

CHARLES DICKENS (1812-1870)



Biographical notes:

1812 Born in Landport, near Portsmouth, a few hours after his mother had returned from a dance. His father was verbose, kind-hearted, hospitable and generous. He worked a clerk at the Navy pay office, but he was chronically incapable of living within his means. Charles was a sickly boy, the second of seven children.

1817 Charles's father was moved to London and then to Chatham in Kent. Unable to join in the games of his companions because of his frail physique, Dickens found happiness in reading, singing, mimicry and recitation. He hated school and had a revulsion for the views of the puritans of his day.

1822 When Dickens was ten the family moved to Camden Town in London. His father's debts had become so severe that all the household goods were sold. His mother rented a house and tried to start up a school that was a failure.

1824 His father was arrested for debt and the whole family went to live in the Marshalsea Prison. Charles took a job at Warren Blacking Factory -wrapping show-blackening bottles for six shillings a week. He was only twelve. It was possibly the most traumatic event of his life. No one knew until his death.

1824-26 Some six months later, the family's fortunes revived -a small inheritance paid of most of the debts- and the family emerged from prison. Charles' father removed him from Warren's, although his mother felt that it might be better for him to stay on. Charles never forgave her. He was sent to a small private school at Wellington School Academy ("Salem House" in his fictionalized autobiography, David Copperfield).

1827 Three years later, aged 15, Dickens left Wellington House and, through his mother, was found a job as office boy to a firm of solicitors (Ellis & Blackmore). The work was dull and demanding but the pay was enough for him to become acquainted with London life; music halls, theatres where he saw pimps, prostitutes and drunkards that were to people his first attempts at fiction. He began teaching himself shorthand, thinking of journalism as a career.

1828 He started to work as a freelance reporter in the court of Doctors' Commons, the court where church & nautical cases were heard, and marriage licences and divorces were granted. His contempt for the law was confirmed.

1830 Now 18, he fell in love with Maria Beadnell, pretty daughter of a banker. He courted her for four years only to be laughed at.

1832-34 Worked as a reporter for several papers, among them The Mirror of Parliament, Morning Chronicle and The Evening Chronicle.

1836 He began to write a series of sketches published under the pen-name of Boz, his youngest brother Augustus' nickname. He began to gain popularity and saved some money. He was then commissioned to write The Pickwick Papers in monthly instalments: it turned out immensely popular. He felt financially able to marry Catherine Hogarth, the daughter of the editor of the Evening Chronicle. The marriage lasted until 1858 when the couple separated.

1837 His first child was born. He had nine more children. Mary, his wife's sixteen year old sister lived with them and Dickens developed a strong attachment to her. She became ill that year and died in his arms. Dickens' idealized vision of her was to remain in his novels as Rose Maylie (Oliver Twist), Little Nell (The Old Curiosity Shop) and Little Dorrit. His sense of loss led Dickens to view the love between

brother and sister as the perfect kind.

During the long years spent with Catherine (1836-1858), Dickens achieved the status of the greatest living writer of his day. Despite being plagued by ill-health his creative energy was boundless. In addition to 10 major novels and numerous short stories he edited a popular weekly Household Words.

1837-39 Oliver Twist

1838-39 Nicholas Nickleby

1840-41 The Old Curiosity Shop, Baranby Rudge.

1842 Travelled to the United States.

1843-44 Martin Chuzzlewit, A Christmas Carol.

1844-45 Travelled to Italy and France.

1846-48 Dombey and Son.

1849-50 David Copperfield.

1852-53 Bleak House

1854 Hard Times

1855-57 Little Dorrit

1857 A year before leaving his wife, Dickens fell in love with a mysterious young actress, Ellen Ternan. The couple hid their relationship.

1858 Started giving public readings of his works, despite recurrent bouts of illness. He separated from his wife. So began a bitter public wrangle between Dickens and his supporters, and Catherine and her family. Georgina, Catherine's sister, stood by Dickens, and insisted on remaining in the Dickens home, where for years she had taken Catherine's place as housekeeper and mentor of the children. Rumour now linked Dickens' name with his sister-in-law as well as Ellen.

