



Balancing the Dionysian and Apolline: A Nietzschean Study of Dicken's *Thomas Gradgrind* and Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes*

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ABSTRACT

The balance between rationality and emotionality is as important as the harmonious occurrence of day and night: the absence of any of them can lead on to destruction. The research paper explores the inevitability of emotionality along with rationality through the application of the concept of balanced art, given by Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* on the novels *Hard Times* and *The Sign of the Four*; and the short stories "The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle" and "The Red-headed League." Through the comparative analysis of Thomas Gradgrind in the novel *Hard Times* and Sherlock Holmes in the *Sherlock Holmes Series*, the researcher has tried to highlight that for creating a balanced art and to lead a balanced life, emotionality is as necessary as rationality. In the words of Nietzsche, the Dionysian features are as essential as are the Apolline.

1. Introduction

In this research, the researcher has done a comparative analysis of the personalities of Thomas Gradgrind, the protagonist of Charles Dickens' novel *Hard Times*, and Sherlock Holmes of Arthur Conan Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes Series* by applying Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of balanced art. Friedrich Nietzsche (2008) gives the concept of balanced art in his work *The Birth of Tragedy*. In this work, Nietzsche (2008, p. 19) says, "the continuing development of art is tied to the duality of the Apollonian and the Dionysian: just as procreation depends on the duality of the sexes." The words Apollonian and Dionysian are derived from the names of the Greek gods Apollo and Dionysius respectively. In Greek mythology, Apollo is the god of wisdom and is associated with intellect and rationality. So, these qualities are termed as the Apollonian features. The Greek god Dionysius, on the other hand, is the god of entertainment, wine, music and sensuality in Greek mythology and is associated with the emotional aspects of life. Therefore, the passions of heart and soul are termed as the Dionysian impulses or the Dionysian features. Nietzsche (2008) believes that in any piece of art, both these features – Apollonian and Dionysian – should run parallel to each other: if there is emphasis on rationality, there should also be stress on emotions. He argues that a work which lacks the

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harmony between these two elements is a fallible and defective work. Therefore, in any piece of art, both the Apollonian and Dionysian features should go hand in hand. Only then, the art would be balanced art. The researcher has selected the novels *Hard Times* and *The Sign of the Four*, and the short stories “The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle” and “The Red-headed League” and analyzed these texts in the light of Nietzsche’s (2008) concept of balanced art.

1.1. Research Questions

1. What is Friedrich Nietzsche’s concept of balanced art?
2. What are the Apollonian and Dionysian features and why both these features are necessary for the production of a balanced art?
3. How is Thomas Gradgrind a fallible and Sherlock Holmes a balanced and perfect piece of art?

2. Literature Review

Nietzsche’s (2008) idea of Apollonian and Dionysian features has been adopted by many scholars and researchers to interpret different works. O’Leary (2009), in his research article, delves into the conflict between the Apollonian and Dionysian impulses in Stephen Dedalus of James Joyce’s novel *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. He discusses that Stephen’s imaginative powers are shaped in the clarity and order of the Apolline; however, he is recurrently visited by the powerful Dionysian tides within him.

Many scholars and researchers have interpreted *Hard Times* through different perspectives. Sohal (2018) discusses the place and position of women in the Victorian era as reflected in *Hard Times*. Through an analysis of the characters of all the female character of the novel, Sohal tries to expose the discrimination done to women in the Victorian era. He argues that at that time, women were considered weak and were not allowed to establish their own identity, and resultantly, they were totally dependent upon men in all respects—financial, emotional, and intellectual—as is evident in the novel. Aşcı (2019) interprets the novel *Hard Times* through the perspective of Marxism. She discusses that in the novel, Dickens exposes the injustice and oppression done to the lower class by the upper class in both economic and social spheres. She sees the novel as a critique of class consciousness, sacrifice, and social injustice of the nineteenth century Victorian era.

3. Methodology

Sherlock Holmes has been interpreted by many researchers through different lenses. Berg (1970) considers Sherlock Holmes to be the father of scientific crime detection. He discusses some examples of the scientific methods used by Holmes to solve his cases such as the haemoglobin test conducted out by Holmes in the novel *A Study in Scarlet* and his method of tracing of footsteps and the preservation of their imprints through the use of plaster of Paris. In this way, Holmes is one of the earliest appliers of the scientific methods in the field of detection. Farrell (1984) explores the themes of heroism and imperialism in the Sherlock Holmes novel *The Sign of the Four*. He examines that for Holmes, heroism lies in the discovery of crimes and in solution of the cases. Furthermore, there are imperialistic strains in the novel as Tonga, an Indian islander, is described as savage and is the embodiment of evil forces. While on the other hand, Holmes is the embodiment of greatness.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

