phenomenon. In *Hard Times* Dickens explores in depth how the industrial process of mechanisation and its consequences were affecting the daily life, the behaviour and education of the Victorians. The novel is set in an imaginary English industrial town characterised by the unnatural red and black colours of the bricks of the buildings, most of which are factories producing a huge amount of smoky and ashy clouds covering the sky and giving the town a dingy grey atmosphere. In Coketown, which symbolically represents England[91], everything is alike: each street and each building are similar to the others and even the inhabitants are similar to one another in their physical appearance and have the same routine which articulates every single day of their lives through the same repetitive actions[92]. Accordingly, it can be argued that in Coketown not only is the external space organised according to the industrial standards, but also the citizens themselves, in their strictly routinised lives which ñsubordinate the spontaneity of the impulse to the rationalized regularity of the mechanical systemò[93], can be considered similar to the products of a factory. Hence, the reason why Dickens dedicated *Hard Times* to Thomas Carlyle is clear. Carlyle is one of the first English intellectuals who analysed and criticised the great changes that

[90] H. L. Sussman, *Victorians and the Machine: the Literary Response to Technology*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1968, p. 41.
[91] Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
[92] Cf. C. Dickens, *Hard Times*, [1854], ed. K. Flint, London, Penguin, 2003, Book I, Ch. 5, pp. 27-28.
[93] H. L. Sussman, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

industrialisation brought to England at different levels. In his essay, *Signs of the Times*, published in 1829, he claims that the age in which he is living ñ[é] is an Age of Machinery, in every outward and *inward* sense of that word.ò[94] In this sentence Carlyle states a fundamental concept which is expressed also by Dickens in his conception of Coketown: the mechanical development is not only external but also internal, therefore, it does not exclusively influence the work environment or the institutions, but it can even affect the inner self of the individuals consequently reducing their humanity ñto quantitive termsò[95]. The internal mechanisation of the human soul theorised by Carlyle is a fundamental theme in *Hard Times*. As Leavis argued:

> [Dickens] is for once possessed by a comprehensive vision, one in which *the inhumanities of Victorian civilization are seen as fostered and sanctioned by a hard philosophy, the aggressive formulation of an inhumane spirit.*[96]

In the fictional world of *Hard Times* the champion and perfect example of the ñinhumane spiritò is the rough and unkind character of Josiah Bounderby:

> [...] a rich man: banker, merchant, manufacturer, and what not. A big, loud man, with a stare and a *metallic laugh.* A man *made out of coarse material* [é]. A man who could never sufficiently vaunt himself a self-made man. A man who was always proclaiming, through that *brassy speaking-trumpet of a voice* of his, his old ignorance and his old poverty. A man who was *the Bully of humility.*[97]

Bounderby's physical appearance is described by the narrator in artificial terms and in his first characterisation he is defined by an oxymoron, ñthe bully of humilityò, which emphasises the deceitfulness of his humility since he persecutes and intimidates others with the story of his humble origins which is a mere rhetorical strategy employed exclusively to underline his great ability to rise in society and prestige. Furthermore, Bounderby has thoroughly embraced the utilitarian philosophy which considers facts, logic and rational judgement as the one and

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94 T. Carlyle, *Signs of the Times*, [1829], in *Scottish and Other Miscellanies*, London, Dent, 1950, pp. 223-245, p. 226 [italics mine].
95 H. L. Sussman, *op. cit*., p. 65.
96 F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1948, p. 228 [italics mine].
97 C. Dickens, *Hard Times* cit., Book I, Ch. 5, pp. 20-21 [italics mine].

only means needed in life. Accordingly, affections are an abomination for him to the extent that, according to his view, even his marriage with Gradgrind's daughter, Louisa, is to be considered as a barely convenient transaction between husband and wife. Faithful to his principles of self-interest and incapable of change[98] throughout the whole novel, it can be claimed that Bounderby is the fictional expression of Carlyle's inward mechanisation and, therefore, the embodiment of the extreme and ultimate Utilitarian theories. Similarly, Mr Gradgrind is the promoter of the theory of facts. In the second chapter of the novel, tellingly entitled *Murdering the Innocents* which refers to the teaching methods employed in Mr Gradgrind's school where the pupils are imbued with nothing else but facts, his character is presented to the reader as

> A man of realities. A man of facts and calculations. [é] With a rule and a pair of scales, and the multiplication table always in his pocket, sir, ready to weight and measure any parcel of *human nature*, and tell you exactly what it comes to. It is *a mere question of figures, a case of simple arithmetic*.[99]

Similarly to Bounderby, Gradgrind allows nothing except reason in every aspect of his life strongly believing that the comprehension of the world is achievable through facts alone. Hence, Gradgrind's principal aim is to erase any possible trace of imagination and fancy both in his three children and in his pupils for, according to his theory, imagination involves doubt and therefore confusion; reason, instead, operates through logic which provides clear and indisputable solutions to any problem.

Let us now analyse the formal educational system of Mr Gradgrind and its negative outcomes. The methods on which his school is based directly derives from his theory of facts:

> ñNow, 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

[98] Cf. F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* cit., p. 235.
[99] C. Dickens, *Hard Times* cit., Book I, Ch. 2, p. 10 [italics mine].

> 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!ò[100]

According to Dickens, by discouraging the use of imagination trying to replace it with logic, Mr Gradgrind murders that part of the human being which precisely defines individuals as human and not as mechanical entities, directly developing in his pupils the inward mechanisation first described by Carlyle. The perfect practical result of his system is Bitzer, a boy attending his school, who is able to define a horse in scientific and technical terms providing his description with precise and exhaustive details. In Coketown for a child at primary school a horse is, therefore, a ñQuadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy countries, shed hoofs, too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth.ò[101] The dryness of Bitzer's imagination which yet enables him to be a brilliant student is even more emphasised by his comparison with Sissy's character. Sissy is an alien presence in Coketown as she belongs to Mr Sleary's itinerant circus which has nothing to do with the system of facts. Yet, Sissy attends Mr Gradgrind's school, but because of her developed use of imagination, she will never be considered as smart a pupil as Bitzer. As a matter of fact, when in class she is asked whether she would furnish a room with a carpet patterned with representations of flowers, her answer is affirmative because:

> ñ[...] I am very fond of flowersò returned the girl.
>
> ñAnd is that why you would put tables and chairs upon them, and have people walking over them with heavy boots?ò
>
> ñIt wouldn't hurt them, sir. They wouldn't crush and wither if you please, sir. *They would be the pictures of what was very pretty and pleasant*, and I would fancy -ò
>
> ñ[...] you mustn't fancy. [é] That's it! *You are never to fancy*.ò[102]

The paradox of the scene here quoted is clear: Mr Gradgrind, Mr M'Choakumchild, the

[100] *Ibid*., Ch. 1, p. 9 [italics mine].
[101] *Ibid*., Ch. 2, p. 12.
[102] *Ibid*., p. 14 [italics mine].

teacher, and the third gentleman, a government officer, who are testing Sissy's logical faculties, do not understand or even perceive that Sissy has produced a perfectly logical argumentation. Sissy is capable of operating an abstraction in her mind through the use of her imagination. Hence, she is perfectly aware that the flowers on the carpet could not possibly be spoilt for they are representations of the real items. By so doing, Sissy proves to possess a more brilliant and logical mind than Bitzer and the three gentlemen as she is able to distinguish the difference between representations and reality[103]. On the other hand, for Mr Gradgrind and his party representations are absolutely intolerable because they are not factual and tangible realities. As a consequence of their narrow-minded beliefs, the supposed superior intelligence of the champions of facts in the novel prove that they possess a reduced knowledge of reality because their method despises and lacks in the capacity of representation which, actually, is not a deficiency but richness. As Ostry claims: ñSissy points out the lack of logic in the hyper rational environment of the schoolò highlighting that ñthe school run by Gradgrind promotes rationalism to an irrational degreeò[104], to the extent that he reduces, instead of increasing, the pupil's capacity of logical reasoning. Arguably therefore, for Dickens ñfancy is needed, paradoxically, for reason to exist.ò[105]

Furthermore, Gradgrind's system produces a double negative result. Not only does it directly encourage a loss of logic in his pupils, but worse it fosters in them a dryness of feelings and humanity. Again, it is worth taking into account the example provided by the opposite characters of Bitzer and Sissy. As it has been argued before, Bitzer is the ñreal triumph of [Gradgrind's] systemò[106] and his physical characterisation might be seen as the mirror of his ñinhumane spiritò. He is thus described by the narrator:

> His *cold eyes* could hardly have been eyes, but for the short ends of lashes which, by bringing them into immediate contrast with something paler than themselves, expressed

[103] Cf. E. Ostry, *Social Dreaming: Dickens and the Fairy Tale*, New York, Routledge, 2002, p. 52.
[104] Ivi.
[105] *Ibid*., p. 53.
[106] F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* cit., p. 241.

> their form. [é] His skin was so unwholesomely *deficient in the natural tinge*, that he looked as though, if he were cut, he *would bleed white*.[107]

Bitzer is connoted in unnatural whiteness and paleness, whereas Sissy contrasts with Bitzer's lack of colours as she is ñso dark-eyed and dark-haired, that she seemed to receive a *deeper and more lustrous colour from the sun* when it shone upon her, the boy was so light-eyed and light-haired that the self-same rays appeared to draw out of him what little colour he ever possessed.ò[108] In sheer contrast with the vivid colours of Sissy's appearance Bitzer becomes almost translucent under the sun rays, while Sissy's strong colours brighten producing the opposite effect, thus highlighting her dissimilarity from Bitzer's lifelessness. This physical clash might represent their inner differences. As Leavis points out, thus connoting these two characters, Dickens ñ[opposes] the life that is lived freely and richly from the deep instinctive and emotional springs to the thin-blooded, quasi-mechanical product of Gradgrindery.ò[109] As a matter of fact, throughout the whole novel Sissy is incapable of either vanity, pride and arrogance or egoism and selfishness because she is unable to understand and therefore follow Mr Gradgrind's teachings. On the contrary, when he reappears at the end of the novel, Bitzer displays exactly such features. When Mr Gradgrind discovers that his son, Tom, is guilty of robbing Mr Bounderby's bank he tries to help Tom leave England. Nevertheless, Bitzer reappears on the scene since he wants to take Tom's employment at the bank by delivering the criminal to Mr Bounderby. Overcome by misery for the misdeeds of his son, Gradgrind asks Bitzer if he has a heart and Bitzer answers, in a manner which recalls the initial scene in the schoolroom, with the only scientific notions he possesses about the heart:

> ñ*The circulation*, sir,ò returned Bitzer, smiling at the *oddity of the question*, ñcouldn't be carried out without one. No man, sir, acquainted with the facts established by Harvey relating to the circulation of the blood, can doubt that I have a heart.ò
>
> ñIs it accessible,ò cried Mr Gradgrind, ñto any compassionate influence?ò

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[107] C. Dickens, *Hard Times* cit., Book I, Ch. 2, pp. 11-12 [italics mine].
[108] *Ibid*., p. 11 [italics mine].
[109] F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* cit., p. 231.

ñ*It is accessible to Reason*, sirò returned the excellent young man. ñ*And to nothing else*.ò[110]

The access to the heart exclusively through reason seems apparently an oxymoron considering that, figuratively and metaphorically, the heart is the place where feelings are generated. Yet again, Bitzer could not have given a different answer as his whole education was based upon the principle that only reason is allowed to exist. Further on, Bitzer repeats a theorem about society he learnt in his infancy at school: ñ[é] *the whole social system is a question of self-interest*. What you must always appeal to, is a person's self-interest. It's your only hold. We are so constituted. I was brought up in that catechism when I was very young, sir, as you are aware.ò[111] The ñinhumane spiritò of the adult Bitzer shows how wrong, incomplete, unnatural and disturbing is Mr Gradgrind's educational system. As Professor Andrews claims:

> children in whom childhood has not naturally ripened, but in whom maturity is forced, are deprived of what Dickens regards as the proper culture of childhood ï the cultivation of the sentiments and affections, playing with toys, knowledge of the world of fairy-tale. Such deprivation produces *deformed adults*.[112]

What Mr Gradgrind has induced Bitzer to become is a ñdeformed adultò: a cold, egoistic and ultimately inhumane individual with whom the realms of affections and imagination are completely unfamiliar. On the other hand, Sissy feels and cherishes sympathy, generosity and human kindness, and these positive features are preserved in her thanks to her refusal to bend under the policy of facts:

> [é] Sissy's incapacity to acquire this kind of 'fact' or formula, her unaptness for education, is manifested [é] as part of her [é] indefeasible humanity: it is the virtue that makes it impossible for her to [é] think of any other human being as a unit of arithmetic. [é] She stands for vitality as well as goodness [é]; she is generous, impulsive life, finding self-fulfilment in self-forgetfulness ï all that is the antithesis of calculating self-interest.[113]

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[110] C. Dickens, *Hard Times* cit., Book III, Ch. 8, pp. 276-277 [italics mine].
[111] *Ibid*., p. 277 [italics mine].
[112] M. Andrews, *op. cit*., p. 26 [italics mine].
[113] F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* cit., pp. 230-231.

Moreover, when Sissy is taken to Mr Gradgrind's home because she is abandoned by her father, Gradgrind strives to provide her with a ñsound practical educationò[114] and to erase in her the nonsense of fancy and feelings. Yet, Gradgrind's efforts are unsuccessful as Sissy continues to hope and have faith that some day her father would come back, thus refusing the ñsuperior comfort of knowing, on a sound arithmetical basis, that her father [is] an unnatural vagabond [é]ò[115] The ñsuperior comfort of knowingò proves to be completely erroneous for Sissy is perfectly aware that, despite the sufferings her father caused by abandoning her, he did not desert his only daughter because he is ñan unnatural vagabondò, but to release her from the burden of his difficulties at the circus. Therefore, Sissy proves that her knowledge, be it about scholastic topics or life experiences, is on a far superior level than Mr Gradgrind's thanks to the use of her imagination and feelings which are to be considered as complementary to reason and logic and necessary elements for a deep and complete understanding.

Having examined the formal educational system of Gradgrind, let us now focus on the informal and familiar up-bringing of his children, in particular of his eldest daughter, Louisa. Tom and Louisa are obviously encouraged by their father to use reason and logic in every single experience of their lives. Accordingly, their education stopped ñthe cultivation of the sentiments and affectionsò[116] being settled ñby means of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and divisionò[117]. Being forbidden to fancy, imagine and wonder, Tom and Louisa are the products of ñthe mechanical art and mystery of educating the reasonò[118], therefore, they are meant to become the future leaders of Coketown who will replace the Bounderbys and Gradgrinds. The effects on the Gradgrind's siblings, however, is much frustrating. Tom hates his father's strict and sometimes preposterous rules, such as being obliged to call Sissy with

[114] C. Dickens, *Hard Times* cit., Book I, Ch. 6, p. 43.
[115] *Ibid*., Ch. 9, p. 58.
[116] *Ibid*., Ch. 8, p. 52.
[117] Ivi.
[118] Ivi.

her family name, Jupe, and not simply Sissy. Tom's hatred is so strong that he even bitterly confesses to his sister:

> ñI wish I could collect all the Facts we hear so much about [é] and all the Figures, and all the people who found them out; and I could put a thousand barrels of gunpowder under them, and blow them all up together!ò[119]

The frustrations of the young Tom will be vented later on in the novel when he takes his revenge against the system by stealing money from Mr Bounderby's bank where he is employed. Tom's criminal act can be considered as a direct consequence of the strictness of his up-bringing. Arguably, the cancellation of his innocence in his childhood led him, as an adult, to develop such a powerful hate for the system of facts as to commit an act against the law. Tom's misdeed can be regarded as the fulfilment of that impulse of rebellion and vengeance he revealed to his sister. Therefore, it appears that Tom has no moral judgement, he cannot distinguish between right and wrong because he is moved by the despise towards his father and Mr Bouderby and the ideals they represent. Hence, similarly to Bitzer, Tom is what Professor Andrews defines as the ñdeformed adultò. Despite their opposite aims, namely the self-interest in Bitzer's case and revenge in Tom's, both characters, in their adulthood, demonstrate that the catechism of the exclusive use of logic can have destructive consequences.