1859 A Tale of Two Cities

1860-61 Great Expectations

1864-65 Out Mutual Friend

1867-68 Tour of public reading in the USA. His health deteriorated.

1870 Died at Gad's Hill; He was buried, against his wishes, in Westminster Abbey. He left a fortune of £93,000 - more than half of which came from the proceeds of his public readings.



Dickens the novelist.

Dickens's inventiveness is prodigious. He can weave plots of huge complexity as to ensure a sense of mystery and uncertainty all along the way. However, his greatest achievement lies in the creation of his characters which are vividly drawn. A third facet is his gift of humour, his comic scenes and witty dialogue.

An urge to reform.

Dickens's novels, however, are not merely good fun. He has a considerable reputation as a satirist and critic of society. He takes those institutions respected by the Victorians (Parliament, marriage, the family, philanthropic societies, education, law, the Church..) and exposes their

inadequacies and failings.

The impetus for Dickens' vast output can be seen as the "the one common end" described in *Dombey and Son*: "To make the world a better place".

Personal experience of childhood injustice, and compassion for the plight of London's poor were the mainsprings of Dickens' art. He wrote with the express intention of moving people to do something and he was able to affect individuals and institutions alike, although it is debatable whether he instigated any of the social reforms enacted by Parliament in his lifetime. Affected by his childhood experiences, Dickens grew into a humanitarian, something of a social reformer. His novels take us to the most miserable London underworld, with its jails, opium-dens, slums and work-houses. Dickens was principally an urban writer, and the setting of all his novels (except *Hard Times*) was at least partly London. In this setting he exposes the failure of the Victorian social system, ineffective justice and bureaucracy, the power of money, the cruelty and stupidity of the school system, and above all, the exploitation of children. Yet he is no revolutionary; rather than advocating radical changes in society, he appeals to individual good-will and humanity, merely pointing out the wrongs of a "laissez-faire" policy.

Dickens has a strong feeling for social varieties and gradation that also goes with a feeling for human character. Thus he fights against the arbitrariness of social classification and the resultant clash between the individual and society. His novels have the gift for entertaining while moving and reforming.

The Victorians were great cultivator of family life and the idea of the happy family in Dickens is like a refuge from the ruthlessness of society.



Characterization

Always a very visual writer, he took delight in describing sights and sounds and the feel of things, detail upon detail. He lived the characters he created. The love and vitality which Dickens bestowed on his characters are echoed by the affection and vividness with which the reader remembers them. Dickens focuses on idiosyncrasies of speech, dress and appearance, and often gives his characters repeated "stock phrases" which virtually sum them up and commit them to memory.

Having a very acute ear for turns of phrase, Dickens used such speech patterns as a source of humour in all his works -but he also used them as a vehicle for satire.

The serial publication of his novels made for a close relationship with his public, a need to maintain suspense from each instalment to the next and to take his reader's feelings into consideration, which may partly account for his sometimes over-indulgent use of sentimentality and melodrama.

Point of view.

Sometimes Dickens uses the first person narrator to tell the story, as in *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*. It is no coincidence that these are also the most directly autobiographical of all his major novels. But in most cases he is the author telling the story, talking directly to his audience.



Hard Times

Context

Charles Dickens was born on February 7, 1812, and spent the first nine years of his life in Kent, a marshy region by the sea in the west of England. Dickens's father, John, was a kind and likable man, but he was incompetent with money and piled up tremendous debts throughout his life. When Dickens was nine, his family moved to London, and later, when he was twelve, his father was arrested and taken to debtors' prison. Dickens's mother moved his seven brothers and sisters into prison with their father but arranged for Charles to live alone outside the prison, working with other children at a nightmarish job in a blacking warehouse, pasting labels on bottles. The three months he spent apart from his family were highly traumatic for Dickens, and his job was miserable—he considered himself too good for it, earning the contempt of the other children.

