



## METAPHORICAL IMPRISONMENT OF VICTORIAN WOMEN IN DICKENS'S *HARD TIMES*: A FOUCAULTIAN APPROACH

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### **Abstract:**

In the nineteenth-century English society, during the Victorian period, most of the women experienced metaphorical confinement due to the dominance of power relations though they were not in the real structures of imprisonment. Victorian women were excessively disciplined and controlled by men who were very dominant and influential in that society. These women were captivated not by the iron bars of prisons, but by the walls of Victorian houses in which they were physically and psychologically subjected to the pressure of a male-dominated society. Charles Dickens, in his novel *Hard Times*, also sheds light on the miserable condition of Victorian women due to abuse of power. While analyzing the dominance of power in society and its impact on individuals, it would be worth dwelling on French philosopher, Michel Foucault's concept of power and imprisonment. The aim of this article is to stress the influence of power upon Victorian women in Dickens's *Hard Times* by emphasizing Foucault's interpretation of power and incarceration.

**Keywords:** *Hard Times*, Victorian women, Michel Foucault, power relations, metaphorical imprisonment

### **1. Introduction**

Analyzing the impact of power relations upon Victorian women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century English society, one cannot deny the fact that Victorian females suffered from the excessive pressure of repression and the restrictions of the male-dominated society. Since they were oppressed with intense surveillance and permanent control, they were at the centre of power relations. In this sense, it would be appropriate to underline Michel Foucault's analysis of power and its influence on individuals, because his interpretation regarding the exercise of power in society can be associated with the condition of Victorian females under oppression.

Foucault indicates that the powerless are subjected to the exercise of power due to the continuous observation and endless discipline they are faced with in everyday life. In his work, *Discipline and Punish*, he states that power relations lead to "strict divisions, the penetration of

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regulation into even the smallest details of everyday life through the mediation of the complete hierarchy that assured the capillary functioning of power [...]" (198). As Foucault underlines, power dominates daily life and controls each movement of individuals; it shows that power relations in society are so prevailing that people cannot avoid becoming a part of these relations. In this sense, considering the dominance of power in society, it is obvious that the Victorian women also experienced the exercise of power at any time and any place due to the patriarchal norms of the male-dominated society. Therefore, female characters in Dickens's *Hard Times* effectively portray the suffering of Victorian women due to metaphorical imprisonment, so they can be analyzed in the light of Foucault's understanding of power and incarceration in society together with his reconceptualization of Jeremy Bentham's exemplary prison-like structure, Panopticon.

Owing to the intense constraint and continuous supervision carried out in societies, Foucault likens communities to Bentham's 'Panopticon' in which each person is under close surveillance without being aware of if they are seen or not (*D and P* 200), and he underlines how the roots of power and social conducts are created in several structures of society by stressing the influence of endless inspection and subjugation on people. Furthermore, he emphasizes that the impact of power determines the manners of individuals and turns them into docile beings. The same restriction experienced by people can also be seen in the 19<sup>th</sup> century English society, therefore, it is possible to observe restricted lives not only in prisons but also in social life or at home. Since this force exists within various institutions of society, people are always controlled and disciplined by power mechanisms which make them extremely surrounded by the systems of extreme discipline, so as Foucault suggests, "*the individual is an effect of power*" ("*Two Lectures*" 98). He refers to Bentham's design by reflecting the similarities between the societies and 'Panopticon' in which people are constantly inspected and controlled for the maintenance of order. In this sense, Victorian women were also leading their lives as if they were in Panopticon. As a consequence, the impact of power imposed on individuals and the wide spread of its exercise in society can also be observed in the Victorian England as well. In this respect, the Victorian houses, in which women were extremely controlled and scrutinized, can be considered to be similar to Panopticon, which is the centre of disciplining individuals with intense surveillance.