It can be argued that, in the light of the treatment of his pupils and children, Mr Gradgrind conceives childhood as a stage of life which needs to be erased. At his school he tries to ñmurder the innocentsò by destroying their imagination similarly to a ñ[...] a kind of cannon loaded to the muzzle with facts, and prepared to blow them clean out of the regions of childhood at one dischargeò[120]. Similarly, Louisa's childhood and adulthood have been

[119] *Ibid.*, p. 55.
[120] *Ibid.*, Book I, Ch. 2, p. 10.

levelled creating a sort of atemporal individual of no definite age[121]. While discussing with his daughter about Bounderby's marriage proposal to Louisa, Mr Gradgrind affirms: ñit has always been my object so to educate you, as that you might, while still in your early youth, be (if I may so express myself) *almost any age*.ò[122] Yet, as it did with Tom, Gradgrind's educational system, aimed at erasing her infancy, does not manage to produce successful results with Louisa. In fact, she slowly, but progressively, becomes aware that there must exist something more than facts and figures, namely the human faculty of imagination, and that the heart of human beings does not exclusively work for the circulation of the blood. As a matter of fact, Louisa proves to be able to use her imagination in the scene in which her brother reveals to her that he hates their father's methods:

> ñHave you gone to sleep, Loo?ò
>
> ñNo, Tom. I am looking at the fire.ò
>
> ñYou seem *to find more to look at in it than ever I could find* [...].ò
>
> [é] Tom went and leaned on the back of her chair, to contemplate the fire which so engrossed her, from her point of view, and see what he could make of it.
>
> ñExcept that it is a fire,ò said Tom, ñit looks to me as stupid and blank as everything else looks. What do you see in it? Not a circus?ò
>
> ñ*I don't see anything in it, Tom, particularly. But since I have been looking at it, I have been wondering about you and me, grown up*.ò[123]

On the one hand, Tom proves that he has no capacity of imagination altogether. On the other, by looking at the fire, Louisa tries to picture in her mind a possible future for herself and her brother, precisely operating through imagination, thus using the opposite method that her father would have used to predict their future, namely an exact statistic. Moreover, Louisa has a direct contact with affections and emotions which are provided by Sissy who tells Louisa how much her father loves her and how much in love he was with her mother. She listens to Sissy's revelations about her family with ña strong, wild, wandering interest peculiar to her;

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[121] M. Andrews, *op. cit.*, p 84.
[122] C. Dickens, *Hard Times* cit., Book I, Ch. 15, p. 101 [italics mine].
[123] *Ibid*., Ch. 8, p. 56 [italics mine].

an interest gone astray like *a banished creature, and hiding in solitary places.*ò[124] The ñbanished creature hiding in solitary placesò is exactly her feelings and curiosity which have been set aside for years during her up-bringing and which now, with the aid of Sissy's story, are emerging for the first time. Thanks to the presence of Sissy, Louisa realises that she too is capable of compassion and sympathy to the extent that the anxieties and hopes of Sissy about the return of her father become Louisa's own anxieties and hopes. At this point, possessing a new awareness of herself, Louisa accuses her father of having spoilt her childhood as she has never ñhad a child's heartò, ña child's dreamò, ña child's beliefò or ña child's fearò[125] so that, as a consequence, she has no ñheart experiencesò, ñtaste and fanciesò, ñaspirations and affectionsò[126]. Nonetheless, Mr Gradgrind, because of his frame of mind, does not understand the deep unhappiness of his daughter. In fact, he needs to see her fainting in front of him overwhelmed by affliction and despair in order to understand the inhumanity of his education and its dreadful outcomes. Throughout the novel Louisa undergoes a deep change which begins with her relationship with Sissy who first arouses in Louisa the awareness of possessing feelings. The development of her inner alteration is then aided by her meeting with Mr Harthouse, a gentleman bored with life who moves to Coketown in order to alleviate his ennui. After the proposal and her marriage with Mr Bounderby, whom she marries exclusively for Tom's sake[127], Louisa has been wearing a sort of mask which conceals the deep dissatisfaction and frustration caused by her marriage, thoroughly expressed in her repetition of the expression ñwhat does it matter!ò[128]. Mr Harthouse meets her for the first time exactly in this stage of her life whose circumstances led her to be ñconstrained, and yet so careless; so reserved, and yet so watchful; so cold and proud, and yet so sensitively ashamed of her husband's braggart humility [é]. Her features were handsome; but their natural play was so

[124] *Ibid*., Ch. 9, p. 60 [italics mine].
[125] *Ibid*., Ch. 15, p. 101.
[126] *Ibid*., p. 100.
[127] Cf. F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* cit., p. 239.
[128] C. Dickens, *Hard Times* cit., Book I, Ch. 15, p. 100 and Book II, Ch. 9, p. 190.

locked up, that it seemed impossible to guess at their genuine expression. [é] *she baffled all penetration*.ò[129] It can be claimed that, on the surface, Louisa faces her married life with the coldness and composure required by the wife of a prestigious man of facts such as Bounderby. Yet, her acquaintance with Harthouse unveils her sentiments towards the gentleman and, above all, her hatred towards her husband and what he represents which, according to her education, should mirror her own frame of mind. At this point Louisa has fully understood what she once, before meeting Sissy, only rationally knew: as a child she was aware of the existence of emotions, yet she had absolutely to avoid them. Because of her inner revolution, namely feeling new emotions, Louisa experiences a deep crisis during which she expresses all her unhappiness to her father:

> ñWhat you have nurtured in me, you never nurtured in yourself; but O! if you had only done so long ago, or if had only neglected me, what a much better and much happier creature I should have been this day! [é]. All that I know is, your philosophy and your teaching will not save me.ò [é] And he laid her down there, and saw the pride of his heart and *the triumph of his system, lying, an insensible heap, at his feet*.[130]

Along with Bitzer and Tom, Louisa is a further example of how an up-bringing rigidly founded on the use of reason and logic employed to judge and solve any situation and problem proves to be dangerous and harmful. With her crisis, therefore, Louisa represents the ultimate collapse of the whole Gradgrind's system which first began to stagger with Tom's misdeed. Nevertheless, differently from her brother and Bitzer, Louisa finally manages to save her future as a ñdeformed adultò. She is able to counterbalance her frame of mind, based only on facts and figures, with the capacity of cherishing emotions. At the end of the novel the narrator portrays a happy picture of the future Louisa:

> [é] happy Sissy's happy children loving her; all children loving her; she, grown learned in childish lore; *thinking no innocent and pretty fancy ever to be despised; trying hard to know her humbler fellow-creatures, and to beautify their lives of machinery and reality with those imaginative graces and delights, without which the heart of infancy will wither up*, the

[129] *Ibid*., Book II, Ch. 2, p. 127 [italics mine].
[130] *Ibid*., Ch. 12, p. 209, 211and 212 [italics mine].

> sturdiest physical manhood will be morally stark death [é] she holding this course as part of no fantastic vow, or bond, or brotherhood, or sisterhood, or pledge, or covenant, or fancy dress, or fancy fair; but *simply as a duty to be done* [é].[131]

The character who, at the beginning of the novel, stands for the potential triumph of Mr Gradgrind's policy becomes, at the end, the triumph of Dickens's conception of the genuine adult: a mature individual who is capable of balancing the ñwisdom of the Headò with the ñwisdom of the Heartò[132] by knowing and feeling that

> the mere fact, or logic, that leaves half our lives out of account ï any method of ruling conduct or affairs that lacks sympathy, love, and understanding between human beings ï is, in the end, not merely sterile, but bitterly destructive of all the moral virtues, beauty, and everything that is best; that a sound life cannot exist without happiness; and that the proper education of children must take into account their moral development, which it should foster through their fancy and love of life.[133]

Moreover, opposite to her brother's behaviour, Louisa does not feel any hatred for her father and she is able to forgive him because she is fully conscious that Mr Gradgrind brought her up in such manner for he wanted the best education possible for his children.

Therefore, it is worth underlining that the figure of Gradgrind is not as thoroughly negative as it might appear. In spite of his rigidity in relying on reason and facts alone, he proves to be capable of noble feelings. It is clear that he loves his children, otherwise he would not strife so much in order to give them what, according to him, is the best possible education. Arguably therefore, his means are wrong, but his aims are noble. Furthermore, he is kind and gentle towards his children and above all, feels pity for Sissy in front of her efforts to learn from his teachings. Finally, when Louisa undergoes her crisis, he has a similar experience. Facing the collapse of his system he acknowledges that it proved he was wrong and only produced sufferings in his family. Gradgrind recognises his mistakes first thanks to Louisa

[131] *Ibid*., Book III, Ch. 9, pp. 287-288 [italics mine].
[132] *Ibid*., Ch. 1, p. 217.
[133] K. J. Fielding, *Charles Dickens: a Critical Introduction*, London, Longman, 1958, p. 132.

who, being ñthe pride of his heartò[134], allows him to approach the sphere of feelings through the confession of her sorrows. Then, because of the miserable lot of his son, who is obliged to leave England after the robbery, Gradgrind personally experiences sufferings for the loss of Tom, thus proving to himself that he is ñcapable of humane feelingsò[135]. Hence, as Leavis argues:

> *What love is Gradgrind now knows, and he knows that it matters to him more than the system*, which is thus confuted (the educational failure as such being a lesser matter). There is nothing sentimental here; the demonstration is impressive, because we are convinced of the love, and because *Gradgrind has been made to exist for us as a man who has meant to do right*.[136]

The utter contrast with Gradgrind and Bounderby's grim philosophy is given by the warm atmosphere of Mr Sleary's itinerant circus. It provides the reader with a gallery of unusual characters, who appear to belong to the realm of fairy-tales and myth, such as Mr Childers whose ñface, close-shaven, thin, and sallow, was shaded by a great quantity of dark hair brushed into a roll all around his head, and parted up the centre. His legs were very robust, but shorter than legs of good proportions should have been. [He] looked a most remarkable sort of Centaur, compounded of the stable and the playhouseò, and his assistant, ña boy with and old faceò called Cupid whose appearance on the scene ñconstitute the chief delight of the maternal part of the spectators [...].ò[137] Moreover, the world of the circus is the dimension of good feelings in which the group of untidy artists possess a ñremarkable gentleness and childishness [é], a special inaptitude for any kind of sharp practice, an untiring readiness to help one another, deserving, of as much respect, and always of as much generous construction, as the everyday virtues of any class of people in the world.ò[138] The description of the great humanity belonging to the itinerant artists finds its exact opposite in Gradgrind's idea of human relationships which claims that any sort of help or favour to anyone is to be

[134] C. Dickens, *Hard Times* cit., Book II, Ch. 12, p. 212.
[135] F. R. Leavis, *Dickens the Novelist*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1970, p. 196.
[136] *Ibid*., p. 200 [italics mine].
[137] C. Dickens, *Hard Times* cit., Book I, Ch. 6, pp. 34 and 35.
[138] *Ibid*., p. 40

purchased, and that gratitude, therefore, is to be banned.[139] It is clear, then, that the circus stands for all the good virtues which are missing in Mr Gradgrind's school and household. As a matter of fact, the cold and business-like atmosphere of Gradgrind's family needs an external positive influence in order to become an actual familiar place[140]. This influence is provided by Sissy who, coming from the circus ñlike a good fairy in his houseò[141], softens the heart of both Mr and Mrs Gradgrind.

The matter-of-fact attitudes among the Gradgrinds is strongly counterbalanced by the special affection which characterises Sissy's relationship with her father. As Childers reports to Mr Gradgrind and Mr Bounderby, ñ[...] Those two were one.ò[142] Spending his time with Sissy was Mr Jupe's only comfort and relief from the disappointments produced by his poor show performances, and this is the reason why Sissy knows that he left her only for her good. Furthermore, during her father's moments of distress, Sissy used to read to him about ñthe Fairies, [é] the Dwarf, and the Hunchback, and the Genies [é].ò[143] and the moments spent together in such manner were ñthe happiest [é] of all the happy times we had together [é].ò[144] Hence, it can be claimed that Sissy's father finds a means of escape from his troubles through the listening of his daughter readings of the *Arabian Nights* which ñ*kept him*, many times, *from what did him real harm*.ò[145] Here Dickens's point of view is clear. He defends the highly virtuous role of literature as a means of moral entertainment and edifying amusement. According to Dickens, literature entertains and amuses as it prevents the reader from being overwhelmed by daily frustrations, such as in the case of Mr Jupe. Furthermore, the amusement it provides is moral since literature leads the reader to ñwonder about human nature, human passions, human hopes and fears, the struggles, triumphs and defeats, the cares

[139] Cf. *Ibid.*, Book III, Ch. 8, p. 276.
[140] Cf. K. Flint, *Introduction*, in *Hard Times* cit., pp. xi-xxxiii p. xxv.
[141] C. Dickens, *Hard Times* cit., Book III, Ch. 7, p. 267.
[142] *Ibid*., Book I, Ch. 6, p. 38.
[143] *Ibid*., Ch. 7, p. 52.
[144] Ivi.
[145] *Ibid*., Ch. 9, p. 62 [italics mine].

and joys and sorrows, the lives and deaths, of common men and women!ò[146] Wondering and imagining through reading, therefore, are the most direct possibilities to come in contact with the humane part of the individual. According to Dickens, being a form of art and by presenting the shared sufferings and joys of common people, literature thus extends the reader's sympathies. In his conception of literature, therefore, Dickens shares George Eliot's view of art, according to which: ñIf Art does not enlarge men's sympathies, it does nothing morallyò[147].

But if, on the one hand, Dickens firmly defends the positive outcomes produced by the genuine use of imagination, on the other, he carefully takes into account the risks of an unsound exercise of this faculty. The first example in the novel of the misuse of imagination is provided by Mr Bounderby who, despite being a champion of the facts system, reinvents his whole past through the use of his imagination. Bounderby claims to have extremely humble origins from which he has risen to his prestigious position:

> ñMy mother left me to my grandmother, [é] and, according to the best of my remembrance, my grandmother was the wickedest and the worst old woman that ever lived. [é] Then I became a young vagabond; and instead of one old woman knocking me about and starving me, everybody of all ages knocked me about and starved me. [é] I pulled through it, though nobody threw me out a rope. Vagabond, errand-boy, vagabond, labourer, porter, clerk, chief manager, small partner, Josiah Bounderby of Coketown. [é] you may force him to swallow boiling fat, but *you shall never force him to suppress the facts of his life*.ò[148]

What Bounderby calls the ñfacts of his lifeò are, instead, a complete work of fiction. As a matter of fact, his mother, who was supposed to have left him, appears on the scene unmasking her son's falsehood. A second example is Mrs Sparsit whose aristocratic roots are, again, Bounderby's invention. She makes a wrong use of her imagination since, as soon as she realises that Louisa pays a special attention to Mr Harthouse, Mrs Sparsit erects ñin her mind

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[146] *Ibid*., Ch. 8, p. 53.
[147] G. Eliot, *Letter to Charles Bray*, 5th July 1859, in *The George Eliot Letters*, ed. G. S. Haight, London, Oxford University Press, 1954, 6 Vols., Vol. III, p. 111.
[148] C. Dickens, *Hard Times* cit., Book I, Ch. 4, pp. 22-23 [italics mine].

a mighty Staircase, with a dark pit of shame and ruin at the bottom; and down those stairs, from day to day and hour to hour, she saw Louisa coming.ò[149] Both Mrs Sparsit and Bounderby use their imaginative faculties for perfidious and deceitful aims. As it has been claimed before, Bounderby promotes and circulates invented events of his past in order to emphasise his great ability to advance in society, thus underlining that he is ñconcerned in nothing but self-assertion and power and material success, he has no interest in ideals or ideas ï except the idea of being the completely self-made man.ò[150]. Similarly, Mrs Sparsit uses her imaginative faculties in order not to fully comprehend Louisa's situation, but as a means to indirectly revenge her jealousy against Bounderby's wife. With these two instances Dickens demonstrates that imagination produces negative outcomes when combined with the sterility of the heart. Therefore, the use of imagination is a much delicate aspect of Dickens's poetics. It is worthwhile to take into account, then, the opinion of David Sonstroem who, in his essay *Fettered Fancy in* ***ñ****Hard Times****ò***, states that ñalthough Bounderby's highly imaginative account of his sorry youth is fiction, he manages to persuade everyone, including himself, of its truth.ò Therefore, ñ[é] the no-nonsense [...] Bounderbys, in refusing to recognize Fancy, engage in it unaware.ò[151] Moreover, Sonstroem claims that the characters who rely on the philosophy of facts ñmake the virtuous ones seem very dull indeedò[152] since the Bounderbys and the Sparsits are characterised by a far deeper and developed capacity of imagination. It is true, as Sonstroem points out, that such characters are able to use imagination to a great extent. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasise that, in Dickens, the use of imagination aimed at creating lies and revenge is a corrupted use of this faculty since ñmythmaking, the novel demonstrates, can be turned to falsifying, destructive ends as well as good ones.ò[153]

Having examined the tragic outcomes of the imbalance between reason and imagination, let

[149] *Ibid*., Book II, Ch. 10, p. 195.
[150] F. R. Leavis, *The Great Tradition* cit., p. 228.
[151] D. Sonstroem, *Fettered Fancy in* ***ñ****Hard Times****ò***, in *PMLA*, Vol. 84, No. 3, 1969, pp. 520-529, p. 526.
[152] *Ibid*., p. 527.
[153] K. Flint, *op. cit*., p. xvii.

us now consider Dickens's solution to this issue. Arguably in *Hard Times*, Dickens introduces his actual manifesto of the sound and balanced education of mind and feelings. Dickens emphasises the need to cherish the graces of the soul and sentiments of the heart[154] underlining the tragic consequences of Gradgrind's methods through the words of Louisa who has fallen under the burden of her strict up-bringing:

> ñ[...] it has been my task from infancy to strive against *every natural prompting that has arisen in my heart*; [é] *there lingered in my breast, sensibilities, affections, weaknesses capable of being cherished into strength*, defying all the calculations ever made by man [é]. Would you have doomed me, at any time, to the frost and blight that have hardened and spoilt me? Would you have *robbed me ï for no one's enrichment ï only for the greater desolation of this world* ï of the immaterial part of my life, the spring and summer of my belief, *my refuge for what is sordid and bad in the real things around me*, my school in which I should have learned to be *more humble and more trusting with them, and to hope in my little sphere to make them better*? [é] *If I had groped my way by my sense of touch, and had been free, while I knew the shapes and surfaces of things, to exercise my fancy somewhat, in regard to them; I should have been a million times wiser, happier, more loving, more contented, more innocent and human in all good respects, than I am with the eyes I have.*ò[155]

According to Dickens, every parent and teacher should foster and cherish in children their sensibilities and affections, combining them with a balanced use of imagination and reason, in order for them to successfully enter a wise maturity. On the one hand, the discipline of reason should control and moderate the freedom of imagination and of the emotional impulse, on the other, emotions should temper the rigidity of the logic of the mind. Hence, only through this method, the ñwisdom of the Headò can successfully encounter the ñwisdom of the Heartò.