Thomas Gradgrind is the protagonist of the novel *Hard Times*. He is a wealthy merchant and founder of a school in the industrial city of Coketown, England. Gradgrind favors only facts, rationality, and utilitarianism. Thus, the Apollonian traits are all sufficient in his personality and he entirely repudiates any kind of involvement of the Dionysian impulses in life. He is a “man of realities. A man of facts and calculations. A man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four, and nothing over, and who is not to be talked into allowing for anything over.” (Dickens, 1994, p. 02)

Gradgrind is a man who is “caught in the veils of Maya” (Nietzsche, 2008, p. 21). He considers himself and his own philosophy of facts and utilitarianism to be perfect and complete, as in the very beginning of the novel, when he is talking to a teacher of his school, his words affirm this idea. He says to the teacher:

Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else and root out everything else... nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, Sir! (Dickens, 1994, p. 01)

His words “nothing else will ever be of any service to them” reflect that he altogether denies the notions of imagination and emotionality: as emotions do not provide any material gain, therefore, according to Gradgrind, they are of no “service” to his pupils and thus, he wants “the tender young imaginations” (Dickens, 1994, p. 02) to be “stormed away” (Dickens, 1994, p. 02).

He does not allow his students to engage themselves in fanciful pursuits and dictatorially forbids them to pursue any such passion, as he says to them, "You mustn't fancy" (Dickens, 1994, p. 06).

His home is also not a normal and emotionally soothing place; instead, it is a matter-of-fact home which is called Stone Lodge. The very name of Gradgrind's home suggests that there are no real love and homely feelings in his house. Similarly, there is no emotional attachment between Mr. Gradgrind and Mrs. Gradgrind. Gradgrind's children are also like machines. They lead a miserably factual life, devoid of any adventures and fancies. The beauty and colors of life are unknown to them.

Gradgrind's notion of superiority of mind over heart causes the ruination of his daughter Louisa's life. He thinks that materialism is everything and instead of fulfilling the passions of soul, one should do everything solely for practical gains. When Gradgrind asks Louisa to marry Bounderby, she asks her father that whether Bounderby loves her. On this question, Gradgrind remarks, "I would advise you (since you ask me) to consider this question, as you have been accustomed to consider every other question, simply as one of tangible Facts." (Dickens, 1994, p. 87)

Instead of thinking about the emotions of Louisa, Gradgrind suggests her to think about the whole affair only as a fact. Bounderby is prosperous and has high status; similarly, being the daughter of Gradgrind, Louisa also holds status. Therefore, there is suitability in their marriage. Thus, instead of thinking about the "irrelevant fancies and other absurdities that have no existence" (Dickens, 1994, p. 87), Louisa should accept Bounderby's proposal. As a result, compelled by Gradgrind, Louisa marries Josiah Bounderby who is more than twice her age. At the time of marriage, Louisa is twenty years old and Bounderby is fifty years old. But within a few months, their marriage turns out to be a failure due to lack of emotional connection and love between Louisa and Bounderby. Gradgrind, on the other hand, is still not ready to openly admit his fault, rather, he hesitantly says to his daughter, "Some persons hold that there is a wisdom of the Head and there is a wisdom of the Heart. I have not supposed so... I have supposed the head to be all-sufficient." (Dickens, 1994, p. 199-200). At these remarks, his daughter vacantly looks at him, not knowing what to say. Her life is destroyed because of the materialistic and factual philosophy of her father who is still not ready to openly accept the imperfections of his philosophy.

Gradgrind's example is like "a sailor who sits in a small boat in a boundless ragging sea, surrounded on all sides by heaving mountainous waves, trusting to his frail vessel." (Schopenhauer as cited in Nietzsche, 2008, p. 21). He is surrounded on all sides by problems, as the lives of his children Tom and Louisa are completely destroyed, but he still believes in his frail vessel: that is mind. He does not think about the cause behind the destruction of the lives of his children, because he considers himself and his factual philosophy to be perfect. Therefore, he is not ready to accept the fact that only mind is not all-sufficient and the heart should also be considered equally significant as the mind.

His son Tom's condition is even worse than Louisa. When he reaches his young-adulthood, he becomes a hedonist and a resolute scoundrel. Tom's rebellious spirit is the outcome of Gradgrind's strict upbringing in which, he never allowed his children to give an outlet to the passions of their souls. When he is apprenticed at Bounderby's bank, soon after, he robs it and tries to flee from Coketown. Somehow, Tom manages to escape the country but dies in a remote place, away from his family.