## 2. Dickens's and Foucault's Perspectives towards Power Relations

Being a member of Victorian society and observing the experiences of the powerless people in the nineteenth-century England, Dickens, in his novels as well as in *Hard Times*, paid special attention to the vulnerable condition of the Victorian women, for they were repressed because of the constant control imposed on them by the Victorian men. Since he himself witnessed the agonies of these people, it is apparent that "*Dickens generally knew what he wanted to say and generally said it with great power. He also knew what his audience wanted him to say [...] because he shared with his audience many of the values they embraced*" (Reed 112). Consequently, he effectively demonstrated the power inflicted upon the helpless with the purpose of stressing the trauma and the anguish these individuals underwent in the nineteenth-century English society. In this

respect, the Victorian women can be analyzed as one of the significant groups under the influence of power relations.

Women's feelings of inferiority and their incapability to challenge the patriarchal values come from the fact that they were accustomed to be despised and ignored by the male-dominated society. This abuse of power caused them to experience metaphorical imprisonment as well. Their being left behind at home without participating in social life absolutely played a considerable part in their vulnerability. Hence, they were unavoidably transformed into beings who had to put up with all the physical and psychological torture they were exposed to. They were faced with degradation, indifference and suffering under the hegemony of the patriarchal society. As a result, isolated from the real world, they were suppressed inside the walls of their houses as if they were prisoners. In this respect, their helplessness comes to the fore. This brings about Foucault's stress on the variety and continuity of power relations as he himself underlines:

*"It seems to me that power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain."* (The History of Sexuality 92)

Emphasizing the stability and inevitability of power relations in society, Foucault explicitly highlights the continuous cycle through which these forces operate and become dominant. In this outlook, all the people are involved in this system that turns them into disciplined human beings. Regarding the situation of the Victorian women, it is obvious that a similar power mechanism can also be recognized in their lives and had a considerable influence on them since they were continuously observed and controlled. By reflecting the sorrows of these women, Dickens supports the weak and the tortured in society. Considering the physical and psychological pressure upon women in the Victorian period, one can realize the similarities between Dickens's female characters and Victorian women in English society. These women's submissiveness due to their powerless situation and the authority of the powerful males can be associated with Foucault's concept of power because he also pays attention to the obedience of the continuously controlled imprisoned beings who are subjected to permanent discipline and punishment. Here, the situation of the Victorian women, reflected in *Hard Times*, under undeviating metaphorical confinement, is an appropriate example of Foucault's interpretation of exercise of power.

### **3. Female Characters' Mental and Psychological Imprisonment in a Panopticon-like Atmosphere in *Hard Times***

In *Hard Times*, one of the significant realistic novels of the Victorian period, recognizing Mr Gradgrind's strict doctrines employed to discipline not only his students at school but also his wife, Mrs Gradgrind, and his daughter, Louisa at home, it can be asserted that in the nineteenth-century English society, particularly women were oppressed and controlled as if they were put

into prisons. Louisa, who is forced to consider everything from *"the strong dispassionate ground of reason and calculation"* (H T 86), represents the helplessness of Victorian women. As she is expected to marry an old and wealthy man, Mr Bounderby, for the sake of self-interest, she is subjected to the power of the male-dominated society as it is seen along these lines:

*"Father," said Louisa, "do you think I love Mr Bounderby?"* (86).

*"Well, my child," he returned, "I – really – cannot take upon myself to say."*

*"Father," pursued Louisa in exactly the same voice as before, "do you ask me to love Mr Bounderby?"*

*"My dear, Louisa, no. No. I ask nothing."*

*"Father," she still pursued, "does Mr Bounderby ask me to love him?"*

*"Really, my dear," said Mr Gradgrind, "it is difficult to answer your question."*

*"Difficult to answer it, Yes or No, father?"*

*"Now Mr Bounderby does not do you the injustice, and does not do himself the injustice, of pretending to anything fanciful, fantastic, or sentimental."* (87)

This conversation shows that Louisa is regarded as a machine-like being without any emotions and yearnings. Forcing a woman to accept an arranged marriage is nothing but paying no attention to her individuality and her personal choices. The pressure inflicted upon her is so repressive that her father does not hesitate to control even her heart and disregard her own feelings. Thus, Dickens shows that the females in the nineteenth-century England were repressed by the norms of the male-dominated society, as a result, psychological imprisonment came into view. In this period, women were regarded by society as passive and uncreative beings who could only deal with domestic issues at home (Ellis 50). Due to the negative ascribing, women were left behind and put into a very miserable condition that forced them to obey the restrictions of men, as a consequence they were oppressed under the pressure of power. So, considering Foucault's interpretation of power which is supposed to be carried out to discipline individuals and attain efficiency, what appears here is that the positive outcomes of this application were replaced with the suppression of women in the Victorian era. These women were like the prisoners of Bentham's Panopticon where different groups of people are supposed to be controlled and trained for productivity and efficiency.