To conclude, *Hard Times* clearly displays the importance to wisely mingle together the ñtwo individual naturesò of the human being. The destructive consequences of the drastic radicalisation of reason, on the one side, and of imagination, on the other, is to be found in the characters of Mr Bounderby and Mrs Sparsit who show how dangerous is the inflexible division between facts and imagination. Similarly, Dickens demonstrates how the life and

[154] Cf. C. Dickens, *Hard Times* cit., Book II, Ch. 12, p. 208.
[155] *Ibid*., pp. 208-209 [italics mine].

above all the education of any human being cannot be founded exclusively on facts, logic and intellect alone because it would otherwise produce a ñdeformed adultò such as Bitzer and Tom Gradgrind. Hence, the character of the good-natured Sissy represents the solution to this issue: not only is she a clear example of sympathy and generosity, but she also represents the model through which the Gradgrinds and Bounderbys should learn to understand and relate to their fellow-human beings[156]. Being born and raised in the environment of the circus, Sissy learns from an early age the importance of the communal life in which sympathy, mutual understanding and good feelings are fundamental and, above all, she is able to preserve these characteristics in her adulthood. As an adult, therefore, Sissy falls into the pattern of maturity which Wordsworth poetically expresses in his poem, *My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold*: ñThe Child is father of the Manò[157]. As Professor Andrews explains, ñthe challenge to which, in different ways, both Wordsworth and Dickens rose was not encourage the adult to retreat to nature or regress to childhood as an end in itself, but to reintegrate what had been forced apart. This sustaining of the feelings of childhood into adulthood entails reuniting the adult and child within each mature individual.ò[158] And even Louisa, despite her education, eventually manages to discover her long-suppressed childish nature, cherishing it ñsimply as a duty to be doneò[159], and reintegrating it in her adulthood. Finally, Dickens expresses a further important concern of his. He underlines the utmost importance of a genuine entertainment in order for imagination to be developed. One means of such achievement is literature which, by portraying an infinite gallery of character and situations, enables the readers to enrich their sensibilities. Honest and authentic amusement is necessary, ñPeople mutht be amuthed.ò comments Sleary, ñThey can't be alwayth a learning, nor yet they can't be alwayth a working,

[156] Cf. K. Flint, *op. cit*., p. xxi.
[157] W. Wordsworth, *My Heart Leaps Up When I Behold*, [1802], in *Favourite Poems*, New York, Dover, 1992, p. 34.
[158] M. Andrews, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-26.
[159] C. Dickens, *Hard Times* cit., Book III, Ch. 9, p. 288.

they an't made for it. You *mutht* have uth, Thquire.ò[160] According to Dickens, people and therefore society need the right compromise among feelings and affections, sound imagination, entertainment and reason. With his social novel, he does not aim at reforming society in its structure, rather in its spirit, since for him it is ñuseless to change institutions without a ñchange of heartò - that, essentially is what he is always saying.ò[161]

[160] *Ibid*., Ch. 8, p. 282.
[161] G. Orwell, *Charles Dickens*, [1939], in *A Collection of Essays*, San Diego, Harcourt and Company, 1981, pp. 48-104, p. 64.

Chapter Three

Fiction and Real Life: the *Autobiography* of John Stuart Mill

3. Fiction and Real Life: the *Autobiography* of John Stuart Mill

The theme of a sound and balanced education is a fundamental component of Dickens's fiction, yet he was not the only Victorian intellectual and writer who dealt with this issue. The English philosopher, John Stuart Mill, explores in depth the progression and results of his personal, strict domestic education in his *Autobiography* published in 1873. John Stuart Mill was born and raised in an age in which ñthe effect of the vast increase of knowledge, scientific and historical, [é] almost inundated the Victorians and left them often baffled by the sheer number of complexity of its implications.ò[162] Hence, as Mill himself argues, it required ñ[é] in these times much more intellect to marshal so much greater a stock of ideas and observations.ò[163] Despite the general complexity which characterised the period, and despite the fact that ñthe Victorians might be, and often were, uncertain about what theory to accept or what faculty of the mind to rely on; [é] *it never occurred to them to doubt their capacity to arrive at truth*.ò[164]. The shared belief in the capacity of the human mind of rationally achieving ultimate truths is the solid foundation on which the Victorians thought the universe could be kept together[165]. Arguably therefore, intellect and rationality were the basis of the general Victorian view of the world. John Stuart Mill was born in 1806 and grew up in this intellectual environment. Furthermore, he was the eldest son of James Mill, the Utilitarian philosopher, friend and principal disciple of Jeremy Bentham[166]: one of the main intellectuals of the period and theorist of the Utilitarian philosophy. Utilitarianism directly derived from the English Enlightenment and, in particular, was strongly influenced by the eighteenth-century groundbreaking Newtonian discoveries and by the method employed by Newton, namely the deductive method, which implied the direct empirical observation in order to

[162] W. E. Houghton, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
[163] J. S. Mill, *Letters*, quoted in W. E. Houghton, *op.* cit., p. 13.
[164] W. E. Houghton, *op. cit.*, p. 14 [italics mine].
[165] Cf. Ivi.
[166] Cf. M. Cranston, *John Stuart Mill*, in *Writers and Their Work*, ed. B. Dobrée, London, Longman, 1958, 280 Vols., Vol. 91-100, pp. 5-34, p. 5.

obtain new knowledge[167]. Hence, the empirical observation and the logical analysis were the main instruments though which scientists were able to acquire knowledge of the physical world. Such scientific instruments were the starting point from which Bentham theorised the philosophy of Utilitarianism:

> If the remotest stars moved together in a stately dance, controlled unalterably by the simple principle of mass and distance, and if this law had been uncovered by empirical observation [é] it seemed clear to many that *other complex problems, in areas beyond the physical sciences, could be solved by applying these same methods. The means were now available, it seemed, for scientifically working out the best political organization of society* [é] *and the establishment of an absolute and objective set of moral principles*.[168]

Bentham's Utilitarianism applied the rational analytical method aiming at creating an impartial and unbiased system of moral and legal behaviour based not on ñ[...] a subjective set of moral values, but an objective law, like gravitation, of human nature.ò[169] According to Bentham, therefore, it is possible to rationally and objectively observe, analyse and control any aspect of human nature. On the one hand, Utilitarianism utilises the scientific methods of empirical observation and rational analysis, on the other, this philosophy is founded on the Epicurean principle according to which the primary and central characteristic of the human being is the pursuit of pleasure and happiness and the avoidance of pain. Accordingly, the principal aim of Utilitarianism is the greatest happiness of the greatest number of individuals and this aim is achievable through purely rational means:

> By the principle of utility is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever according to the tendency it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question: or, what is the same thing in other words to promote or to oppose that happiness. I say of every action whatsoever, and therefore not only of every action of a private individual, but of every measure of government.[170]

From this assumption, Bentham hypothesised to control both the social and the inner life of

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[167] Cf. F. P. Sharpless, *The Literary Criticism of John Stuart Mill*, Paris, Mouton, 1967, p. 11.
[168] *Ibid*., pp. 11-12 [italics mine].
[169] *Ibid*., p. 14.
[170] J. Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, [1789], ed. J. H. Burns and H. L. A. Hart, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996, p. 12.

the individuals by making socially and morally good actions pleasurable and socially and morally bad actions painful. In order to operate in this way, Bentham tried to evaluate pleasures and pains on the basis of their ñintensity, duration, certainty and uncertaintyò and then ñto add up the sum of pleasures and pains involved in any given action, in the same manner, and with the same confidence that Newton was able to add up the moments of force in a moving body.ò[171] Therefore, according to Bentham, James Mill and their followers, pleasures and pains are evaluated only on the basis of the quantity of happiness or unhappiness they produce in the individual; arguably therefore, Utilitarianism does not take into account the quality of pleasure and pain, but it considers them exclusively in quantitative terms.

This was the intellectual milieu in which John Stuart Mill was born and raised. As Ellery suggests, as a child, Mill was soon regarded as Bentham's and James Mill's intellectual inheritor and therefore, the young Mill soon became the subject of a new educational experiment conducted by both his father and Jeremy Bentham[172]. In order for Bentham and James Mill to apply their new educational system, John Stuart Mill never benefited from a formal education, as matter of fact, he never attended any school or university and his father was Mill's tutor for his entire childhood and youth. Since the very beginning of his *Autobiography*, Mill takes into account the special and extraordinary features of his early intellectual upbringing. The first of these remarkable features is the great amount of time and energy which James Mill personally devoted to the education of his children, in particular of his eldest son:

> [é] a considerable part of almost every day was employed in the instruction of his [James Mill's] children: in the case of one of whom, myself, he exerted an amount of labour, care, and perseverance, if ever, employed for a similar purpose, in endeavouring to give, according to his own conception, *the highest order of intellectual education.*[173]

[171] F. P. Sharpless, *op. cit.*, p. 15.
[172] Cf. J. B. Ellery, *John Stuart Mill*, New York, Grosset & Dunlop, 1964, p. 19.
[173] J. S. Mill, *Autobiography*, London, Longman, 1873, Ch. I, p. 4 [italics mine].

Such ñhighest order of intellectual educationò was provided by both the subjects he had to study and the methods through which the young Mill learnt. With regard to the subjects, Mill claims that he did not remember how old he was when he began to learn Greek, ñI have been told that it was when I was three years oldò[174], and some years later he was able to read Aesop's *Fables* in the original, the first of the many Greek books he read. Alongside with the study of Greek, he learnt arithmetic and history. Being such a precocious child, he began to study Latin and reading the Latin classics, such as the *Bucolics* by Virgil, at the age of eight[175], four years later his father introduced him to the study of logic and, at thirteen, to a complete course of political economy[176]. At sixteen, Mill wrote his first argumentative essay[177], and in the winter between 1822 and 1823 he created a small society composed of a small number of his peers, all agreeing on the principle of Utility as the basic political and ethical standard[178], and during their meetings they discussed about contemporary philosophical, political and economic issues. Finally, in the spring of 1823, ñ[...] my professional occupation and status for the next thirty-five years of my life, were decided by my father's obtaining for me an appointment from the East India Company, in the office of the Examiner of India correspondence, immediately under himself.ò[179]

As well as considering the subjects which formed Mill's frame of mind, it is important to analyse the approach through which he dealt with them. As it has been argued before, James Mill had a central role in the education of his son. From 1810 to 1813 the Mill family lived at Newington Green in north London which, at that time, was a rustic neighbourhood and in that period of Mill's childhood, he used to have long walks with his father, a necessary exercise required by James's health. During these walks, the young Mill used to express to his father

[174] *Ibid*., p. 5.
[175] Cf. *Ibid*., p. 11.
[176] Cf. *Ibid*., pp. 18 and 27.
[177] Cf. *Ibid*., Ch. III, p. 71.
[178] Cf. *Ibid*., p. 79.
[179] *Ibid*., p. 81.

his thoughts and opinions about what he had read the day before:

> To my best of remembrance, *this was a voluntary rather than a prescribed exercise*. I made notes on slips of paper while reading, and from these in the morning walks, I told the story to him; for the books were chiefly histories, of which I read in this manner a great number [é]. In these frequent talks about the books I read, *he used, as opportunity offered, to give me explanations and ideas respecting civilization, government, morality, mental cultivation, which he required me afterwards to restate to him in my own words*.[180]

This passage displays the first step towards the future intellectual development of John Stuart Mill. By encouraging his son to form personal opinions on any subject and to restate new ideas in his own words, James Mill trained his son's mind to perform with excellence the analytical thought. The germ of the analytical process to achieve knowledge was then fully developed and cultivated in Mill through the study of logic. When he first attempted to understand, through a dialogue with his father, the utility of syllogistic logic, Mill admits a complete failure: despite James's clarifications on the subject, he continued to be doubtful and confused. Nevertheless, such explanations ñremained as a nucleus for my observations and reflections to crystallize upon; the import of his general remarks being interpreted to me, by the particular instances which came under my notice afterwards.ò[181] Mill had learnt from his father how the observation, along with the analytical reflection about an issue, were fundamental to reach clarity and truth, as he himself explains:

> I know nothing, in my education, to which I think myself more indebted for whatever capacity of thinking I have attained. *The first intellectual operation of which I arrived at any proficiency, was dissecting a bad argument, and finding in what part the fallacy lay*: and though whatever capacity of this sort I have attained, was due to the fact that *it was an intellectual exercise in which I was most perseveringly drilled by my father*[182].

The analysis of any aspect of new knowledge Mill encountered was not only his method of learning and studying, but also the basis for his frame of mind. By avoiding by any means any activity which might ñdegenerate into a mere exercise of memoryò[183], by leading his son to

[180] *Ibid*., Ch. I, pp. 7-8 [italics mine].
[181] *Ibid*., p. 19.
[182] Ivi. [italics mine].
[183] *Ibid*., p. 31.

discover truth only by himself and giving his explanations only afterwards, James Mill formed and educated his son not only as a cultivated man, but most of all as a thinker and ñMill, fortified by a phenomenal precociousness and disciplined by a great awe of his father, appeared to have reacted enthusiastically and without resistance throughout his trialò[184].

Moreover, James Mill was not the only great influence on John Stuart Mill's education, also Bentham and his philosophy played a chief role in Mill's development as a young intellectual. In the third chapter of his *Autobiography*, Mill describes an important event in the last stage of his education. In the winter between 1821 and 1822, under suggestion from his father, Mill read for the first time the *Traité de Législation*, namely ñBentham's principal speculations, as interpreted to the Continent, and indeed to all the world, by Dumont [é]. *The reading of this book was an epoch in my life; one of the turning points in my mental history*.ò[185] Further on he claims that, although his previous education was already founded on Benthamism and although he was always taught to apply its chief principles, the reading of Bentham's philosophy on legislation and jurisprudence

> seemed to open a clearer and broader conception of what human opinions and institutions ought to be [é]. When I had laid down the last volume of the *Traité*, I had become a different being. The ñprinciple of utilityò, understood as Bentham understood it [é] fell exactly into its place as the keynote which held together the detached and fragmentary component parts of my knowledge and beliefs. *It gave unity to my conceptions of things. I now had opinions; a creed, a doctrine, a philosophy; in one among the best senses of the word, a religion; the inculcation and diffusion of which could be made the principal outward purpose of a life*.[186]

Not only did the principle of utility conceived by Bentham become the first aim in Mill's career as an intellectual, but it also became his creed, doctrine and religion. Hence, both his career and inner life were based on the principle of utility and he aimed at spreading it. Arguably therefore, as a result of his education, the central purpose of Mill's life was of the highest range and degree: at fifteen years old he became conscious that his principal goal was

[184] J. B. Ellery, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
[185] J. S. Mill, *Autobiography* cit., Ch. III, p. 64 [italics mine].
[186] *Ibid*., pp. 66-67 [italics mine].

the happiness and good of the greatest number of individuals, therefore, he aimed at the happiness of mankind.