After his father was released from prison, Dickens returned to school. He tried his hand professionally as a law clerk and then a court reporter before becoming a novelist. His first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*, became a huge popular success when Dickens was only twenty-five, and he was a literary celebrity throughout England for the remainder of his life. At about this time, he fell in love with Mary Beadnell, the daughter of a banker. In spite of his ambition and literary success, Dickens was considered her social inferior in terms of wealth and family background, and Mary's father prohibited the marriage. Several years later, Dickens married Catherine Hogarth. Although they had ten children, Dickens was never completely happy in this marriage, and he and Catherine eventually separated.

Though the young blacking factory employee had considered himself too good for his job, the older novelist retained a deep interest in and concern for the plight of the poor, particularly poor children. The Victorian England in which Dickens lived was fraught with massive economic turmoil, as the Industrial Revolution sent shockwaves through the established order. The disparity between the rich and poor, or the middle and working classes, grew even greater as factory owners exploited their employees in order to increase their own profits. Workers, referred to as "the Hands" in *Hard Times*, were forced to work long hours for low pay in cramped, sooty, loud, and dangerous factories. Because they lacked education and job skills, these workers had few options for improving their terrible living and working conditions. With the empathy he gained through his own experience in poverty, Dickens became involved in a number of organizations that worked to alleviate the horrible living conditions of the London poor. For instance, he was a speaker for the Metropolitan Sanitary Organization, and, with his wealthy friend Angela Burdett-Coutts, he organized projects to clear up the slums and build clean, safe, cheap housing for the poor.

Though he was far too great a novelist to become a propagandist, Dickens several times used his art as a lens to focus attention on the plight of the poor and to attempt to awaken the conscience of the reader. *Hard Times* is just such a novel: set amid the industrial smokestacks and factories of Coketown, England, the novel uses its characters and stories to expose the massive gulf between rich and poor in the nation and to criticize what Dickens perceived as the unfeeling self-interest of the middle and upper classes. Indeed, *Hard Times* suggests that nineteenth-century England itself is turning into a factory machine: the middle class is concerned only with making a profit in the most efficient and practical way possible. *Hard Times* is not a delicate book: Dickens hammers home his point with

vicious, often hilarious satire and sentimental melodrama. It is also not a difficult book: Dickens wanted all his readers to catch his point exactly, and the moral theme of the novel is very explicitly articulated time and again. There are no hidden meanings in *Hard Times*, and the book is an interesting case of a great writer subordinating his art to a moral and social purpose. Even if it is not Dickens's most popular novel, it is still an important expression of the values he thought were fundamental to human existence.

Key Facts

Full Title - *Hard Times*

Author - Charles Dickens

Type of work - Novel

Genre - Victorian novel; realist novel; satire; dystopia

Language - English

Time and place written - 1854, London

Date of first publication - Published in serial installments in Dickens's magazine *Household Words* between April 1 and August 12, 1854

Publisher - Charles Dickens

Narrator - The anonymous narrator serves as a moral authority. By making moral judgments about the characters, the narrator shapes our interpretations of the novel.

Point of view - The narrator speaks in the third person and has a limited omniscience. He knows what is going on in all places and at all times, but he sometimes speculates about what the characters might be feeling and thinking, suggesting at those times that he does not actually know.

Tone - The narrator's tone varies drastically, but it is frequently ironic, mocking, and even satirical, especially when he describes Bounderby, Harthouse, and Mrs. Sparsit. When describing Stephen and Rachael, his tone is pathetic, in an attempt to evoke sympathy.

Tense - The narrative is presented in the present tense; however, at the end, the narrator reveals what the future will bring to each of the main characters.

Setting (time) - The middle of the nineteenth century

Setting (place) - Coketown, a manufacturing town in the south of England

Protagonist - Louisa Gradgrind

Major conflict - Louisa Gradgrind struggles to reconcile the fact-driven self-interest of her upbringing with the warmth of feeling that she witnesses both in Sissy Jupe and developing within herself. As this attitude changes, Louisa is caught between allegiances to her family and loveless marriage and her desire to transcend the emotional and personal detachment of her past.