When Louisa's submissiveness is taken into account, it can be stressed that Foucault's concept of psychological incarceration of the individual in several structures of society can be associated with the situation of Victorian women, who were all the time under extreme surveillance and manipulation. Therefore, *"the Panoptic diagram thus becomes something like a general diagram of the disciplines, the map of what Foucault will come to call a disciplinary society"* (Bogard 3). It means that the power practices in this age transformed society into the Panopticon in which one could not behave by her/his own free will. The result of this oppression was mentally and psychologically destructive for the Victorian women. In the novel, it is exercised in such a harsh way that Louisa, in the end, rejects her father's suffocative rules by stating: *"I curse the hour in which I was born to such a destiny"* (193). By exposing the relationship between Louisa and her father, Dickens reflects how women were put into terrible situations in his society

through power relations and disciplinarian exercises. In this sense, it is undeniable that “*Louisa Gradgrind ... is the victim of a terrible fatherly experiment*” (Humpherys 177), which makes her a ‘living-dead’ despite her young age. She suffers from metaphorical imprisonment due to the utilitarian expectations of her father and it can be noticed after analyzing his philosophy along with his own expression:

*“I would advise you to consider every other question, as you have been accustomed to consider every other question, simply as one of tangible Fact. The ignorant and the giddy may embarrass such subjects with irrelevant fancies, and other absurdities that have no existence, properly viewed – really no existence –... Now, what are the Facts of this case? In considering this question, it is not unimportant to take into account the statistics of marriage.”* (87)

Rather than accepting a marriage which is based on love and confidence, Mr Gradgrind insists that his daughter should pay attention to its materialistic advantages and should not respect anything fanciful or romantic. His approach to marriage explains that the Victorian women were regarded as merely objects in the hands of men who determined the manners, lifestyles and even the dooms of these women. Unsurprisingly, these females turned out to be the prisoners of society obligating its people to behave in accordance with not their own expectations but the others’. As a consequence, these females could not take their own decisions like the prisoners of Panopticon. Since “[i]nspection functions ceaselessly [and] [t]he gaze is alert everywhere” (D and P 95) in this structure, the Victorian society can be likened to this construction due to the similar power practices and extreme surveillance inflicted upon people. In this respect, Louisa’s being continuously inspected by her father and her losing control of her own life reveal that Victorian women were psychologically confined within the social doctrines of the male-dominated society, so it is obvious that extreme discipline leads to undesirable situations. Louisa’s crying for the wrong decision taken by her father underlines the destruction of the disciplinarian and distressing approaches exercised over women for the sake of self-interest as Louisa points out:

*“Where are the graces of my soul? Where are the sentiments of my heart? What have you done, O father, what have you done, with the garden that should have bloomed once, in this great wilderness here? If it had ever been here, its ashes alone would save me from the void in which my whole life sinks. What have you never nurtured in me, you have never nurtured in yourself; but O! if you had only done so long ago, or if you had only neglected me, what a much better and much happier creature I should have been this day!”* (193-194)

Stressing the repression of emotions in her heart, Louisa, in fact, becomes the voice of many Victorian women dominated by the extreme restraints in society. Likening her soul to a garden without any flowers or colours, like a wasteland, and indicating even the ashes of a more flexible educational understanding could have saved her; she exposes how the stringent rules and prohibitions of her father have destroyed her psychology. Disregarding the importance of compassion, love and mercy, Mr Gradgrind isolates her daughter from these feelings and causes

nothing but mental deterioration that cannot be compensated. That is why, Louisa is sure that if she had been left behind alone with nobody to guide her, she could have been more content as an independent person who could have taken her own decisions. The situation of females like her obviously illustrates that the nineteenth-century English society caused women to experience metaphorical imprisonment as if they were in Panopticon even if they were not really locked up. Foucault also questions the inevitability of metaphorical incarceration in "On Power":