But if on the one hand, Mill's strict and rigorous education led him to conceive and pursue an extremely high purpose, on the other, it was lacking in one important aspect, namely the cultivation of imagination and feelings. As he learnt Greek and Latin, Mill read Aesop, Homer and Virgil and other classic poets, yet the first aim of their study was the grammatical analysis of the sentences in the dead languages, not the pleasure and delight of the beauty of the verses. Despite the methods to which he was subjected, Mill admits that he enjoyed reading much[187] but the sheer pleasure which derived from the reading of poetry was only secondary for the young Mill and absolutely negligible for his father. Furthermore, in his son's childhood, hardly did James Mill allow him to read books which were not appropriate or suitable to his system:

> Of children's books, any more than of playthings, I had scarcely any, except an occasional gift from a relation or acquaintance: among those I had, *Robinson Crusoe* was pre-eminent, and continued to delight me through all my boyhood. *It was not part, however, of my father's system to exclude books of amusement, though he allowed them very sparingly. Of such books he possessed at that time next to none, but he borrowed several for me*; those which I remember are the *Arabian Nights*, Cazotte's *Arabian Tales*, *Don Quixote*, Miss Edgeworth's *Popular Tales*, and a book of some reputation in its day, Brooke's *Fool of Quality*.[188]

Arguably therefore, James Mill was not against childish amusement, yet, being extremely focused on the development of his son's intellectual faculties, he neglected that part of education which stimulates and cultivates the feelings and the imagination of the child. Such a negligence combined with an educational system exclusively focused on the development of Mill's rational faculties and, as Ellery suggests, a relationship between father and son based on ñgreat respect rather than warm affectionò[189] are the main factors which produced a deep mental and spiritual crisis in the young Mill.

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[187] Cf. *Ibid.*, Ch. I, pp. 10-12.
[188] *Ibid.*, p. 9 [italics mine].
[189] J. B. Ellery, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

Immediately before his personal crisis, Mill was a young Benthamite whose chief object in life was the good of mankind: ñAmbition and desire of distinction I had in abundance; and zeal for what I thought the good of mankind was my strongest sentiment, mixing with and colouring all others.ò[190] Yet, as he admits, the nobleness of such an elevated goal

> had not its root in genuine benevolence, or sympathy with mankind; though these qualities held their due place in my ethical standard. Nor was it connected with any high enthusiasm for ideal nobleness. *Yet of these feelings I was imaginatively very susceptible*; but there was at that time an intermission of its natural aliment, poetical culture, while *there was a superabundance of the discipline antagonistic to it, that of mere logic and analysis. Add to that* [é] *my father's teachings tended to the undervaluing of feeling.* [é] *he thought that feeling could take care of itself* [...].[191]

Now, the superabundance of mere logic and analysis over the sympathetic feeling towards mankind were the real problem in Mill's pursuit of his goal. This imbalance between feelings and mind, which is to be considered partly as the heritage of James Mill's belief that feelings do not need to be cultivated, led Mill to set them aside in favour of the practice of logic and analysis as the only instruments to achieve his aim. Moreover, the Utilitarian environment which surrounded Mill was generally held as emotionless and unfeeling and the Benthamites and Utilitarians were considered as ñmere reasoning machinesò[192] As Mill claims: ñthe cultivation of feelings (except the feeling of public and private duty) was not in much esteem among us, and had very little place in the thoughts of most of us, myself in particular.ò[193] As a matter of fact, the entire group of Utilitarians neglected the cultivation of feelings and, accordingly, in their view, the improvement of society was attainable exclusively through the education of the intellect[194].

Mill's personal crisis arose in this situation and context. At the age of twenty, his happiness was entirely and directly associated with his object in life, nevertheless, ñthe time came when

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[190] J. S. Mill, *Autobiography* cit., Ch. IV, p. 109.
[191] *Ibid*., pp. 109-110 [italics mine].
[192] Cf. *Ibid*., p. 109.
[193] *Ibid*., p. 111.
[194] Cf. Ivi.

I awakened from this as from a dream. [é] I was in a dull state of nerves, [é] *unsusceptible to enjoyment or pleasurable excitement; one of those moods when what is pleasure at other times, becomes insipid or indifferent* [é].ò[195] Being accustomed by his education to analysing and dissecting each problem in order to find where the error lay, Mill tried to understand the source of this thorough indifference by asking himself:

> 'Suppose that all your objects in life were realized; that all the changes in institutions and opinions which you are looking forward to, could be completely effected at this very instant: would this be a great joy and happiness to you?' And an irrepressible self-consciousness distinctly answered, 'No!' At this my heart sank within me: *the whole foundation on which my life was constructed fell down. All my happiness was to have been found in the continual pursuit of this end. The end had ceased to charm.* [é] *I seemed to have nothing to live for.*[196]

The idea of his future as a reformer of the institutions in order to provide the greatest happiness to society ceased to be the source of Mill's own happiness and it produced in him a lack of motivation in his daily activities and a negative feeling of dullness towards his life in general. Moreover, ña feeling of unworthiness began to manifest itself [é]. His reasoning became stilted by disturbing thoughts, by fear and apprehension; his mental agitation slipped into apathy and then into despondency.ò[197] Mill identifies the principal cause of such a distressful and troubled state of mind in his father's educational system. The Utilitarian philosophy, in whose creed Mill was brought up, disdained the cultivation of feelings, relying on and promoting, instead, the rational and analytical development of the mind. Yet, the stark separation between mind and feelings, considered as two entities of the individual which need necessarily to be isolated from each other, and the complete focus on the first and the utter negligence of the latter proved, in Mill's case, to be partly an unsuccessful method of educating an individual. Furthermore, Mill realised that ñthe analytic habits may [é] strengthen the associations between causes and effects, means and ends, but tend altogether to

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[195] *Ibid*., Ch. V, p. 133 [italics mine].
[196] *Ibid*., pp. 133-134 [italics mine].
[197] J. B. Ellery, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

weaken those which are [é] a *mere* matter of feelings.ò[198] Hence, the nearly absent cultivation of the feelings, and the overdeveloped intellectual faculties tended to erase in him the human part of the individual, since feelings need ñsufficient strength to resist the dissolving influence of analysis [...].ò[199] Arguably therefore, at this stage of his life, Mill was aware of the existence of feelings and emotions, yet he hardly perceived them:

> All those to whom I looked up, were of the opinion that the pleasure of sympathy with human beings, and the feelings which made the good of others, and especially for mankind on large scale, the object of existence, were the greatest and surest sources of happiness. *Of the truth of this I was convinced, but to know that a feeling would make me happy if I had it, did not give me the feeling*.[200]

It can be claimed that Mill intellectually acknowledged the existence of feelings simply as a notion, but he was not able to experience them.

Nevertheless, the personal conditions caused by the crisis Mill experienced had the beneficial effect of producing in him a fundamental new awareness which led him to positively overcome his crisis and to revolutionise his entire theory of life. This new consciousness manifested itself in two forms. Firstly, Mill changed the focus of his principal aim by concentrating his attention and energies not on happiness as a direct end in itself, but by finding different ends external to it, since he realised that

> *Those only are happy (I thought) who have their minds fixed on some object other than their happiness;* on the happiness of others, on the improvement of mankind, even on some art or pursuit, followed not as a means, but as itself an ideal end. Aiming thus at something else, *they find happiness by the way*. [é] Ask yourself whether you are happy, and you cease to be so. *The only chance is to treat, not happiness, but some end external to it, as the purpose of life*. [é] This theory now became the basis of my philosophy of life.[201]

In this passage, Mill demonstrates how his new theory to achieve happiness has removed the selfish individual pursuit of happiness, beginning to be centred on an object external to the individual, and most importantly, to be led by the feeling of sympathy and unselfishness.

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[198] J. S. Mill, *Autobiography* cit., Ch. V, p. 138.
[199] Ivi.
[200] Ivi. [italics mine].
[201] *Ibid*., p. 142 [italics mine].

Hence, it can be claimed that the cold calculations and the strict logic on which he was previously accustomed to relying are now replaced by a capacity of sympathetic feelings which Mill now considered as a resource and a richness rather than an obstacle to his end. The second important change which this new awareness produced in Mill is the cultivation of the feelings. Mill realised for the first time how fundamental it is to develop and improve the human side of the individual in order to accomplish his goals:

> I, for the first time, gave its proper place, *among the prime necessities of human well-being, to the internal culture of the individual*. I ceased to attach almost exclusive importance to the ordering of outward circumstances, and the training of the human being for speculation and for action. *I had now learnt by experience that the passing susceptibilities needed to be cultivated as well as the active capacities, and required to be nourished and enriched as well as guided.*[202]

By giving its due place to individual feelings, Mill began to bridge the gap between mind and feelings created by his former education. Hence, the recognition of such gap enabled him to begin a new phase of his personal history which included a new form of education, namely the cultivation of the human part of himself. Furthermore, it is important to underline that the recognition of the complementary function of the feelings to the practice of the intellect did not separate Mill from his habit of logical reasoning. As he remarks:

> I *did not, for an instant, lose sight of, or undervalue, that part of the truth which I had seen before; I never turned recreant to intellectual culture*, or ceased to consider the power and practice of analysis as an essential condition both of individual and social improvement. *But I thought that it had consequences which required to be corrected, by joining other kinds of cultivation with it.* The maintenance of *a due balance among the faculties now seemed to be of primary importance*. The cultivation of the feelings became one of the cardinal points in my ethical and philosophical creed.[203]

Therefore, a due balance is of absolute necessity in order for an individual to grow to a complete and genuine maturity avoiding becoming a ñdeformed adultò[204] who cherishes or relies on only one aspect of his individuality, namely either the mind or the feelings. It can be

[202] *Ibid*., p. 143 [italics mine].
[203] Ivi. [italics mine].
[204] M. Andrews, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

claimed, therefore, that, through such a long period of crisis, Mill integrated and fortified his already solid intellectual capacities with the education of his emotional side. Accordingly, the compensation of such lack gave him the possibility to develop an emotional intelligence[205] along with his solid intellectual and logical intelligence, acknowledging ñfor the first time the importance of the spiritual, aesthetic things that his father's rationalism had no room for; he felt the need for the culture of feelings as well as of the mindò[206].

Moreover, it is important not only to analyse the effects and changes which Mill's crisis produced on his frame of mind, but also the process and the instruments which helped him to overcome such difficult spiritual condition. At the beginning of his crisis Mill was conscious that he could not find any aid in a friend because, apparently, he could not consider any of his acquaintances as a real friend since they all belonged to the Utilitarian group and were linked only by a relation of mutual respect and shared intellectual beliefs. As Mill explains:

> If I had loved anyone sufficiently to make confiding my grief a necessity, I should not have been in the condition I was. [é] Advice, if I had known where to seek it, would have been most precious.[207]

Similarly, he could not confess his state of mind to his father who ñwas the last person to whom, in such a case as this, I looked for help. Everything convinced me that *he had no knowledge of any such mental state as I was suffering from*, and that even if he could be made to understand it, he was not the physician who could heal it.ò[208] In such spiritual solitude which prevented him from confiding his anguish and suffering due to the absence of a sympathetic and understanding friendly figure[209], Mill sought relief in literature. As argued before, Mill approached literature from an early age mostly through the study of the Greek and Latin classics and of the English poetry by Shakespeare, Spencer, Dryden and, one of his

[205] Cf. M. Parris, *J. S. Mill*, in *Great Lives*, BBC Radio 4 Podcast, 8 Jan. 2013, min. 16:42.
[206] M. Cranston, *op. cit*., p. 6.
[207] J. S. Mill, *Autobiography* cit., Ch. V, p. 135.
[208] Ivi. [italics mine].
[209] Cf. J. B. Ellery, *op. cit*., p. 28.

favourites, Milton[210], although in his youth he enjoyed the reading of history books more. Nevertheless, at the beginning of his crisis, the reading of his favourite books, ñthose memorials of past nobleness and greatness from which I had always hitherto drawn strength and animationò[211] gave him now no relief altogether. Accordingly, in the middle of his crisis, Mill set aside the greatness and nobleness of historical records to approach a completely different genre, he began to read Marmontel's *Mémoires* which cast a new light on his condition:

> [I] came to the passage which relates to his father's death, the distressed position of the family, and the sudden inspiration by which he, then a mere boy, felt and made them feel that he would be everything to them ï would supply the place of all that they had lost. *A vivid conception of the scene and its feelings came over me, and I was moved to tears*.[212]

In this passage, Mill describes two fundamental experiences: firstly, the reading of a painful loss led him to sympathise with the author and consequently to shed tears for Marmontel's sufferings and strength. Secondly, he states that he had a ñvivid conception of the sceneò, it can be claimed, therefore, that it is Mill's imagination that enabled him to feel such sympathetic emotions towards Marmontel. Hence, the process of imaging Marmontel's sufferings and then being moved to tears are the first step into Mill's recovery: ñI was no longer hopeless: I was not a stock or a stone. I had still [é] some of the material out of which all worth of character, and all capacity for happiness, are made.ò[213] By reading about the sufferings of others, not only did Mill begin to recover from his wretchedness, but he also discovered his capacity for feeling: he discovered that he was not a mere cold and rational individual, but that he also possessed both imagination and sympathetic and understanding feelings.

Marmontel was not the only author in whom Mill sought relief from his condition. When he

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[210] Cf. J. S. Mill, *Autobiography* cit., Ch. I, pp. 12 and 16.
[211] *Ibid*., Ch. V, p. 134.
[212] *Ibid*., pp. 140-141 [italics mine].
[213] *Ibid*., p. 141.

acknowledged the importance of the balance between mind and feelings and, therefore, devoted a great amount of energy to the cultivation of his humanity in order to bridge the gap caused by the strict education he had received, Mill approached poetry with a different and new attitude since ñI now began to find meaning in the things which I read or heard about the importance of *poetry and art as instruments of human culture*.ò[214] It is important to underline that Bentham, James Mill and the group of Bentham's supporters which surrounded Mill did not recognise the emotional value of literature and art in general. Since the Utilitarian philosophy tried to measure any sort of pleasure according to its duration, intensity, certainty and uncertainty, then also the pleasures produced by art could be measured and defined through the same method. Therefore, ñboth James Mill and Bentham assume that in all aspects of art, in aesthetic questions, in matters of feelings and sensibility, there is nothing in any way special or unique, nothing that cannot be understood through the agency of empirical reasoning.ò Accordingly, they ñdisdained any employment of arcane appeals to 'taste', 'genius' and 'adherence to nature', in discussing aesthetic questions.ò[215] Yet, the Utilitarians did not reject art *a priori*, in fact they judged its importance

> by the pleasures and pains which it causes. It is not that [James] Mill and Bentham consider art and literature to be inherently less worthing of consideration or encouragement than any other activity. It is only that art, in their system, stands at the bar of utility on an equal and unprejudiced basis with all other activities, and receives a fair hearing. Literature and the feelings and emotions derived from it must be tested by the standard of utility and be assigned their proper value to society in accordance with this measurement.[216]

Thus, by denying any importance to the genius and taste of the artist and the poet, James Mill and Bentham undervalued the power of imagination and creativity and they attached value to art only as far as it provided pleasure. With regard to imagination, the Utilitarians agreed on the fact that imagination has no connection with reality[217]. On the one hand, Bentham claimed that the use of imagination is harmless to the individual and society as far as the individuals

[214] *Ibid*., p. 144 [italics mine].
[215] F. P. Sharpless, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.
[216] *Ibid*., p. 16.
[217] Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

are able to discern between objective and empirical reality and the modification and alteration of such reality which the poet operates through the use of his imagination in creating poetry. Hence, ñthe imaginative thoughts of the poet will [not] be mistaken either by the poet, or by the reader of poetry, as having nothing to do with truth.ò[218] On the other hand, Bentham believed that ña great deal of human error and a preponderate amount of the pains that afflict men, stem from faulty reasoning, and from irrational action committed under the influence of emotions. If, as Bentham says, poetry can, by diverting the mind, dissuade the idle from vicious anti-social practices, it can also have the opposite effect.ò[219] Hence, Bentham attacked those who might only appeal to the feelings, namely the poets, thus corrupting the intellectual reasoning.[220] In his *Autobiography*, Mill claims that Bentham and the Utilitarian group, to which he belonged, were generally defined as ñenemies of poetryò: since they neglected ñboth in theory and in practice the cultivation of feeling,ò it ñnaturally resulted [é] an undervaluing of poetry, and of imagination generally, as an element of human nature.ò[221]

Mill agreed with this view of art until his crisis. As a matter of fact, as soon as he acquired the consciousness of the importance of feelings, he changed his consideration of the aesthetic and emotional value of literature. In the autumn of 1828 at the age of twenty-two, Mill read Wordsworth's poems for the first time in his life and discovered that they were exactly what suited his conditions:

> In the first place, these poems addressed themselves powerfully to one of the strongest of my pleasurable susceptibilities, the love of rural objects and natural scenery [...]. But Wordsworth would never have had any great effect on me, if he had merely placed before me beautiful pictures of natural scenery. [é] What made Wordsworth's poems a medicine to my state of mind, was that *they expressed*, not mere outward beauty, but *states of feeling,* and of *thought coloured by feeling, under the excitement of beauty*. They seemed to be *the very culture of feelings, which I was in quest of.*[222]

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[218] *Ibid*., p. 27.
[219] *Ibid*., p. 29.
[220] Cf. *Ibid*., p. 30.
[221] J. S. Mill, *Autobiography* cit., Ch. IV, p. 112.
[222] *Ibid*., Ch. V, pp. 147-148 [italics mine].