Rising action - Sissy joins the Gradgrind household, and Louisa marries Mr. Bounderby unwillingly, only to satisfy her father's sense of what would be most rational for her.

Climax - Mr. Harthouse joins Gradgrind's political disciples and attempts to seduce Louisa. Louisa, confused, leaves Bounderby and returns to her father's house, where she collapses.

Falling action - Sissy informs Harthouse that Louisa will never see him again, and Louisa attempts to amend her life by appealing to her father and offering assistance to the alleged perpetrator in Bounderby's bank robbery.

Themes - The mechanization of human beings; the opposition between fact and fancy; the importance of femininity

Motifs - Bounderby's childhood; clocks and time; mismatched marriages

Symbols - Staircase; pegasus; fire; smoke serpents

Foreshadowing - Stephen's claim that factory Hands have only death to look forward to foreshadows his own death in the mine shaft. Bitzer's run-in with Mr. Gradgrind at the circus at the beginning of the

novel, when he has been taunting Sissy, foreshadows his run-in with Mr. Gradgrind at the circus at the end of the novel, when Tom is fleeing the country.

Plot Overview

Thomas Gradgrind, a wealthy, retired merchant in the industrial city of Coketown, England, devotes his life to a philosophy of rationalism, self-interest, and fact. He raises his oldest children, Louisa and Tom, according to this philosophy and never allows them to engage in fanciful or imaginative pursuits. He founds a school and charitably takes in one of the students, the kindly and imaginative Sissy Jupe, after the disappearance of her father, a circus entertainer.

As the Gradgrind children grow older, Tom becomes a dissipated, self-interested hedonist, and Louisa struggles with deep inner confusion, feeling as though she is missing something important in her life. Eventually Louisa marries Gradgrind's friend Josiah Bounderby, a wealthy factory owner and banker more than twice her age. Bounderby continually trumpets his role as a self-made man, abandoned in the gutter by his mother as an infant. Tom is apprenticed at the Bounderby bank, and Sissy remains at the Gradgrind home to care for the younger children.

In the meantime, an impoverished "Hand"—Dickens's term for the lowest laborers in Coketown's factories—named Stephen Blackpool struggles with his love for Rachael, another poor factory worker. He is unable to marry her because he is already married to a horrible, drunken woman who disappears for months and even years at a time. Stephen visits Bounderby to ask about a divorce but learns that only the wealthy can obtain divorces. Outside Bounderby's home, he meets Mrs. Pegler, a strange old woman with an inexplicable devotion to Bounderby.

James Harthouse, a wealthy young sophisticate from London, arrives in Coketown to begin a political career as a disciple of Gradgrind, who is now a Member of Parliament. He immediately takes an interest in Louisa and decides to try to seduce her. With the unspoken aid of Mrs. Sparsit, a former aristocrat who has fallen on hard times and now works for Bounderby, he sets about trying to corrupt Louisa.

The Hands, exhorted by a crooked union spokesman named Slackbridge, try to form a union. Only Stephen refuses to join because he feels that a union strike would only increase tensions between employers and employees. He is cast out by the other Hands and fired by Bounderby when he refuses to spy on them. Louisa, impressed with Stephen's integrity, visits him before he leaves Coketown and helps him with some money. Tom accompanies her and tells Stephen to wait outside the bank for several consecutive nights, and help will come to him. Stephen does so, but no help arrives. Eventually he packs up and leaves Coketown, hoping to find agricultural work in the country. Not long after that, the bank is robbed, and the lone suspect is Stephen, the vanished Hand who was seen loitering outside the bank for several nights just before disappearing from the city.

Mrs. Sparsit witnesses Harthouse declaring his love for Louisa, and Louisa agrees to meet him in Coketown later that night. However, Louisa instead flees to her father's house, where she miserably confides to Gradgrind that her upbringing has left her married to a man she does not love, disconnected from her feelings, deeply unhappy, and possibly in love with Harthouse. She collapses to the floor, and Gradgrind, struck dumb with self-reproach, begins to realize the imperfections in his philosophy of rational self-interest.