Thus, Gradgrind's undue emphasis on rationality and utter repudiation of emotions result in catastrophic outcomes for himself and his family.

On the other hand, the great detective Sherlock Holmes of *Sherlock Holmes Series* does not tilt only towards rationality; rather, along with having the Apollonian reason, he also possesses the Dionysian emotions and passions. Due to his exceptionally well qualities of detection and his unbeatable wit, Holmes is admired not only by his friends and London folk but also by his rivals: the Scotland Yard detectives and inspectors. In the novel *The Sign of the Four*, Detective Inspector Athelney Jones praises Holmes' detection skills while conversing with Dr. Watson, as he says, "Your friend, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, is a wonderful man, sir. He's a man who is not to be beat." (Doyle, 2016, p. 76). Similarly, at another point in the same novel, Jones once again appreciates Holmes saying, "We all know that you are a connoisseur of crime." (Doyle, 2016, p. 119)

Sherlock Holmes wants mental engagement. In the very beginning of the novel *The Sign of the Four*, Holmes expresses his love for mental labor during a conversation with his friend Dr. Watson. He says:

My mind rebels at stagnation. Give me problems, give me work, give me the most abstruse cryptogram, or the most intricate analysis, and I am in my own proper atmosphere... But I abhor the dull routine of existence. I crave for mental exaltation. That is why, I have chosen my own particular profession, or rather created it (Doyle, 2016, p. 02).

These words clearly reflect that how much Holmes likes to use his mind. Therefore, he has created his own profession and is a private detective. But within this Apollonian love for reason, he also gets the Dionysian pleasure, as he says to Watson, "I claim no credit in such cases. My name figures in no newspaper. The work itself, the pleasure of finding a field for my peculiar powers, is my highest reward." (Doyle, 2016, p. 02-03)

When he solves the cases which the officers of Scotland Yard bring to him, the whole credit is given to them, because they are the government officials and he is a private detective. Therefore, his name is not mentioned in any newspaper. But still, he gets pleasure from his work because detection is the passion of his soul. Therefore, he enjoys it and does not care for any official credit and material gain. Holmes' also has the Dionysian love for intoxication, as he is a cocaine addict. At various occasions, Holmes can be seen to be taking dose of cocaine, as in the novel *The Sign of the Four*, he is injecting himself cocaine. Similarly at the end of the novel, when the case is solved and the criminal Jonathan Small is arrested, Watson and Holmes are sitting in Holmes' apartment and conversing with each other, Watson says to Holmes, "The division seems rather unfair. You have done all the work in this business. I get a wife out of it (during the case, Watson and Miss Mary Morstan fall in love and marry each other), Jones gets the credit (as he is a government officer and Holmes is a private detective), pray what remains for you?" (Doyle, 2016, p. 120)

To this question, Holmes merrily replies, "For me, there still remains the cocaine-bottle" (Doyle, 2016, p. 120) and he happily takes the bottle. He does not hold any kind of malice against Jones or Watson and he does not care about the fact that he has done the whole work but the credit is given to anyone else, therefore, in Nietzsche's words, Holmes is "a free man" (Nietzsche, 2008, p. 23) because he no longer cares about "all the inflexible and hostile divisions which necessity, caprice, or 'impudent fashion' have established between men" (Nietzsche, 2008, p. 23). He is under the spell of Dionysius and therefore, he forgets about his individual weaknesses. Similarly, Holmes also likes to smoke pipe.

Holmes possesses the Apollonian "calm wisdom" (Nietzsche, 2008, p. 19), but he also possesses the Dionysian "wilder impulses" (Nietzsche, 2008, p. 19). Most of the times, he has a well-composed demeanor, but sometimes, especially, when he has found important clues about his case, he enters "a state of nervous exaltation" (Doyle, 2016, p. 81). During these periods, Holmes becomes excessively talkative and he wonderfully exhibits all his qualities, like his excellence in knowledge of different fields such as detection, literature, art, music, and culture. In the novel *The Sign of the Four*, Holmes arranges dinner for Watson and Jones. During the meal, Watson observes Holmes and notes his Apollonian sagacity and Dionysian humor, as he narrates the event in the following words:

Holmes could talk exceedingly well when he chose... He spoke on a quick succession of subjects — on miracle plays, on mediaeval poetry, on Stradivarius violins, on the Buddhism of Ceylon, and on the warships of the future — handling each as though he had made a special study of it. His bright humour marked the reaction from his black depression of the preceding days (Doyle, 2016, p. 81).