Mill's interest in Wordsworth's poems derived from his profound inner necessity to experiment and experience directly the activity of feelings and such poems, being ñthe very culture of feelingsò, were exactly what he required for his deepest emotions to be stimulated:

> *In them I seemed to draw from a source of inward joy, of sympathetic and imaginative pleasure, which could be shared in by all human beings;* which had no connection with struggle or imperfection, but would be made richer by every improvement in the physical or social condition of mankind. *From them I seemed to learn what would be the perennial sources of happiness*, when all the greater evils of life shall have been removed. And *I felt myself at once better and happier as I came under their influence.*[223]

Through the reading of Wordsworth, Mill felt an ñinward joyò and a ñsympathetic and imaginative pleasureò which spiritually connected him with all human beings, their ñcommon feelings and common destinyò[224] because such feelings are universally shared, and therefore, with the activity of imagination, their influence led him to be happier and better. Therefore, the moral effect which Wordsworth's poems produced on Mill's sensibility can find a perfect correspondence in George Eliot's description of the function of literature and art in general:

> The greatest benefit we owe to the artist [é] is the extension of our sympathies. [é] *a picture of human life such as a great artist can give, surprises even the trivial and the selfish into that attention to what is apart from themselves, which may be called the raw material of moral sentiment*. [é] *Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot.*ò[225]

Moreover, as Sharpless argues, Wordsworth's poems suited Mill because they rescued him from a state of indifference and emptiness since, as Mill himself defined him, Wordsworth ñmay be said to be the poet of unpoetical naturesò[226], and before his crisis Mill was exactly one of the ñunpoetical naturesò whose education and lofty goals prevented him from developing his human side[227]. Accordingly, ñunpoetical natures are precisely those which

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[223] *Ibid*., p. 148 [italics mine].
[224] Ivi.
[225] G. Eliot, *Natural History of German Life*, [1856], in *Selected Critical Writings*, ed. R. Ashton, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992, pp. 260-295, p. 263 [italics mine].
[226] J. S. Mill, *Autobiography* cit., Ch. V, p. 149.
[227] Cf. F. P. Sharpless, *op. cit*., p. 62.

require poetic cultivation.ò[228]

The last important stage in Mill's life which is worth considering here is the relationship with his wife, Mrs Harriet Taylor. According to Mill's description of Mrs Taylor, she was the perfect expression of the union between a powerful and piercing intelligence and a loving and sympathetic heart, between the noblest morality and the most refined taste and imagination:

> The same exactness and rapidity of operation, pervading as it did *her sensitive as well as her mental faculties*, would, with *her gifts of feeling and imagination*, have fitted her to be a consummate artist, as *her fiery and tender soul and her vigorous eloquence* would certainly have made her a great orator, and *her profound knowledge of human nature and discernment and sagacity in practical life*, would, in the times when such a *carrière* was open to women, have made her eminent among the rulers of mankind. Her intellectual gifts did but minister to *a moral character at once the noblest and best balanced* which I have ever met with in life. *Her unselfishness was not that of a taught system of duties, but of a heart which thoroughly identified itself with the feelings of others*, and often went to excess in consideration for them by imaginatively investing their feelings with the intensity of its own. *The passion of justice* might have been thought to be her strongest feeling, but for her *boundless generosity*, and a *lovingness ever ready to pour itself forth upon any or all human beings* who were capable of giving the smallest feeling in return.[229]

The greatness and nobility of character which stem from such description underlines the deep awe which Mill felt for Taylor's capacity of generosity, loving and unselfish feeling for others. Arguably therefore, it can be claimed that it was the cultivation of his feelings which allowed Mill to appreciate such qualities in his wife. In fact, if he had not developed such capacity, he would not have needed a loving and imaginative companion, but simply an intellectual one. Furthermore, not only did his wife embody the perfect balance between mind and feelings, she also helped Mill in the conception and development of *On Liberty*. As he states in the last chapter of his *Autobiography*:

> What was abstract and purely scientific was generally mine; the properly human element came from her. [é] The whole mode of thinking of which the book was the expression, was emphatically hers. But I also was so thoroughly imbued with it, that the same thoughts naturally occurred to both. [é] The *Liberty* is likely to survive longer than anything else that I have ever written [é], because the conjunction of her mind with mine has rendered it *a kind of philosophic text-book of a single truth*, which the changes progressively taking place in modern society tend to bring out into ever stronger relief: *the importance, to man and society of a large variety in types of character, and of giving full freedom to human*

[228] J. S. Mill, *Autobiography* cit., p. 149.
[229] *Ibid*., Ch. VI, p. 187 [italics mine].

nature to expand itself in innumerable and conflicting directions.[230]

It can be claimed that, without his personal crisis, Mill would not have been able to elaborate so precisely the idea of human freedom rooted in the possibility of every individual to expand his nature in ñinnumerableò directions. *On Liberty* as well as his later works ñaccept the principle that men need to be moved through their feelings, as well as through their reason. When an appeal to feelings can be employed to make a truth felt as well as understood, Mill clearly aims at this greater effectiveness.ò[231]

Despite the personal character of Mill's inner revolution, the new conception of life and happiness which he adopted and the importance which he attached to literature, in particular to poetry, was not isolated. As a matter of fact, many among the Victorian intellectuals and novelists, for instance Matthew Arnold and Charles Dickens, in opposition to the Utilitarian view, shared the idea of the feeling side of the human beings as intimately connected with literature. As it has been argued before, Mill never abandoned the use of logic and never denied its importance. Hence, it can be claimed that Mill tried to conciliate and integrate the analytical and rational method on which the Utilitarian philosophy was based with the aesthetic and moral value of poetry. Mill shared Wordsworth's theory of the difference between poetry and science according to which science ñaddresses itself to the beliefò, it ñdoes its work by convincing or persuadingò and ñacts by presenting a proposition to the understandingò, whereas poetry addresses itself ñto the feelingsò, therefore, it works ñby movingò and acts ñby offering interesting objects of contemplation to the sensibilities.ò[232] Moreover, Mill acknowledged that not only science, but also poetry is able to reveal truth: ñthe truth of poetry is to paint the human soul truly [é], the deeper and more secret working

[230] *Ibid*., Ch. VII, pp. 247-253 [italics mine].
[231] F. P. Sharpless, *op. cit.*, p. 223.
[232] J. S. Mill, *Monthly Repository*, VII, pp. 60-61, quoted in F. P. Sharpless, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

of the human heart.ò[233] Hence, in opposition to Bentham's considerations which denied any relation between poetry and truth[234], according to Mill, the realm of truth does not belong exclusively to the field of science, but also to poetry which is the means of achieving knowledge of the soul. Science enables the scientist to acquire knowledge of the external physical world, whereas poetry enables the reader to acquire knowledge of the inner spiritual dimension. The belief in the shared capacity of reaching truth of both science and poetry is supported by Matthew Arnold as well:

> We are proud of our men of science. [é] Finally we are proud of our poets and poetry. Now *poetry is nothing less than the most perfect speech of man, that in which he comes nearest to being able to utter the truth*. It is no small thing, therefore, to succeed eminently in poetry.[235]

Furthermore, as Mill comprehended the moral value of poetry after his crisis, so Arnold agreed with the idea that poetry has the function of morally entertaining its readers and that it helps them to approach happiness: ñ[Wordsworth's poems] will co-operate with the benign tendencies in human nature and society, and will, in their degree, be efficacious in making men *wiser, better*, and *happier*.ò[236] Hence, according to both Mill and Arnold, poetry is able to morally and spiritually improve men's nature. Finally, they both recognised that there can be no utter separation between mind and feelings and that if rational thinking is not supported by emotions, human nature is dangerously limited. The two sides of human nature need to be reconciled and connected and poetry is the best means for the man of science to achieve this goal and, on the other hand, thought is the best means for the poet:

> [Poetry] *thinks emotionally*, and herein it differs from science, and is more of a stay to us. *Poetry gives the idea, but it gives it touched with beauty, heightened by emotion.* This is what we feel to be interpretative for us, to satisfy us ï thought, but *thought invested with beauty, with emotion.* So true is this, that the more the follower of science is a complete man, the more he will feel the refreshment of poetry as giving him a satisfaction which our nature is always desiring, but to which his science can never bring him. And the more an

[233] *Ibid*., p. 62, quoted in F. P. Sharpless, *op. cit*., p. 73.
[234] Cf. F. P. Sharpless, *op. cit*., p. 29.
[235] M. Arnold, *Wordsworth*, [1879], *in The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. R. H. Super, Rexdale, University of Michigan Press, 1973, XI Vols., Vol. IX, pp. 36-56, p. 38 [italics mine].
[236] Ivi. [italics mine].

> artist, on the other hand, is a complete man, the higher he will appreciate the reach and effectualness which poetry gains by being, in Goethe's words, not art but genius; by being *for its very nature forbidden to limit itself to the sphere of plastic representation, by being forced to talk and think.*[237]

Both Mill and Arnold underline the utmost importance of the balance between rationality and emotions, since the incompleteness of human nature stems from the stiffening of emotions in the man of science and of rationality in the poet, since ñpoems to which any value can be attached, were never produced [é] but by a man who being possessed of more then usual organic sensibility *had also thought long and deeply.*ò[238] Hence, for the two intellectuals, the completeness of human nature can be reached only through developing, in Dickens's words, the ñwisdom of the Headò alongside with the ñwisdom of the Heartò[239] because feelings which ñlack this rational foundation 'cannot properly be called anything but tastes, prejudices, or passions, according to their source and their intensity'. On the other hand, men whose intellectual convictions are not balanced by emotion become transformed into 'animals or calculating machines.'ò[240]

The ideal figure who might embody such a perfect balance is what Mill defined as the ñpoet-philosopherò, namely ñthe ideal man who inspires admiration both for what he is, *and* for what he says, a man whose work and life reconcile the opposites of fact and feeling, of intuition and reason, and who thus solves finally the contradictions which grew directly out [of Mill's] mental crisis [é].ò[241] Nevertheless, Mill never found anyone who perfectly balanced mind and feelings, neither in the present nor in the past. Yet, such failure produced ña new, final development in Mill's thinking, which is liberal and humane in tone, and which

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[237] Ivi. [italics mine].
[238] W. Wordsworth, *Preface*, [1800], in *Lyrical Ballads*, ed. R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones, London, Methuen, 1965, pp. 241-272, p. 246 [italics mine].
[239] C. Dickens, *Hard Times* cit., Book III, Ch. 1, p. 217.
[240] F. P. Sharpless, *op. cit.*, pp. 202-203.
[241] *Ibid*., p. 220.

gives literature a higher and more crucial place than it had ever had in his earlier writing.ò[242] Thus, Mill found out that to produce this ideal character of the poet-philosopher, a proper education was necessary. In 1865 he was elected Rector at the University of St. Andrews where he gave his ñInaugural Addressò on the 1st February 1867. In his beautiful speech, Mill introduced the topic of education as a ñmany-sided subjectò which not only includes

> whatever we do for ourselves, and whatever is done for us by others, for *the expressed purpose of bringing us somewhat nearer to the perfection of our nature*; *it does more: in its larger acceptation, it comprehends even the indirect effects produced on character and on the human faculties* [é]. Whatever helps to shape the human being; to make the individual what he is, or hinder him from being what he is not ï is part of his education.[243]

According to Mill, education is the first stage of individual and social improvement since it is through education that the new generations are taught to be better than the previous ones by bringing their nature nearer to perfection. In order to succeed in this accomplishment, universities need not to be ñintended to teach the knowledge required to fit men for some special mode of gaining their livelihood. Their object is not to make skilful lawyers, or physicians, or engineers, but capable and cultivated human beingsò because ñmen are men before they are lawyers, or physicians, or merchants, or manufacturers; and if you make them capable and sensible men, they will make themselves capable and sensible lawyers or physicians.ò[244] Hence, formal education in institutions needs to aim at cultivating the full human nature of its students in order for them to excel in their future activities. The future generation of Englishmen is in need of what Mill defined as the liberal education: a type of education which leads ñto the improvement of the individual mindò and which pursues the end of ñstrengthening, exalting, purifying, and beautifying of our common nature [...].ò[245] Therefore, both the study of science and logic, which teach how to think, and literary

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[242] Ivi.
[243] J. S. Mill, *Inaugural Address Delivered to the University of St. Andrews*, London, Longman, 1867, p. 4 [italics mine].
[244] *Ibid*., pp. 5 and 6.
[245] *Ibid*., p. 11.

education, which teaches how to express feelings, are necessary to a complete education.[246] On the one hand, science and logic are the two main subjects which enable the individual to reach objective truths. Science provides the individual with the perfect ñunion of reasoning and observation, which by means of facts that can be directly observed, ascends to laws which govern multitudes of other facts ð laws which not only explain and account for what we see, but give us assurance beforehand of much that we do not see.ò[247] Furthermore, logic ñis the great disperser of hazy and confused thinking: it clears up the fogs which hide from us our own ignorance, and make us believe that we understand a subject when we do not.ò Logic prevents the mind from falling into error, and uncovers where the false notions lay because it ñcompels us to throw our meaning into distinct propositions, and our reasonings into distinct steps. It makes us conscious of all the implied assumptions on which we are proceeding, and which, if not true, vitiate the entire process.ò[248] On the other hand, there need to be a third branch of education which is ñnot less needful to the completeness of the human being.ò[249] This branch was defined by Mill as ñthe aesthetic branch; the culture which comes through poetry and art, and may be described as the education of the feelings, and the cultivation of the beautiful. This department of things deserves to be regarded in a far more serious light than is the custom of these countries.ò[250] The study of the Arts must not be neglected, especially that of poetry, ñthe queen of artsò[251], which should deserve a higher consideration as a subject taught at university. According to Mill, the chief reasons of the indifference towards poetry in England are the social-economic and religious development of the country. He specified that the rise of middle-class business and Puritanism are the two principal causes of ñone of the commonest types of characterò among the Englishmen, namely

[246] Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
[247] *Ibid.*, p. 48.
[248] *Ibid.*, p. 55.
[249] *Ibid.*, p. 86.
[250] Ivi.
[251] *Ibid.*, p. 87.

> a man all whose ambition is self-regarding; who has no higher purpose in life than to enrich or raise in the world himself and his family; who never dreams of making the good of his fellow-creatures or of his country an habitual object, further than giving away, annually or from time to time, certain sums in charity; but who has a conscience sincerely alive to whatever is generally considered wrong, and would scruple to use any very illegitimate means for attaining his self-interested objects[252].

On the one hand, business led men to disregard any other activity as a loss of time and, therefore, of money, on the other, Puritanism tended to disapprove of any human feeling which was different from fear and reverence towards God. Hence, the selfishness which has been maturing in the heart of the individuals needs to be deleted from human nature and for this reason, future generations need to be taught to develop feelings and imagination.