Sissy, who loves Louisa deeply, visits Harthouse and convinces him to leave Coketown forever. Bounderby, furious that his wife has left him, redoubles his efforts to capture Stephen. When Stephen tries to return to clear his good name, he falls into a mining pit called Old Hell Shaft. Rachael and Louisa discover him, but he dies soon after an emotional farewell to Rachael. Gradgrind and Louisa realize that Tom is really responsible for robbing the bank, and they arrange to sneak him out of England with the help of the circus performers with whom Sissy spent her early childhood. They are nearly successful,

but are stopped by Bitzer, a young man who went to Gradgrind's school and who embodies all the qualities of the detached rationalism that Gradgrind once espoused, but who now sees its limits. Sleary, the lispng circus proprietor, arranges for Tom to slip out of Bitzer's grasp, and the young robber escapes from England after all.

Mrs. Sparsit, anxious to help Bounderby find the robbers, drags Mrs. Pegler—a known associate of Stephen Blackpool—in to see Bounderby, thinking she is a potential witness. Bounderby recoils, and it is revealed that Mrs. Pegler is really his loving mother, whom he has forbidden to visit him: Bounderby is not a self-made man after all. Angrily, Bounderby fires Mrs. Sparsit and sends her away to her hostile relatives. Five years later, he will die alone in the streets of Coketown. Gradgrind gives up his philosophy of fact and devotes his political power to helping the poor. Tom realizes the error of his ways but dies without ever seeing his family again. While Sissy marries and has a large and loving family, Louisa never again marries and never has children. Nevertheless, Louisa is loved by Sissy's family and learns at last how to feel sympathy for her fellow human beings.

Character List

Thomas Gradgrind - A wealthy, retired merchant in Coketown, later a Member of Parliament. Mr. Gradgrind espouses a philosophy of rationalism, self-interest, and cold, hard fact. He describes himself as an “eminently practical” man, and he tries to raise his children—Louisa, Tom, Jane, Adam Smith, and Malthus—to be equally practical by forbidding the development of their imaginations and emotions. Thomas Gradgrind is the first character we meet in *Hard Times*, and one of the central figures through whom Dickens weaves together a web of intricately connected plotlines and characters. Dickens introduces us to this character with a description of his most central feature: his mechanized, monotone attitude and appearance. The opening scene in the novel describes Mr. Gradgrind's speech to a group of young students, and it is appropriate that Gradgrind physically embodies the dry, hard facts that he crams into his students' heads. The narrator calls attention to Gradgrind's “square coat, square legs, square shoulders,” all of which suggest Gradgrind's unrelenting rigidity. In the first few chapters of the novel, Mr. Gradgrind expounds his philosophy of calculating, rational self-interest. He believes that human nature can be governed by completely rational rules, and he is “ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you what it comes to.” This philosophy has brought Mr. Gradgrind much financial and social success. He has made his fortune as a hardware merchant, a trade that, appropriately, deals in hard, material reality. Later, he becomes a Member of Parliament, a position that allows him to indulge his interest in tabulating data about the people of England. Although he is not a factory owner, Mr. Gradgrind evinces the spirit of the Industrial Revolution insofar as he treats people like machines that can be reduced to a number of scientific principles. While the narrator's tone toward him is initially mocking and ironic, Gradgrind undergoes a significant change in the course of the novel, thereby earning the narrator's sympathy. When Louisa confesses that she feels something important is missing in her life and that she is desperately unhappy with her marriage, Gradgrind begins to realize that his system of education may not be perfect. This intuition is confirmed when he learns that Tom has robbed Bounderby's bank. Faced with these failures of his system, Gradgrind admits, “The ground on which I stand has ceased to be solid under my feet.” His children's problems teach him to feel love and sorrow, and Gradgrind becomes a wiser and humbler man, ultimately “making his facts and figures subservient to Faith, Hope and Charity.”