*"Who makes decisions for me? Who is preventing me from doing this and telling me to do that? Who is programming my movements and activities? Who is forcing me to live in a particular place when I work in another? How are these decisions on which my life is completely articulated taken? All these questions seem to me to be fundamental ones today."* (103)

The questions Foucault deals with show that he focuses on the unavailability of the invisible mechanism of discipline in society, as a consequence people cannot control their own lives. Instead, their manners are disciplined and their choices are determined by the others. Moreover, he underlines that individuals turn out to be instructed and programmed creatures ready to perform the tasks expected from them. Hence, they cannot take their own decisions, plan their actions, or determine where to live, what to do, and how to behave; all these are arranged by the system which allows the powerful to be active. It is this mechanism that creates robot-like individuals who lose the power of controlling their own actions and who get used to obeying the orders of the stronger. Therefore, these people unavoidably find themselves in a field where the exercise of power is so dominant that they do not have the right to make decisions even for the important situations related to their lives, like Louisa, who is forced to marry someone she does not want. She resists her father saying: *"you proposed my husband to me. I took him. I never made a pretence to him or you that I loved him. I knew, and, father, you knew, and he knew, that I never did"* (195). A person, like this young woman, whose every behaviour is organized and directed by another person, becomes a prisoner of not a prison but of the society in which she lives. Her confinement at home and her isolation from the outside world like a prisoner can clearly be seen when her reply to her father's question is taken into consideration:

*"You have never entertained in secret any other proposal?"*  
*"Father," she returned, almost scornfully, "what other proposal can have been made to me? Whom have I seen? Where have I been? What are my heart's experiences? "What do I know, father," said Louisa in her quiet manner, "of tastes and fancies; of aspirations and affections; of all that part of my nature in which such light things might have been nourished?"* (90)

Louisa's response indicates the impossibility for her to break the barriers surrounding her like the bars of a prison. What should be stressed here is that she is so alienated from the real-life that she is not allowed to see anyone, to go anywhere or to experience any sensations. Thus, her restricted life that prevents her from communicating with different people or finding friends with whom she can share her feelings or secrets, causes her to resign all of her joys, desires and hopes. Thus, such an educational understanding worsens the improvement of individuals and

brings about irremediable results as Louisa says to her father: *"All that I know is, your philosophy and your teaching will not save me"* (196). Young women brought up like Louisa in Dickens's time were like the Panopticon prisoners who had no freedom or flexibility. In this manner, *"[...] the historical emergence of Panopticism was not only confined to prisons, but began to be employed throughout society"* (Roberts 35) as it emerged in the nineteenth-century England and played a considerable role in the field of gender issue.

In *Hard Times*, Dickens, portraying how lots of people, as well as women of his own period, were mentally imprisoned in society as a result of social pressure, revealed that particularly women suffered when their personal identities were ignored. Dickens portrayed the miserable condition of Louisa, whose freedom and dreams are disregarded first by her father and then by her husband. Since she is unable to voice her feelings, she is inevitably faced with psychological deterioration. Educated in accordance with such a dictatorial and strict understanding, Louisa is also deprived of the joy of life as she herself exclaims as well:

*"The baby-preference that even I have heard of as common among children, has ever had its innocent resting-place in my breast. You have been so careful of me, that I never had a child's heart. You have trained me so well, that I never dreamed a child's dream. You have dealt so wisely with me, father, from my cradle to this hour, that I never had a child's belief or a child's fear."* (90)

It is clear that Dickens highlights the destructiveness of Victorian educational philosophy, particularly for the young women and stresses its negative effects upon them, by creating a character like Louisa, who is fed up with the oppressive limitations of her father imprisoning her with severe discipline. Brought up with such a system disregarding individuality, the children like Louisa, in the nineteenth-century English society, suffered from the continuous observation and unquestionable commands of their parents, as a result, they could not experience the pleasures of childhood. In this sense, as a female, Louisa represents many Victorian women who were forced to put up with the pressure of the male-dominated society which ignores the feelings of women.