According to Mill, being the individual's conscience neither corrupt nor perfect, but a neutral ground on which ñbeneficent plants may be grown as easily as weedsò[253], it is of the utmost importance for universities to encourage the cultivation of the feelings among students in a perfect overturn of the famous beginning of Dickens's *Hard Times*: ñFacts alone are wanted in life. *Plant nothing else and root out everything else*.ò[254] Therefore, such extremities are to be avoided by integrating the study of poetry and of ñall literature so far as it is poetical and artisticò[255] because, as Arnold, perfectly in harmony with Mill's thought, claimed, ñ[...] if the [poet] is a real classic, if his work belongs to the class of the very best [é], then the great thing for us is to feel and enjoy his work as deeply as ever we can [é]. This is what is *salutary*, this is what is *formative*, this is the great benefit to be got from the study of poetry.ò[256] Moreover, the formative character of poetry is reflected in the expansion of the soul and the elevation of the mind, but also in its capacity, on a larger extent, to create a desire of perfection in life in general:

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[252] *Ibid*., p. 90.
[253] F. P. Sharpless, *op. cit*., p. 240.
[254] C. Dickens, *Hard Times* cit., Book I, Ch. 1, p. 9 [italics mine].
[255] J. S. Mill, *Inaugural Address Delivered to the University of St. Andrews* cit., p. 92.
[256] M. Arnold, *The Study of Poetry,* [1880], in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. R. H. Super, Rexdale, University of Michigan Press, 1973, XI Vols., Vol. IX, pp. 161-188, p. 165 [italics mine].

> He who has learnt what beauty is, if he be of a virtuous character, will desire to realize it in his own life ð will keep before himself a type of *perfect beauty in human character*, to light his attempts at self-culture. [é] Now, *this sense of perfection, which would make us demand from every creation of man the very utmost that it ought to give, and render us intolerant of the smallest fault in ourselves or in anything we do, is one of the results of Art cultivation.*[257]

To conclude, after his crisis, Mill attached an increasing profound importance to the cultivation of the feelings thus sharing the view of many other Victorian intellectuals and novelists. His ñInaugural Addressò as Rector at St. Andrews is the evidence that his career as a philosopher and an intellectual moved from the strictness of the system applied to his informal education to a more broad and liberal conception of education and life, based not only on the development of the intellectual faculties, but also of the imagination and feelings which are an aid both for the acquisition of wisdom and for the improvement of life in a more wide sense. Accordingly for Mill, the chief means through which the cultivation of the feelings is possible is the reading and studying of literature and of poetry in particular. By describing and portraying the truth which belongs to the human soul, poetry creates a connection between the reader and his fellow human beings because it stimulates those feelings and sensibilities which belong to all of them. Therefore, if education lacks the cultivation of the feelings, it is to be considered as deeply limited and the individual to whom this system is applied risks, accordingly, becoming an incomplete and selfish adult. On the other hand, when the education of the intellectual faculties is supported by the cultivation of the emotions, the individual can achieve full completeness becoming what Mill defined as the ñpoet-philosopherò, a figure who is able not only to think, but to feel what he thinks. Such awareness of the importance of the cultivation of feelings is a direct consequence of Mill's personal crisis which enabled him to expand his frame of mind by adding a profound humanity to his great intellectual faculties. Arguably therefore, as Sharpless claims, thanks to this new configuration of his character, Mill himself can be considered as the personification

[257] J. S. Mill, *Inaugural Address Delivered to the University of St. Andrews* cit., pp. 94-95 [italics mine].

of his idea of the poet-philosopher[258] since, on the one side, he never denied the possibilities of the correct use of logic and the importance of science in the development of human knowledge, on the other side, he recognised the importance of the energy of feelings and emotions in every human activity. Furthermore, the painful experience of his crisis led him to acknowledge the moral and formative value of art:

> Art, when really cultivated, and not merely practised empirically, maintains, what it first gave the conception of, an ideal Beauty, to be eternally aimed at, though surpassing what can be actually attained; and by this idea *it trains us never to be completely satisfied with imperfection in what we ourselves do and are: to idealize, as much as possible, every work we do, and most of all, our own characters and lives*.[259]

A sound and balanced education is necessary, an education of the mind as well as ñan education for the taste and sympathies.ò[260] Similar to Dickens, George Eliot and Matthew Arnold, thus Mill came to recognise that the chief means for the practice of such sound education is the education to the arts because ñthe more prosaic our ordinary duties, the more necessary it is to keep up the tone of our minds by frequent visits to that higher region of thought and feeling, in which every work seems dignified in proportion to the ends for which, and the spirit in which, it is done.ò[261] Individuals need to learn to beautify their lives, otherwise ñReality will take a wolfish turn, and make an end of you.ò[262]

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[258] Cf. F. P. Sharpless, *op. cit*., p. 240.
[259] J. S. Mill, *Inaugural Address Delivered to the University of St. Andrews* cit., p. 96 [italics mine].
[260] G. Eliot, *Natural History of German Life*, in *op. cit*., pp. 260-295, p. 261.
[261] J. S. Mill, *Inaugural Address Delivered to the University of St. Andrews* cit., p. 94.
[262] C. Dickens, *Hard Times* cit., Book II, Ch. 6, p. 160.

Chapter Four

Victorian Theories of the Education to Humanity

4. Victorian Theories to the Education to Humanity

4.1 John Ruskin

Many among the Victorian intellectuals acknowledged the capital importance of the cultivation of feelings in an age in which the general social tendency was directed towards respectability and economic earnings considered as chief goals in life[263]. Among those who rejected the strictly Utilitarian dogmas of Victorian culture, whose ñprincipal ingredient was Benthamismò[264], John Ruskin is to be considered as a central figure. He was not merely an art critic since his art criticism is often blended with the social. In his criticism, Ruskin specially valued the role of imagination and feelings, yet, he never denied that the intellectual faculties played a role as significant as that of emotions. As a matter of fact, Ruskin defined art as the representation of the ñ*rational* and *disciplined* delight in the forms and in the laws of the creation of which [man] forms part [é]ò[265] hence in his view, the intellectual faculty is to be considered as a fundamental ingredient which lies at the basis of the work of art. Furthermore, ñart is greatest which includes the greatest number of ideasò[266], which are Truth, Beauty and Relation. In the term Relation, Ruskin includes those ideas transmitted by art ñwhich are the subjects of *distinct intellectual perception and action*, and which are therefore worthy of the name of *thought*.ò[267] The term Beauty defines ñthe power in anything of delighting an *intelligent human soul* by its appearanceò, and finally, Truth is ñthe faithful statement, *either to the mind or the senses*, of any act of nature.ò[268] Therefore, similarly to Matthew Arnold, not only does Ruskin recognise the necessity of the practice of reason and thought in art, but he also acknowledges that art possesses the quality of truthfulness. Moreover, the role of the

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[263] Cf. W. E. Houghton, *op. cit.*, p. 269.
[264] *Ibid*., p. 267.
[265] J. Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, Vol. III, quoted in F. W. Roe, *Ruskin and the Sense of Beauty*, in *Studies by Members of the English Department*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1918, 3 Vols., Vol. 1, pp. 270-299, p. 274 [italics mine].
[266] Ivi.
[267] Ivi. [italics mine].
[268] Ivi. [italics mine].

mind needs to be supported by the presence of feelings. In his definition of two of the elements of great art, namely Truth and Beauty, Ruskin combines the rational and the sensitive side of the human being, both the mind and the emotions of the ñintelligent human soulò. A further necessary element is imagination. According to Ruskin, this faculty is by no means an instrument for distorting reality and producing falsehood, as the Benthamites stated. In fact, as he himself states in *Modern Painters*, ñthe *virtue* of the Imagination is its reaching, by intuition and intensity of gaze (not by reasoning, but by its authoritative opening and *revealing power*), *a more essential truth than is seen at the surface of things*.ò[269] Imagination is the capacity of the human mind of reaching truth at its essential level, hence, its sound practice cannot possess any relation with falsehood or deception because, since the foundation of ñits authority and being is its *perpetual thirst for truth and purpose to be true*ò, it can have ñno food, no delight, no care, no perception, except of truthò and therefore, imagination ñis *for ever* looking under masks, and burning up mists.ò[270]

For Ruskin, the ultimate source of the three great ideas in art is the noble soul of the artist[271] who must ñfeel *strongly* and *nobly*ò since great art ñis in some sort an expression of this personal feeling.ò[272] Therefore, to create great art, the artist must avoid to reproduce, ñthough ever so accurately, yet coldly, like human mirrors, the scenes which pass before [his] eyes.ò[273] As Landow argues, for Ruskin ñthe great artist [é] does not merely record the facts of appearance. Rather he treats his subject differently, 'giving not the actual fact of it, but the impression it made upon his *mind*.'ò[274] Accordingly, for Ruskin, great art is the product of the balanced co-operation of the mind and the noble feelings and imagination of the artist.

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[269] J. Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, Vol. II, [1846], in *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cooks and A. Wedderburn, London, George Allen, 1903, 39 Vols, Vol. 4, sec. II, Ch. III, pp. 249-288, p. 284 [italics mine].
[270] *Ibid*., pp. 284-285 [italics mine].
[271] Cf. F. W. Roe, *op. cit.*, p. 275.
[272] J. Ruskin, *Modern Painters*,Vol. III, [1856], in *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cooks and A. Wedderburn, London, George Allen, 1904, 39 Vols, Vol. 5, Ch. I, p. 32.
[273] Ivi.
[274] G. P. Landow, *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1971, p. 63 [italics mine].

Moreover, in order for the artist to use his imagination soundly, he needs to be guided by a spiritual force, ñthe essential idea of real virtueò, namely a ñvital human strength, which instinctively, constantly, and without motive, does *what is right*.ò[275] It is clear then that, according to Ruskin, art is not only the expression of what is true and beautiful, thus possessing an aesthetic dimension, but it also possesses an ethical dimension. The force which leads the artist's imagination towards what is right has its basis in love. As Roe explains, ñRuskin regards this impulse of love as the corner-stone of his whole edifice and calls it *moral*ò, intending love in the Shelleyan meaning of the word: ñthe great secret of moral is love; or *a going out of our nature*, and *an identification of ourselves with the beautiful* and which *exists in thought, action, or person, not our own*.ò[276] Thus, the spiritual force which finds its source in love and moves the artist in the creation of the great work of art is what, according to Ruskin, is to be considered as the origin of morality in art. If the artist's soul is not stirred by such spiritual and sympathetic force, then his work of art is merely the cold representation of external physical reality deprived of any moral value, since

> the painter's great sympathies, sensibility, and imagination, according to Ruskin, make art particularly valuable to us; for *the great artist, the man who sees further and more deeply,* makes the spectator '*a sharer* in his own *strong feelings and quick thought* [é]'. In other words, *the great artist allows us to stand on the shoulder of the giant*.[277]

Furthermore, both Roe and Landow agree on the view that, for Ruskin, art owns the power to stimulate unselfish feelings in men. For Ruskin, the Shelleyan experience of ñgoing out of our natureò involves both the artist and the spectator of the work of art. The work of art is the product of the sympathies, sensibilities and imagination of the artist, hence, by displaying such qualities to the spectator, art makes him share them as well. In the contemplation of the work of art, the spectator is thus able to participate in the sympathies and sensibilities of the

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[275] J. Ruskin, *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, Vol. 18, quoted in F. W. Roe, *op. cit.*, p. 288 [italics mine].
[276] P. B. Shelley, *Introduction*, in *Literary and Philosophical Criticism*, p. xxix, quoted in F. W. Roe, *op. cit.*, pp. 288-289.
[277] G. P. Landow, *op. cit.*, p. 65 [italics mine].

artist thus holding a ñcommunion with a new mindò[278] and is allowed to ñstand on the shoulder of the giantò by enlarging his own capacity of feeling.

In addition to his paramount contribution to the criticism of visual arts, Ruskin also devoted a part of his writing to poetry which shares similar characteristics and functions with the visual arts. In the third volume of *Modern Painters* Ruskin defines what poetry is according to him. Usually, he remarks, it is difficult to encounter a clear explanation of the nature of poetry and what distinguishes it from prose. Hence, he claims:

> poetry is ñthe suggestion, *by the imagination*, of noble grounds for *noble emotions*.ò I mean, by the noble emotions, those four principal sacred passions ï Love, Veneration, Admiration, and Joy (this latter especially, if *unselfish*); and their opposites ï Hatred, Indignation (or Scorn), Horror, and Grief, - this last, when unselfish, becoming Compassion. These passions in their various combinations constitute what is called ñpoetical feelingò, when they are felt on *noble grounds*, that is, on *great and true grounds*.[279]

Similarly to art then, poetry is the expression of the noble, true and even sacred emotions of the poet based on true and noble grounds. Nevertheless, elsewhere Ruskin remarks that such feelings essentially necessitate to be correctly governed by the poet's thoughts in order not to produce falsehood. Ruskin deals with such an issue in one section of *Modern Painters* entitled *Of The Pathetic Fallacy*, in which he describes the pathetic fallacy as the ñerror [...] which the mind admits when affected strongly by emotion.ò[280] The poet, then, might fall into the pathetic fallacy if he is unable to soundly govern his strong emotions and, as a consequence, the fallacy is reflected in his poetry. Hence, for Ruskin, the greatest poets are those who rarely fall into the pathetic fallacy and therefore they ñdo not often admit this kind of falseness.ò[281] The first-order poet does not mistake reality with the associations produced by the emotions stirred by such reality. Therefore, Ruskin acknowledges the necessity of balance between the

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[278] *Ibid*., p. 65.

[279] J. Ruskin, *Modern Painters*,Vol. III, [1856], in *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cooks and A. Wedderburn, London, George Allen, 1904, 39 Vols., Vol. 5, Ch. I, p. 28.

[280] J. Ruskin, *Of The Pathetic Fallacy*, [1856], in *Modern Painters*, Vol. III, in *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cooks and A. Wedderburn, London, George Allen, 1904, 39 Vols., Vol. 5, Ch. XII, p. 205 [italics mine].

[281] Ivi.

emotions of the poet and the rational control of his mind, otherwise the overwhelming power of his feelings might induce him to create falseness, even if in a small degree. In order for the poet to maintain the correct sight and perception of what is true, he has to receive ñindeed all feelings to the full, but [to have] a *great centre of reflection and knowledge* in which he stands serene, and watches the feeling, as it were, from afar off.ò[282] Hence, by perfectly commanding his emotions through the rational thought, the poet is able to produce great poetry because, as Ruskin explains, it is ñnot that any feeling possible to humanity is in itself wrong, but only *wrong when undisciplined*ò[283]. In addition to the balanced interplay between the mind and the noble feelings of the poet, poetry requires the employment of imagination. ñThe poet, or creator,ò he states ñis [é] a person who puts things together, not as a watchmaker steel, or a shoemaker leather, but who *puts life into them*.ò[284] For Ruskin life is the essence of poetry as it is of art, and the means through which life is conveyed into poetry is imagination: ñ[the poet's] work is essentially this: it is *the gathering and arranging of material by imagination*, so as to have in it at last the *harmony or helpfulness of life*, and the *passion or emotion of life*.ò[285]

Finally, for Ruskin both poetry and art are didactic only indirectly and have a great moral value because they are beautiful: ñRuskin's deep faith in the value of art appears nowhere more strikingly than in his affirmation that painting and poetry are most useful and teach most by conveying images of beauty.ò[286] Ruskin's general principle of morality is founded on the concept of imaginative sympathy, namely the sympathy which is produced by the process of imagination[287] expressed in the work of art and poetry. This imaginative sympathy ñprojects us into the emotional position of another human beingò, accordingly, it allows us to go ñout of

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[282] *Ibid*., p. 210 [italics mine].
[283] J. Ruskin, Lecture I: *Sesame ï Of Kings' Treasuries*, in *Sesame and Lilies* cit., p. 80 [italics mine].
[284] J. Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, Vol. V, [1856], in *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cooks and A. Wedderburn, London, George Allen, 1905, 39 Vols., Vol. 7, Ch. I, p. 215 [italics mine].
[285] Ivi. [italics mine]
[286] G. P. Landow, *op. cit.*, p. 68.
[287] Cf. *Ibid*., p. 67.

our natureò, and ñthis experience then produces moral action.ò[288] Therefore, since poetry and the visual arts possess the capacity of ñsharpening and perfecting our moral perceptions,ò they are ñof great potential moral value.ò[289] Arguably therefore, art and poetry teach by being beautiful, because beauty is the promoter of the imaginative sympathy.[290]

In *Sesame and Lilies*, two lectures delivered in 1864, Ruskin deals with the question of reading books to learn from them. Yet according to Ruskin, the reader needs to have the correct attitude in reading to be instructed by books. In *Sesame and Lilies* he extensively deals with the correct approach to literature in order to find ñthe treasures hidden in books.ò[291] At the beginning of the first lecture devoted to male education, Ruskin tackles the problem of the general consideration education enjoys and of how it should be viewed instead. He claims that increasingly seldom parents ñseek, as far as I can make out, an education good in itselfò[292] for their children; in fact, parents tend to provide their children with an education whose chief and exclusive goal is to allow them to advance in life[293]. Ruskin is contrary to this view of education which merely provides a ñgratification of our thirst of applauseò which is ultimately ñthe last infirmity of noble mindsò and the ñfirst infirmity of weak ones.ò[294] Therefore, in his view a sound education in itself ñ*is* advancement in Life.ò[295] A significant part of such sound education consists, for Ruskin, in reading correctly because good literature provides both ñmental recreationò which ñis felt to be sometimes necessary by the best and the wisestò[296], and pieces of true knowledge[297] if correctly dealt with.