Louisa - Gradgrind's daughter, later Bounderby's wife. Confused by her unfeeling upbringing, Louisa feels disconnected from her emotions and alienated from other people. While she vaguely recognizes that her father's system of education has deprived her childhood of all joy, Louisa cannot actively invoke

her emotions or connect with others. Thus she marries Bounderby to please her father, even though she does not love her husband. Indeed, the only person she loves completely is her brother Tom. Although Louisa is the novel's principal female character, she is distinctive from the novel's other women, particularly from her foils, Sissy and Rachael. While these other two women embody the Victorian ideal of femininity—sensitivity, compassion, and gentleness—Louisa's education has prevented her from developing such traits. Instead, Louisa is silent, cold, and seemingly unfeeling. However, Dickens may not be implying that Louisa is really unfeeling, but rather that she simply does not know how to recognize and express her emotions. For instance, when her father tries to convince her that it would be rational for her to marry Bounderby, Louisa looks out of the window at the factory chimneys and observes: "There seems to be nothing there but languid and monotonous smoke. Yet when the night comes, Fire bursts out." Unable to convey the tumultuous feelings that lie beneath her own languid and monotonous exterior, Louisa can only state a fact about her surroundings. Yet this fact, by analogy, also describes the emotions repressed within her. Even though she does not conform to the Victorian ideals of femininity, Louisa does her best to be a model daughter, wife, and sister. Her decision to return to her father's house rather than elope with Harthouse demonstrates that while she may be unfeeling, she does not lack virtue. Indeed, Louisa, though unemotional, still has the ability to recognize goodness and distinguish between right and wrong, even when it does not fall within the strict rubric of her father's teachings. While at first Louisa lacks the ability to understand and function within the gray matter of emotions, she can at least recognize that they exist and are more powerful than her father or Bounderby believe, even without any factual basis. Moreover, under Sissy's guidance, Louisa shows great promise in learning to express her feelings. Similarly, through her acquaintance with Rachael and Stephen, Louisa learns to respond charitably to suffering and not view suffering simply as a temporary state that is easily overcome by effort, as her father and Bounderby do.

Thomas Gradgrind, Jr. - Gradgrind's eldest son and an apprentice at Bounderby's bank, who is generally called Tom. Tom reacts to his strict upbringing by becoming a dissipated, hedonistic, hypocritical young man. Although he appreciates his sister's affection, Tom cannot return it entirely—he loves money and gambling even more than he loves Louisa. These vices lead him to rob Bounderby's bank and implicate Stephen as the robbery's prime suspect.

Josiah Bounderby - Gradgrind's friend and later Louisa's husband. Bounderby claims to be a self-made man and boastfully describes being abandoned by his mother as a young boy. From his childhood poverty he has risen to become a banker and factory owner in Coketown, known by everyone for his wealth and power. His true upbringing, by caring and devoted parents, indicates that his social mobility is a hoax and calls into question the whole notion of social mobility in nineteenth-century England.

Josiah Bounderby - Although he is Mr. Gradgrind's best friend, Josiah Bounderby is more interested in money and power than in facts. Indeed, he is himself a fiction, or a fraud. Bounderby's inflated sense of pride is illustrated by his oft-repeated declaration, "I am Josiah Bounderby of Coketown." This statement generally prefaces the story of Bounderby's childhood poverty and suffering, a story designed to impress its listeners with a sense of the young Josiah Bounderby's determination and self-discipline. However, Dickens explodes the myth of the self-made man when Bounderby's mother, Mrs. Pegler, reveals that her son had a decent, loving childhood and a good education, and was not abandoned after all. Bounderby's attitude represents the social changes created by industrialization and capitalism. Whereas birth or bloodline formerly determined the social hierarchy, in an industrialized, capitalist society, wealth determines who holds the most power. Thus, Bounderby takes great delight in the fact that Mrs. Sparsit, an aristocrat who has fallen on hard times, has become his servant, while his own ambition has enabled him to rise from humble beginnings to become the wealthy owner of a factory and

a bank. However, in depicting Bounderby, the capitalist, as a coarse, vain, self-interested hypocrite, Dickens implies that Bounderby uses his wealth and power irresponsibly, contributing to the muddled relations between rich and poor, especially in his treatment of Stephen after the Hands cast Stephen out to form a union.