Similarly, Foucault also exposes the metaphorical imprisonment of human beings who feel as if they were locked up in a cage and who are forced to live in accordance with the others' instructions and prohibitions like those in Bentham's prison-like structure Panopticon. In this aspect, it is no doubt that *"Jeremy Bentham's design for the Panopticon, a model prison, captures for Foucault the essence of the disciplinary society"* (Diamond and Quinby 176), because the strict rules and power relations which were supposed to be practised in this prison can also be observed in everyday life, so this situation led Foucault to identify the aim of discipline as:

*"to establish presences and absences, to know where and how to locate individuals, to set up useful communications, to interrupt others, to be able at each moment to supervise the conduct of each individual, to assess it, to judge it, to calculate its qualities or merits."* (D and P 143).

Thus, the individual, who is constantly scrutinized and disciplined, is confined physically and psychologically in such a way that s/he cannot behave freely and can be defined as a

constrained being like those in prisons. Consequently, it is apparent that many people may undergo the burden of spiritual confinement even if they are not in real prisons, so the situation of Louisa in *Hard Times* illustrates the metaphorical incarceration of women as well. In this manner, it is very significant that young women in the Victorian family structure were generally regarded as objects with no emotions so it was impossible for them to get away from the pressure of power relations, which unavoidably made them psychologically confined human beings. One of the victims of this educational understanding, Louisa, who is obligated to lead the life determined by her father, expresses her repressed feelings by cursing the authoritative system of Mr Gradgrind:

*"[...] if I had been stone blind; 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."* (193-94)

She longs for a life that will allow her to experience the pleasures of life, to find her way through her own steps and with her sense of touch, instead of others' directions and interferences. Her desire perfectly ascertains that she has not come into contact with fancy, enjoyment and joy in the outside world due to the restrictions of her father's disciplinarian teaching approach. A person who claims that she could have been "a million times" experienced, satisfied and notably more "human," if she had been blind and if she had had no one to guide her, might be so demoralized and suffocated in consequence of the austere regulations imposed upon her. The results of this practice of excessive power and surveillance could also be described as disastrous in the Victorian families, so Dickens demonstrated the vulnerable position of Victorian women in his novel.

In *Hard Times*, dwelling on the sufferings of Louisa due to abuse of power, Dickens calls into question the effect of ceaseless discipline and control upon women. The negative outcomes of this severe implementation of power led to enormous changes in the lives of women who were completely surrounded by the male hegemony in the Victorian era. In this outlook, in *Hard Times*, not only Louisa, but also her mother Mrs Gradgrind, is subjected to misuse of power. Due to her vulnerability, she is too powerless to indicate her own ideas and to prevent her daughter's marriage. It is apparent that the obedient house-wives of the Victorian age suffered from excessive control, which prevented them from participating in social life, working fields and expressing their opinions. Since these women were left behind with their domestic affairs, they could not find the opportunity to get involved in life and to indicate their viewpoints. Thus, they were expected to be submissive and to deal with just their children and their husbands at home. It is this reality Dickens also underlines by means of the female characters in his novel.

Many ordinary Victorian women like Mrs Gradgrind can be described, by Virginia Woolf's term, as 'the Angel in the House' ("Professions for Women" 141). Woolf wanted to break the conventional woman type and illustrate the position of the nineteenth-century women, who were excessively subservient and self-sacrificing. She encouraged Victorian women to participate in life, have contact with the outside world and prove themselves in the field of



writing (1-2). Most of the Victorian women, who stayed at home and merely looked after their children without pointing out their feelings, can also be entitled with Woolf's phrase. In this perspective, examining the endless control mechanism in the lives of these women, Foucault's concept of power that dominates everyday life comes to the fore once more as he underlines in "Truth and Power":

*"The form of power that applies itself to immediate everyday life categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him that he must recognize and others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power that makes individuals subjects."* (331)

As Foucault indicates, the powerless individuals are subjected to the exercise of power and scrutiny in daily life, so their movements, even their individualities, are shaped by these forces, which can be correlated with the situation of the socially and economically helpless Victorian women leading their lives under the influence of power relations. Therefore, the disillusionment and hopelessness of these women and the domination of the powerful male-dominated society over the powerless mark the frame of the Victorian England as Dickens depicted as well.