A book is for Ruskin a written means to perpetuate and keep alive what the author perceives

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288 *Ibid*., p. 68.
289 Ivi.
290 Cf. Ivi.
291 J. Ruskin, *Sesame ï Of Kings' Treasuries* cit., p. 54.
292 *Ibid*., p. 55.
293 Cf. *Ibid*., p. 54.
294 Ivi.
295 *Ibid*., p. 55.
296 J. Ruskin, *Essay on Literature*, [1836], in *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cooks and A. Wedderburn, London, George Allen, 1905, 39 Vols., Vol. 1, pp. 357-375, p. 359.
297 Cf. J. Ruskin, *Sesame ï Of Kings' Treasuries* cit., p. 61.

to be ñtrue and useful, or helpfully beautifulò[298] Hence, good books possess the same qualities as poetry and art, namely their faithful relation with truth and the capacity of being helpful by being beautiful. Nevertheless, it is necessary to read correctly to ñdiscover the true bitsò[299] of a book and find ña piece of true knowledgeò in it. For Ruskin, reading rightly is based on two main principles: firstly, to be truly and humbly wilful to be taught by the great writers, hence, leaving apart any form of ambition; secondly, to be sure to get the author's meaning not to find yours[300]. According to Ruskin, the reader ñmust dig painfullyò in order to find the author's meaning, and the instruments employed are his ñcare, wit, and learningò and his ñthoughtful soulò[301]. By thus operating, the reader can enter into the thoughts of ñthe great teachersò. Yet, this is only the first part of a correct reading. As a matter of fact, the reader requires also to enter the hearts of ñthe great teachersò and ñshare at last their just and mighty Passion.ò[302] Hence, the reader must not limit himself to the full understanding of the thoughts of the writers, but he must also share their feelings and emotions to read and learn from them correctly. Hence, once again Ruskin underlines the utmost importance of the balance between thoughts and feelings by applying it to the correct education provided by a sound reading. It is essential, through the work of reason, to enter into the writers' thought in order to reach what they perceive as true. Yet, reason alone, Ruskin claims, ñcan *but* determine what is true. [é] We come [é] to that great concourse of the Dead, not merely to know what is True, but *chiefly to feel with them what is just*.ò[303] And this is ultimately real advancement in life:

> *He only is advancing in life, whose heart is getting softer, whose blood warmer, whose brain quicker*, whose spirit is entering into Living peace. And the men who have this life in them are the true lords or kings of the earth ï they, and they only.[304]

[298] *Ibid*., p. 61.
[299] Ivi.
[300] Cf. *Ibid*., p. 63.
[301] *Ibid*., p. 64.
[302] *Ibid*., p. 78.
[303] *Ibid*., p. 80 [italics mine].
[304] *Ibid*., p. 100 [italics mine].

4.2 George Eliot

Ruskin's idea of the possibility of advancing in life and improving morally through art and literature was also strongly supported by George Eliot. In the course of her literary career, she dealt extensively with the conception of art and literature as ethical means in a number of different ways and in many of her works and private correspondence. Similarly to many other of her contemporaries, and in particular ñlike Dickensò George Eliot ñcriticizes the utilitarian ethics deriving from Jeremy Bentham, a moral view she describes as concerned with 'arithmetical proportion,' '*balance of happiness*,' and the '*quantitative view of human anguish*' [é]. She denounces the tendency to turn individuals into abstractions, writing that '*human pain* [é] refuses to be *settled by equations*.'ò[305] Anger's apt choice of quotations from George Eliot's *Scenes of the Clerical Life* and *The Mill on the Floss* directly reminds of a central scene in Dickens's *Hard Times*, and of the comment of the wretched Sissy, the girl from the circus, to Louisa about statistics:

> ñThen Mr M'Choakumchild [...] said, This schoolroom is an immense town, and in it there are a million of inhabitants, and only five-and-twenty are starved to death in the streets, in the course of the year. What is your remark on that proportion? And my remark was ï for I couldn't think of a better one ï that I thought *it must be just as hard upon those who were starved, whether the others were a million, or a million million.* And that was wrong, tooò[306]

Mr M'Choakumchild, Sissy's teacher, stands for the ñutilitarian ethicsò when human anguish and happiness are considered only in ñarithmetical proportionsò, whereas Sissy stands for the correct consideration of the sufferings of human beings. Arguably therefore, Dickens and George Eliot shared the same point of view on the blind strictness of the Utilitarian ethics.

George Eliot's contribution to the solution of such an issue follows a paradigm which is similar to that of Ruskin's, since also her own conception of art and literature is strongly

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[305] S. Anger, *George Eliot and Philosophy*, in *The Cambridge Companion to George Eliot*, ed. G. Levine, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp. 76-97, pp. 79-80 [italics mine].

[306] C. Dickens, *Hard Times* cit., Book I, Ch. 9, p. 60 [italics mine].

connected to their ethical influence. In a letter to her friend, Charles Bray, George Eliot affirms that ñif Art does not enlarge men's sympathies, it does nothing morally.ò[307] It can be argued that, as Ruskin, George Eliot shares the Shelleyan conception of art as projecting us outside of our natures thus enabling us to identify ourselves with something which does not belong to our own nature, but which exists in something external and alien to us. This identification corresponds to the moral end of art in George Eliot's view, according to whom ñmorality grows from our ability to imagine and understand another's state of mindò[308], namely our ability to sympathise with others. Yet, for George Eliot the expansion of men's sympathies through the work of art or literature is possible only when the artist or novelist does not fall into the temptation of embellishing or adorning his work with false details. Since ñArt is the nearest thing to life; [é] *a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot*ò, distortions and forgeries become ñfar more pernicious than in the more artificial aspects of life.ò[309] In her novel, *Adam Bede*, George Eliot devotes a whole chapter to the definition of her poetics and extensively deals with the role of the ñrare, precious quality of truthfulnessò[310] in art. In order to explain her point of view, she chooses the example of the beauty one can find in Dutch paintings. Such pieces of art, she claims, are widely despised by many because they portray humble and homely scenes and people[311]. Contrary to this general consideration, George Eliot affirms that she finds instead ña source of *delicious sympathy* in these faithful pictures of a monotonous homely existenceò because such life ñhas been the fate of so many more among *my fellow-mortals* than a life of pomp or of absolute indigence, of tragic suffering or of world-stirring actions.ò[312] The beauty which characterises such sort of paintings is to be found in their capacity of portraying true and faithful representations of life, although humble and ordinary.

[307] G. Eliot, *Letter to Charles Bray*, 5th July 1859, cit., p. 111.
[308] S. Anger, *op. cit*., p. 80.
[309] G. Eliot, *The Natural History of German Life* cit., pp. 263-264 [italics mine].
[310] G. Eliot, *Adam Bede* cit., Ch XVII, p. 195.
[311] Cf. Ivi.
[312] Ivi. [italics mine].

Hence according to George Eliot, beauty in art stems from its accuracy and faithfulness in representing reality. Thus, similar to Ruskin and Arnold, she too argues that art needs to be founded on truth and not to be a distortion of reality. Nevertheless, it is important to underline that, in her conception of art, George Eliot does not despise or deny the beauty which belongs to pictures representing lofty subjects such as ñcloud-borne anglesò, ñprophetsò, ñsibylsò and ñheroic warriorsò[313]. In fact, she herself affirms: ñAll honour and reverence to the divine beauty of form! *Let us cultivate it to the utmost* in men, women, and children [é]. But *let us love the other beauty too, which lies* in no secret of proportion, but *in the secret of deep human sympathy*.ò[314] Hence, it can be claimed that she admires both the lofty and the humble subjects portrayed in art and literature, yet she urges her audience not to consider as beautiful only those works which represent grand and noble scenes, but to cherish also those which represent humble characters because such paintings are more apt to extend one's sympathies. Hence, not only does George Eliot acknowledge the importance of the cultivation of feelings, but she also stresses the essential value of ñfeeling with othersò[315]. In her view ñwe are all of us born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selvesò[316], but through art and literature, which can faithfully display ñreal-life situationsò[317] and human sorrows and joys thus extending our sympathies, we have the possibility to ñemerge from that stupidity.ò[318]

Moreover, feelings and sympathy are not crucial exclusively for moral improvement, but also for knowledge. In opposition to the Utilitarian theories, according to which any form of new knowledge can be attained in no other way than by the agency of empirical reasoning[319], George Eliot emphasises that reason alone provides only a partial knowledge. As Anger

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313 Ivi.
314 *Ibid*., p. 196 [italics mine].
315 S. Anger, *op. cit*., p. 81.
316 G. Eliot, *Middlemarch*, Ch. 21, p. 208, quoted in S. Anger, *op. cit*., p. 81.
317 S. Anger, *op. cit*., p. 81.
318 G. Eliot, *Middlemarch*, Ch. 21, p. 208, quoted in S. Anger, *op. cit*., p. 81.
319 Cf. F. P. Sharpless, *op. cit*., p. 16.

argues, ñin George Eliot's view, it is not only through perception (on the model of natural science, in which knowledge was argued to be founded upon observation and experiment) that one gains knowledge, but *feeling is also essential*.ò[320] Inspired by Comte's *System of Positive Polity*, George Eliot claims that the sympathetic feeling along with the work of imagination are a medium to acquire new knowledge[321]. In this late work of his, Comte ñallows a larger place for feeling, placing the 'affective' over the 'intellectual,' and concedes that it is possible to attain some knowledge through this *more emotional, less rational means*. Comte acknowledges that *imagination often precedes more rational ways of understanding* [é].ò[322] It can be claimed that this configuration of knowledge, different form its strictly rational scientific conception, works on the level of the human side of the individual. Through the sympathetic feeling and imagination men can acquire knowledge of other individuals by imagining their state of mind and sharing their sorrows and joys. The capacity of an individual of being able to identify himself with the experiences of another and to understand a condition which is new and unfamiliar compared with his personal experience through the agency of his sympathy and imagination is for George Eliot a form of knowledge which goes beyond the intellectual and rational ability to understand the physical world. This sort of knowledge is based on the more intimate and sensitive ability of understanding other human beings because it is related to the capacity of the individual of feeling and imagining the perspectives of others. As Ager argues, according to George Eliot, ñby overcoming the one's own viewpoint and *imaginatively entering into the perspective of others, one can transcend the limitations of subjective experience*.ò[323] Hence, it can be claimed that, for George Eliot, ethics and epistemology are strongly interconnected because they are both based on the sympathetic feeling and capacity of imagination which allow the individuals to overcome

[320] S. Anger, *op. cit*., pp. 82-83 [italics mine].
[321] Cf. *Ibid*., pp. 82-85.
[322] *Ibid*., pp. 85-86 [italics mine].
[323] *Ibid*., p. 86 [italics mine].

their ñmoral stupidityò and selfishness by widening their knowledge of others. A great contribution to the extension of men's sympathies is provided by art and literature which, by portraying genuine scenes and characters, give the possibility to the spectator or reader to enter into ñthe perspective of othersò, thus broadening his point of view and sympathies. Therefore, similar to many Victorian intellectuals, namely Ruskin, Arnold, Mill and Dickens, George Eliot emphasises the utmost relevance and importance of the cultivation of feelings and imagination, and the great enrichment which art can provide to this end.

4.3 Charles Dickens

As previously argued while dealing with his fiction, the cultivation and education of feelings and imagination is central in Dickens's view as well. And he gave voice to the issue of the starvation of imagination and feelings in England not only in his novels, but also in his richly articulated journalistic project, ñHousehold Wordsò. Dickens's magazine was intended to reach a wide audience which included young and aged readers and men and women belonging to the lower as well as the higher classes. Nevertheless, as Lohrli claims, ñthe poor, in the sense of [é] the 'lower classes,' were not addressed in ñHousehold Wordsò. They were discussed, their lives and hardships described, and their cause championed. [é] At the same time, readers of higher station were appealed to concern themselves with the welfare of those below them.ò And finally, ñchildren were occasionally addressed [é]. The periodical published non-fiction material that children could read and understand, as also childish stories.ò[324]

The first issue of Dickens's weekly magazine was launched on the 30th March 1850[325] and in the first article, *A Preliminary Word*, Dickens states the goals he hopes to achieve through its publication:

> *No mere utilitarian spirit, no iron binding of the mind to grim realities, will give a harsh tone to our Household Words.* In the bosoms of the young and old, of the well-to-do and of the poor, we would *tenderly cherish that light of Fancy which is inherent in the human breast; which, according to its nurture, burns with an inspiring flame, or sinks into a sullen glare, but which (or woe betide that day!) can never be extinguished*. To show to all, that *in all familiar things*, even in those which are repellent on the surface, *there is Romance enough, if we will find it out: - to teach the hardest workers at this whirling wheel of toil, that their lot is not necessarily a moody, brutal fact, excluded from the sympathies and graces of imagination*; to bring the greater and the lesser in degree, together, upon that wide field, and mutually dispose them to a better acquaintance and a kinder understanding - is one main object of our Household Words.[326]

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[324] A. Lohrli, *Introduction*, in *Household Words: A Weekly Journal 1850-1859, Conducted by Charles Dickens*, ed. A. Lohrli, Toronto, Toronto University Press, 1973, pp. 3-57, pp. 15-16.

[325] Cf. H. Stone, *Introduction*, in *Uncollected Writings of Charles Dickens: Household Words 1850-1859*, [1968], ed. H. Stone, London, Penguin Press, 1969, 2 Vols., Vol. I, pp. 3-68, p. 13.

[326] C. Dickens, *A Preliminary Word*, [1850], in *Miscellaneous Papers*, 2 Vols., Vol. I, in *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Charles Dickens*, London, Chapman and Hall, 1911, pp. 181-183, p. 181 [italics mine].