This example serves as proof positive that Holmes is endowed with both the Apollonian wit and the Dionysian delightfulness. Unlike Gradgrind whose own life is barren and is devoid of any enjoyment and who has made the lives of his children colorless, Holmes is a jovial fellow who not only himself gets pleasure from his cleverness, but also amuses his fellow workers. Similarly, despite being a highly rational detective, Holmes is not some deadpan and stoic person; instead, he is a good-natured and friendly man who likes the company of his friend Dr. Watson.

Another very striking Dionysian feature, that is love for music, is also present in Holmes. Whenever any case is very complicated and Holmes' mind is stressed out, he starts playing his violin in order to relax his mind. Once refreshed by the sweetness of music, he returns to his work and this time, he can easily find the solution of his problem. Not only does he use music to calm his mind, but he also enjoys listening to it in his leisure time. Holmes has an immense admiration for Richard Wagner's music and he also enjoys the compositions of Pablo de Sarasate. In the short "The Red-headed League," after solving the case, Holmes says to Dr. Watson, "And now, Doctor, we've done our work, so it's time we had some play. A sandwich and a cup of coffee, and then off to violin-land, where all is sweetness and delicacy and harmony" (Doyle, 2013, p. 41)

Then both Holmes and Watson attend a music opera. Watson observes the changed behavior of Holmes — from an exceedingly clever and rational detective to a happy and tranquil person — during the opera and narrates the event in the following words:

My friend was an enthusiastic musician, being himself not only a very capable performer but a composer of no ordinary merit. All the afternoon, he sat in the stalls wrapped in the most perfect happiness, gently waving his long, thin fingers in time to the music, while his gently smiling face and his languid, dreamy eyes were as unlike those of Holmes, the sleuth-hound, Holmes the relentless, keen-witted, ready-handed criminal agent, as it was possible to conceive. In his singular character the dual nature alternately asserted itself (Doyle, 2013, p. 41-42).

This alternative assertion of dual nature — wit and delightfulness — in Holmes is an example of the "periods of reconciliation" (Nietzsche, 2008, p. 19) between the Apollonian and the Dionysian impulses.

Similarly, Mr. Holmes has unbeatable wit with the help of which, he can easily solve the cases which are brought to him by his clients but he is also a kind-hearted man. For example, Holmes efficiently solves the case of the lost blue carbuncle in the short story "The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle" and arrests the real culprit who has committed theft. But, the thief is a young boy

and he is very much ashamed of his guilt. He cries a lot and begs Holmes for mercy. After giving him a strict warning to never commit any crime again, Holmes sets him free instead of handing him over to the police. Besides, Holmes understands that there isn't much serious crime committed, the jewel is also restored to the real owner and therefore, he sets the boy free. Holmes justifies his action, saying:

I suppose that I am commuting a felony, but it is just as possible that I am saving a soul. This fellow will not go wrong again; he is too terribly frightened. Send him to jail now, and you make him a jailbird for life (Doyle, 2013, p. 164).

These words clearly reflect that Holmes is not a mechanical and stone-hearted person, unlike Gradgrind; rather, he is an emotional and soft-hearted person who cares for the well-being of his fellow human beings, as his words "I am saving a soul" suggest. Thus, Holmes possesses in his heart that Dionysian magic under the spell of which, "the bond between man and man is sealed." (Nietzsche, 2008, p. 22)

All these evidences show that Holmes is a balanced combination of the Apollonian and the Dionysian traits, or in other words, an embodiment of balance between emotionality and rationality.

5. Conclusion

Although the Apollonian reason and logic are very important elements, but the Dionysian passions and emotions are also equally significant for the production of a balanced art, as well as to lead a balanced life. The researcher has analyzed the characters of both Gradgrind and Holmes and has found that there is a tremendous difference between their personalities. While Gradgrind favors only logic, reason, facts, and utilitarianism, Sherlock Holmes exemplifies rationality and logic, as well as emotionality and passionateness. The analysis shows that Thomas Gradgrind is a defective and fallible piece of art due to his one-sided tilt towards rationality, logic, facts, and utilitarianism. On the other hand, Sherlock Holmes does not rigidly sticks to rationality all the time. Instead, he also gives vent to the pleasures of his soul and the desires of his heart. Thus, the presence of both the Apollonian and the Dionysian traits in Holmes makes him a balanced piece of art. This study will raise awareness that only logic and reason are not enough to create a balanced art as well as to live a balanced life; rather, emotions are also inevitably necessary for beautifying one's one life as well as the lives of others.

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