The opinions of the Victorian women were so disrespected that they were isolated not only from social issues but also from personal matters in the patriarchal society. They were certainly like the docile bodies in Panopticon, who are under permanent control both bodily and mentally. As Brown, also asserts, "Foucault believes that there is no outside to power [...]. Everyone has power exerted against or for him or her" (31). It is noteworthy that the women of Dickens's age experienced the exercise of these power relations in their everyday lives, as a consequence of which they could not avoid mental deterioration.

It is seen that in the Victorian era, "independence was an intrinsically masculine quality, in so far as women, as daughters, sisters or wives, were dependent on the participation of their fathers, brothers or husbands [...]" (Green 4). In this manner, it is not surprising to notice the restrictive life Mrs Gradgrind leads like a prisoner in her own house. Her helpless condition and her inability to resist her daughter's marriage can clearly be recognized in her own words: "[...] if your head begins to split as soon as you are married, which was the case with mine, I cannot consider that you are to be envied [...]. However, I give you joy, my dear – and I hope you may now turn all your ological studies to good account" (91). Instead of trying to change her husband's mind and persuading him to stop this marriage, she submissively accepts the situation in such a rational manner that she mentions the advantages of this proposal by advising Louisa to make use of her education, which is based on just scientific figures and factual knowledge. Even if she also warns Louisa about the problems that may occur after marriage emphasizing that it is the case with her own matrimony, she is still too weak to point out that it will be a terrible mistake to consent to this offer, which can cause psychological imprisonment of her daughter. When her confession is taken into notice, related to her repentance after her own marriage, it can be claimed that she has also been faced with the male power which gives no permission to the opinions of women and regards these females as insignificant figures. Thus, as Mendelson and Crawford highlight, the Victorian women were

restricted by masculine domination and were supposed to deal with merely domestic affairs with just limited choices and opportunities (301).

It is observed that Mrs Gradgrind, whose thoughts and emotions are disregarded, represents the repressed English women of Dickens's times. She is left behind lonely suffering from lack of love, affection, respect and concern, which makes her passive and obedient. Since she is used to living with the reality that nobody cares for her or pays attention to her condition, as many Victorian women were also tormented because of the same situation, she gets surprised after hearing Louisa's question: *"I want to hear of you, mother [...]"* (178). Her reply, *"You want to hear of me, my dear? That's something new, I'm sure, when anybody wants to hear of me"* (178), portrays that Victorian women were of secondary importance so that it was an unnatural thing for them to see someone who was concerned with their problems. Moreover, considering Mrs Gradgrind's remarks, it is also seen that her opinions are not regarded as important by her husband, who does not feel the necessity to take his wife's advice or to communicate with her to solve their common problems. Since her ideas have never been put into practice, she turns out to be a silent, inactive and compliant individual who prefers not to speak anymore. So, *"Mrs Gradgrind's ceasing to talk throughout the novel indicates the brutality of her suppression"* (Humpherys 181). Therefore, it is impossible not to liken these Victorian women to the prisoners of Panopticon and not to find a close link between these women and the human beings described by Foucault as the prisoners of society, despite their physical independence. This situation shows how these women were forced to lead prison-like lives, consequently, Mrs Gradgrind, who is accustomed to being subjected to the power of her husband, is not strong enough to support her daughter and escape from the disciplinarian force as observed from the dialogue between the daughter and the mother:

Louisa: *"I was encouraged by nothing, mother, but by looking at the red sparks dropping out of the fire, and whitening and dying. It made me think, after all, how short my life would be, and how little I could hope to do in it."*

Mrs Gradgrind: *"Nonsense! Don't stand there and tell me such stuff, Louisa, to my face when you know very well that if it was ever to reach your father's ears I should never hear the last of it. After all the trouble that has been taken with you! After the lectures you have attended, and the experiments you have seen!"* (48)