It can be claimed that, for Dickens, the chief aim of ñHousehold Wordsò is to educate the readers of any class and gender to ñtenderly cherishò their imagination and good feelings by entertaining them and showing them that even in everyday and ordinary reality they can find the solace and beauty of romance. A further, but not less important, aim of ñHousehold Wordsò is to bring relief to ñthe hardest workersò by showing them that ñgrim realitiesò can be beautified by the ñlight of fancyò, by sympathy and by the ñgraces of imaginationò which belong to any human being. Therefore, ñHousehold Wordsò was intended not only to inform its readership about the present condition of England, but also to be a ñcomrade and friend of many thousands of peopleò[327] and, by cherishing its readers' imagination, to restore in them their childish capacity of finding beauty and romance in their everyday life, since ñin an iron age [é] imagination is a *sine qua non* for survival.ò[328] However, it is important to underline that the nature of the articles in ñHousehold Wordsò was not completely imaginative. In fact, the articles mainly dealt with a great number of contemporary social problems, but were balanced and filtered by the imaginative process of the journalist. As Stone explains:

> One form well represented in these new writings is the 'process' article (the term is Dickens'). [é] These articles contain fanciful flights as well as facts and figures; they frequently include meditations, symbolic scenes, parables, reminiscences, or pleas for reform. Any subject at any moment may suddenly be translated from the limbo of the matter-of-fact to the realm of the extraordinary.[329]

Hence, Dickens attempted to find a due balance between the truthfulness of the accounts reported in the articles and an imaginative dimension which demonstrates ñhow important fancy, fairy tales, and the literature of childhood were to him; and we can verify once more his sympathy for the poor, his concern for social justice, and his efforts to reform.ò[330] Therefore, Dickens's purpose is explicit: the articles and essays published in his magazine were to teach readers to both beautify and improve their personal and social lives through a continuous

[327] Ivi.
[328] H. Stone, *op. cit.*, p. 13.
[329] *Ibid.*, p. 53.
[330] Ivi.

wavering between actual facts and imaginative scenes which made them more similar to a work of literature rather than strictly journalistic pieces. By operating in this way, therefore, Dickens prevented his articles from being over didactic since in his view ñit was better to have vivacity, to see the world with fresh eyes, than to be a learned pedant.ò[331]

As we have amply discussed in chapter one and two, Dickens considered the prevailing Utilitarian doctrine as the promoter of the too forced separation of the mind and the human side of the individual.[332] And in ñHousehold Wordsò he expresses the same concern. In his essay, *Where We Stopped Growing*, he writes about the many riches of childhood, be them books or real places, which, according to him, are impossible to ñoutgrowò. As Andrews remarks, ñthe essay is one of Dickens's more explicit and extended statements on the value of immaturity [é]ò a stage which is ñreconstituted as a positive virtue.ò[333] As a matter of fact, in this essay, Dickens emphasises once more the essential sound balance between the capacity for feelings and imagination which characterise the child and the rationality which characterises the adults of his age. At the beginning he states that ñchildhood is usually so beautiful and engaging, that [é] there is a mournful shadow of the common lot, in the notion of its changing and fading into anything else.ò[334] Nevertheless, this nostalgic tone for the passing of childhood does not characterise the entire essay. In fact as Professor Andrews underlines, Dickens ñhas no wish to throw up everything and live in a Never-Never Landò[335] as Barrie's Peter Pan. If on the one hand, he acknowledges the dangers of a strict education which might produce ñdeformed adultsò incapable of good feelings, on the other, he is perfectly aware of the negative consequences which might derive from an overdeveloped childishness in the adult. As argued in the previous chapters, Dickens portrayed such dangers in the characters of Mr Gradgrind and Bitzer in *Hard Times*, and in the characters of Dora and

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[331] *Ibid*., p. 34.
[332] Cf. M. Andrews, *op. cit*., pp. 41-42.
[333] *Ibid*., pp. 57 and 62.
[334] C. Dickens, *Where We Stopped Growing*, [1853], in *Miscellaneous Papers*, 2 Vols., Vol. I, in *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Charles Dickens*, London, Chapman and Hall, 1911, pp. 385-390, p. 385.
[335] M. Andrews, *op. cit*., p. 68.

Clara in *David Copperfield*. And in *Where We Stopped Growing* he argues in favour of the importance of a peaceful cohabitation of the adult and the child in the individual: as Professor Andrews argues, childishness and maturity ñare meant to cohabit quite amicably, as long as each respects the other [...]. Discord and moral deformity arise when the adult bullies, ignores or belittles the internalised child.ò[336] Hence, there need to be a right adjustment in the adult personality. For Dickens, the ñmournful shadowò which surrounds the growing child is not the nostalgic longing of a never growing mature, but the threat of the possibility that the adult might not be able to preserve his childlike qualities in his full maturity. Hence, the cultivation of feelings and imagination which maintain alive the humanity and childlike features in the adult is necessary, since, as Andrews beautifully stated, ñin every buttoned-up adult there is a child trying to escape suffocation.ò[337] There are many memories of childhood which survive in adulthood: fairy tales, novels, romances, places and situations which we will never outgrow. But this is not to be considered as a deformity of our maturity, but a favourable and extremely advantageous condition for us because, according to Dickens, thanks to this we will preserve ourselves from growing old. It is with this piece of great wisdom that Dickens concludes his essay:

> We hope *we have not outgrown the capacity of being easily pleased* to what is meant to please us, or *the simple folly of being gay* upon occasion without the least regard to being grand. [é] *If we can only preserve ourselves from growing up, we shall never grow old, and the young may love us to the last. Not to be too wise, not to be too stately, not to be too rough with innocent fancies, or to treat them with lightness ï which is as bad ï are points to be remembered that may do us all good in our years to come.* And the good they do us, may even stretch forth into the vast expanse beyond those years; for, this is the spirit inculcated by One on whose knees children sat confidingly, and from whom all our years dated.[338]

As previously argued, Dickens believed that the ñimaginative malnutrition [which] is

[336] Ivi.
[337] Ivi.
[338] C. Dickens, *Where We Stopped Growing* cit., p. 390 [italics mine].

devastating for the psychic health of human beingsò[339] might find a possible solution in the rejuvenation of adults. Such process of making adults younger in their spirit implies that they should rediscover their ñchildlike sensibilityò[340], and according to Dickens, the best occasion to revive this sensibility is the Christmas festivity. As Wilson claims, ñChristmas in his own home, with his own family, was a peak celebration of *high spirits* and *good will* for Dickensò[341], and he wanted to share such ñhigh spirits and good willò with all his readers as well. Thus, in his ñChristmas articles and stories he communicated with his wider familyò[342] trying to entertain the children and to recover the childish sense of wonder in the adults. *A Christmas Tree,* an article published in December 1850, is a good example of Dickens's wish to revive the childlikeness in his adult readers. Through his powerful imagination, he recalls the magical and enchanting atmosphere and memories of the Christmas of his own childhood, but he also directly addresses his readers in order to lead them to revive their childhood memories and set aside reality for a moment:

> Being now at home again, and alone, the only person in the house awake, my thoughts are drawn back, by *a fascination which I do not care to resist*, to my own childhood. *I begin to consider, what do we all remember best upon the branches of the Christmas Tree of our own young Christmas days, by which we climbed to real life*.[343]

In this article, Dickens appeals to the childhood memories of his adult readers hoping that the same sense of wonder could be revived in them as it is revived in himself because only by restoring through their imagination, and thus in a sense living again, the joyous memories of Christmas and childhood, adults can prevent themselves from becoming ñtoo wiseò, ñtoo statelyò and ñtoo rough with innocent fanciesò[344]. Hence, Dickens urges his readership to imaginatively live again those childhood experiences and to be able to transform ñall common

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[339] M. Andrews, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
[340] *Ibid*., p. 62.
[341] A. Wilson, *The World of Charles Dickens*, London, Secker and Warburg, 1970, p. 12 [italics mine].
[342] Ivi.
[343] C. Dickens, *A Christmas Tree*, [1850], in *Christmas Stories*, 2 Vols., Vol. I, in *The Centenary Edition of the Works of Charles Dickens*, London, Chapman and Hall, 1911, pp. 1-22, p. 4 [italics mine].
[344] C. Dickens, *Where We Stopped Growing* cit., p. 390.

thingsò into ñuncommon and enchantedò[345] to avoid becoming similar to the villains of his novels such as Gradgrind or the Murdstone siblings.

So, similar to his contemporaries, for Dickens literature is cardinal to the education of imagination and feelings and he specially valued the didactic role of fairy-tales. He defended their intrinsic moral value and teachings in his attack against the illustrator George Cruikshank who re-edited ñHop O' My Thumbò, an English translation of ñLe Petit Poucetò by Perrault, to promote a social programme in favour of teetotalism and abstinence[346]. In *Frauds on the Fairies*, Dickens explains that the texts of fairy tales do not need to be changed or improved because they are as useful, by being simple and extravagant, as they were originally conceived, in an age generally characterised by strictness and rigidity:

> In an utilitarian age, of all other times, *it is a matter of grave importance that Fairy tales should be respected*. [é] The theatre, having done its worst to destroy these admirable fictions [é] it becomes doubly important that the *little books* themselves, *nurseries of fancy* as they are, should be preserved. *To preserve them in their usefulness, they must be as much preserved in their simplicity, and purity, and innocent extravagance*, as if they were actual fact. Whosoever alters them to suit his own opinions, whatever they are, is guilty, to our thinking, of an act of presumption, and appropriates to himself what does not belong to him.[347]

For Dickens fairy tales possess that essential capacity of nursing imagination and fancy and it is in this special capacity that their greatest usefulness lies, not only for children, but also for adults and society in general, since in his view, ña nation without fancy, without some romance, never did, never can, never will, hold a great place under the sun.ò[348] Furthermore, it can be claimed that Dickens's consideration of fairy tales is similar to that expressed by Ruskin in *Fairy Stories*, an essay initially published as the introduction to a volume entitled *German Popular Stories*.[349] In this essay Ruskin claims that children

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345 C. Dickens, *A Christmas Tree* cit., p. 9.
346 Cf. E. Ostry, *op. cit.* p. 30.
347 C. Dickens, *Frauds on the Fairies*, [1853], in *Household Words. A Weekly Journal. Conducted by Charles Dickens*, No. 184, New York, McElrath and Baker, 1854, XIX Vols., Vol. VIII, pp. 97-100, p. 97.
348 Ivi.
349 Cf. *Bibliographical Note*, in *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, London, George Allen, 1905, 39 Vols., Vol. 19, p. 232.

> will find in the apparently vain and fitful courses of any tradition of old time, *honestly delivered to them, a teaching for which no other can be substituted, and of which the power cannot be measured; animating for them the material world with inextinguishable life, fortifying them against the glacial cold of selfish science*, and preparing them submissively, and with no bitterness of astonishment, to behold, in later years, the mystery ï divinely appointed to remain such to all human thought ï of the fates that happen alike to the evil and the good.[350]

Hence, according to both Ruskin and Dickens, fairy tales have a great didactic and moral potential because they stimulate the imagination of the child and animate ñthe material world with inextinguishable lightò, and for both Dickens and Ruskin, such advantages and teachings are nowhere to be found in their pure essence but in fairy tales. Accordingly, fairy tales do not need to be altered or neglected since ñthe world is too much with us, early and late. Leave this precious old escape from it, alone.ò[351]

Arguably therefore, Dickens considered the reading of fairy tales as a crucial remedy to the imaginative and sensitive starvation of contemporary England of his time and, similarly to Ruskin, he acknowledged them as inherently suitable to the moral education of children. Moreover, for Dickens fairy stories can help adults as well. Adults can escape the harshness of reality through reading, having a similar experience to that of Mr Jupe in *Hard Times*, who was prevented from falling in thorough distress by his daughter's reading of *The Arabian Nights*.[352] As Stone maintains, ñthose childhood experiences and childhood readings [é] proved to Dickens that *imagination was an anodyne for servitude and suffering*. He never forgot that early lesson. In a time of disorder and neglect, he had been saved (or so he felt) by reading and imagination. *Imagination*, he now insisted, *could help save the others*.ò[353] It is for this reason that he urged his readership to cultivate their imaginative and sensitive side and endeavoured to keep any piece of his writings imaginative, since his childhood literature became ña sort of amulet; it became a favorite way of continuing to save himself and saving

[350] J. Ruskin, *Fairy Stories*, [1868], in *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, London, George Allen, 1905, 39 Vols., Vol. 19, pp. 233-239, pp. 235-236 [italics mine].
[351] C. Dickens, *Frauds on the Fairies* cit., p. 100.
[352] Cf. C. Dickens, *Hard Times* cit., Book I, Ch. 9, p. 62.
[353] H. Stone, *op. cit.*, p. 34 [italics mine].

othersò[354]. So, it can be claimed that the aim of Dickens's writings and novels was not to be simply moral or didactic. In fact, ñhe viewed *art as* a deeply social force, *a way of humanizing life*ò[355], a means of reintegrating ñwhat society is systematically forcing apartò[356], namely the childlike imaginative and sensitive side of human beings and their sheer cold rational and intellectual faculties. The best way to reconcile such harsh division is through the moral and ennobling amusement of literature and art which help to revive the capacity for imagination and feelings. And since, as we have seen, this idea was widely shared also by George Eliot and Ruskin, it can be argued that Ruskin, George Eliot and Dickens shared the belief that it was crucial for British society to acknowledge the utmost importance of the benefits provided by the cultivation of feelings and imagination in an epoch in which the general tendency was to exclusively rely on the rational faculties, and that it was crucial for their readers to rediscover the value of art and literature as vital means to re-establish the necessary balance between mind and feelings. A balance which was sadly lacking in a world which was, as Dickens wrote, a too ñserious world, with all its folly.ò[357]

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354 *Ibid.*, p. 59.
355 *Ibid.*, p. 64 [italics mine].
356 M. Andrews, *op. cit.*, p. 70.
357 C. Dickens, *The Battle of Life*, [1846], in *Christmas Book*, ed. R. Glancy, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 366.

Conclusions

Conclusions

The aim of this dissertation was to investigate how the lack of balance between mind and feelings was an actual cultural issue in the British nineteenth century and how it influenced the fiction and non-fiction of the period. As a matter of fact, a great number of Victorian novelists, intellectuals and philosophers acknowledged and approached in their works the question of the excessive development of the rational faculties on the one side, and of the underdevelopment of imagination and feelings on the other side. One of the major causes of such imbalance was the strictness and rigidity of the Utilitarian theories which were largely based on a system of quantifiable ethics, namely ñan absolute and objective set of moral principlesò[358], which were wide spreading in England during the Victorian Age and which also influenced Victorian education. In response to the negligence of the most human side of the individual promoted by the Utilitarian theorists and philosophers, many Victorian intellectuals and novelists, such as Charles Dickens, John Stuart Mill, John Ruskin and George Eliot, advocated the idea of a sound cultivation of feelings and imagination. In different ways, they all supported the idea that the culture of feelings was necessary in order to restore the due balance between men's heart and head.

In his fiction, Dickens dealt with this theme in both his two *Bildungsroman, David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations,* and in his social novel, *Hard Times*. Despite the fact that they belong to different sub-genres, arguably these three novels by Dickens are linked by a common thread, namely the theme of a sound and correct education of the protagonists who, in different ways and through different experiences, manage to enter into full maturity developing both a ñwisdom of the Headò and a ñwisdom of the Heartò[359]. This balance between the rational faculties and the capacity for feeling and imagining is, according to Dickens, the basic characteristic of a genuine maturity which he represented through the

[358] F. P. Sharpless, *op. cit*., p. 12.
[359] C. Dickens, *Hard Times* cit., Book III, Ch. 9, p. 217.

characters of the adult David, Pip and Louisa. During the progression from infancy to maturity, David never abandons his great capacity for affections, rather he learns to discipline his undisciplined heart thus reaching a balanced maturity. Pip manages to restore his authentic and child-like ability to love his friends by being able to free himself from the selfish snobism which characterised most of his growth. Finally, through her misadventures and the help of her faithful and loving friend, Sissy, Louisa, who was rigidly brought up, manages to change her whole frame of mind and discover the dimension of genuine emotions. In other words, the three protagonists learn that their child-like nature must not be erased in maturity, on the contrary it needs to coexist in harmony with their more mature and rational side. Only in this way they can avoid becoming as those sort of adults Dickens so strongly repudiated and actually represented as the villains of his novels, such as Mr Gradgrind and the Murdstones.[360]

The remedies to the imbalance between mind and feelings suggested by Dickens are on the one hand, a sound education which does not focus exclusively on the rational capacities of children, but which cultivates also their feelings and imagination and, on the other hand, the rediscovery of the child-like side of the adult. In addition to his novels, Dickens attempted to induce adults to revive their child-like nature with the ñprocess articlesò published in his weekly magazine, ñHousehold Wordsò, which combined real and actual facts with imaginative and fanciful leaps. Such articles, based on the combination of factual reality with the enrichment of fanciful details, produced what Dickens considered as moral and correct entertainment, the same moral entertainment which we can derive from literature because, through reading, adults can be prevented from being overwhelmed by daily frustrations and can revive and live again their childhood experiences through the aid of their imagination.

The benefits provided by the reading of literature, and of poetry in particular, are epitomised in the experience of the English philosopher John Stuart Mill. As he himself maintains in his *Autobiography*, he managed to recover himself from a profound mental crisis, mainly caused

[360] Cf. M. Andrews, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

by the strictness and rigidity of his father's education, through the reading of Wordsworth's poems. As a matter of fact, such poems played a basic role in Mill's recovery because they taught him what he called ñthe very culture of feelingsò[361].

Therefore, together with a sound education, art is to be considered as a central solution to the imbalance between rigid rationality and feelings. As Ruskin and George Eliot but also Mill and Dickens acknowledged, art possesses the special function of beautifying our lives and extending our sympathies, hence, it is able to restore the due proportion between the rigidity and harshness of reality and our individual capacity for human goodness and feelings.

To conclude, in a strictly Utilitarian and mechanised age such as the Victorian era, many English intellectuals agree on the idea that it is of the utmost importance for their contemporaries to learn and cultivate ñwhile there is yet time, the utmost graces of the fancies and affections, to adorn their lives so much in need of ornament; or [...] when romance is utterly driven out of their souls, and they and a bare existence stand face to face, Reality will take a wolfish turn, and make an end of [them].ò[362]

[361] J. S. Mill, *Autobiography* cit., Ch. V, p. 148.
[362] C. Dickens, *Hard Times* cit., Book II, Ch. 6, p. 160.

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