The mother's indifference to her daughter's condition and her reminding Louisa of Mr Gradgrind's probable disapproving reaction to the things she says, display how the extreme power and prohibitions in women's lives make them docile individuals. Hence, Mrs Gradgrind's stressing the importance of the instructions and education Louisa has experienced and her condemning Louisa for her questioning attitude, reveal that especially Victorian daughters are supposed to take steps that will be consistent with the rigid educational system giving no permission to wonder, think or to interrogate. Such an understanding will unavoidably create powerless people like Mrs Gradgrind and Louisa, whose ideas are regarded as insignificant and worthless. Moreover, the terrible results of power relations can also be recognized when psychology of Louisa is analyzed. A young person's pondering on the shortness of her own life,

her pessimism and hopelessness due to lack of meaning in her life, cannot be reconciled with the vitality and the expectations the young people have. While the old generally think about death, the passing of time and the disappearance of vividness; Louisa, despite her young age, deeply contemplates the impossibility for her to enjoy life and to spend her time as she wishes, and it sheds light on the destructiveness of strict rules. Her comparing the “*whitening and dying red sparks*” with her own life, which also fades away, reflects her psychological trauma just at the beginning of her life and demonstrates the negative outcomes of excessive supervision. Many Victorian women felt the agonies and despair the prisoners were faced with in real structures of confinement, so Dickens’s and Foucault’s emphasis on the resemblance of societies to the places of confinement can be brought together.

Victorian women, as Dickens emphasizes in his work, were regarded as if they were machine-like beings ready to perform the tasks men wanted and were also severely despised and forced to accept all the decisions taken by the males. Unsurprisingly, they got accustomed to obeying all the rules and to serving the men around them without any hesitation despite the oppression they were subjected to. In this respect, Foucault’s argument in *Discipline and Punish*, which is based on power’s strong influence upon the human body and soul and the interaction between the governor and the governed, can be adapted to the condition of Victorian women and it displays the docility and mental depression of the individuals outside the prisons, like the Victorian women. Hence, it can be deduced that Foucault regards:

*“the methods of surveillance and assessment of individuals that were first developed in state institutions such as prisons, as effective tools developed for the orderly regimentation of others as docile bodies, techniques that achieve strategic effects through their disciplinary character.”* (Clegg 30)

These docile bodies can be seen not only in the structures of imprisonment but also in many layers of society. The relationship between the supervisor and the controlled ones in prisons and in Panopticon is very common in many organizations of society including the Victorian houses in which women were so intensely inspected that they got used to fulfill the expected behaviour and adopting it without questioning. Considering the oppression of the mother and daughter in *Hard Times*, it can be inferred that Dickens shows the terrible outcomes of abuse of power, which portrays the inevitability of psychological confinement for Victorian women.

#### 4. Conclusion

To conclude, in his works, “*his [Dickens’s] aim [...] was to present little pictures of life and manners as they really are*” (Horsman 97). It is in these representations he remarked on the hard times and the frustrations the weak lived through. In *Hard Times*, one can observe the restricted lives of the Victorian females who were oppressed and disrespected by men. As Houston argues, “[Dickens] experienced himself as an outsider and a spokesman of the powerless” (183) by means of his

illustrations, so he reflected the agonies and repression of the vulnerable under the pressure of power in their domestic lives.

Like Foucault's power that "depends on comprehending power by first studying the everyday practices where individuals continually experience micro-powers ..." (Hoy 188), in the Victorian age this same notion, which was widespread in everyday life, dominated women's lives and controlled not only their everyday movements, but also their decisions, feelings and viewpoints. Thus, it is obvious that the nineteenth-century English women were excessively disciplined and punished by the male-dominated Victorian society, which resembles Bentham's Panopticon in which everybody is under intense control. Consequently, Foucault's emphasis on the dominance of power at various levels of society and his likening societies to Panopticon can be associated with the condition in Dickens's time. Considering the power relations in the Victorian houses and the docility of women under the dominance of men, it can be stated that these females were imprisoned psychologically and suffered enormously due to abuse of power.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

### **About the Author**

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