Cecilia Jupe - The daughter of a clown in Sleary's circus. Sissy is taken in by Gradgrind when her father disappears. Sissy serves as a foil, or contrast, to Louisa: while Sissy is imaginative and compassionate, Louisa is rational and, for the most part, unfeeling. Sissy embodies the Victorian femininity that counterbalances mechanization and industry. Through Sissy's interaction with her, Louisa is able to explore her more sensitive feminine sides.

Mrs. Sparsit - Bounderby's housekeeper, who goes to live at the bank apartments when Bounderby marries Louisa. Once a member of the aristocratic elite, Mrs. Sparsit fell on hard times after the collapse of her marriage. A selfish, manipulative, dishonest woman, Mrs. Sparsit cherishes secret hopes of ruining Bounderby's marriage so that she can marry him herself. Mrs. Sparsit's aristocratic background is emphasized by the narrator's frequent allusions to her "Roman" and "Coriolanian" appearance.

Stephen Blackpool - A Hand in Bounderby's factory. Stephen loves Rachael but is unable to marry her because he is already married, albeit to a horrible, drunken woman. A man of great honesty, compassion, and integrity, Stephen maintains his moral ideals even when he is shunned by his fellow workers and fired by Bounderby. Stephen's values are similar to those endorsed by the narrator.

Rachael - A simple, honest Hand who loves Stephen Blackpool. To Stephen, she represents domestic happiness and moral purity.

James Harthouse - A sophisticated and manipulative young London gentleman who comes to Coketown to enter politics as a disciple of Gradgrind, simply because he thinks it might alleviate his boredom. In his constant search for a new form of amusement, Harthouse quickly becomes attracted to Louisa and resolves to seduce her.

Mr. Sleary - The lisping proprietor of the circus where Sissy's father was an entertainer. Later, Mr. Sleary hides Tom Gradgrind and helps him flee the country. Mr. Sleary and his troop of entertainers value laughter and fantasy whereas Mr. Gradgrind values rationality and fact.

Bitzer - Bitzer is one of the successes produced by Gradgrind's rationalistic system of education. Initially a bully at Gradgrind's school, Bitzer later becomes an employee and a spy at Bounderby's bank. An uncharacteristically pale character and unrelenting disciple of fact, Bitzer almost stops Tom from fleeing after it is discovered that Tom is the true bank robber.

Mr. McChoakumchild - The unpleasant teacher at Gradgrind's school. As his name suggests, McChoakumchild is not overly fond of children, and stifles or chokes their imaginations and feelings.

Mrs. Pegler - Bounderby's mother, unbeknownst as such to all except herself and Bounderby. Mrs. Pegler makes an annual visit to Coketown in order to admire her son's prosperity from a safe distance. Mrs. Pegler's appearance uncovers the hoax that her son Bounderby has been attesting throughout the story, which is that he is a self-made man who was abandoned as a child.

Mrs. Gradgrind - Gradgrind's whiny, anemic wife, who constantly tells her children to study their

"ologies" and complains that she'll "never hear the end" of any complaint. Although Mrs. Gradgrind does not share her husband's interest in facts, she lacks the energy and the imagination to oppose his system of education.

Slackbridge - The crooked orator who convinces the Hands to unionize and turns them against Stephen Blackpool when he refuses to join the union.

Jane Gradgrind - Gradgrind's younger daughter, and Louisa and Tom's sister. Because Sissy largely raises her, Jane is a happier little girl than her sister Louisa.

Stephen Blackpool - Stephen Blackpool is introduced after we have met the Gradgrind family and Bounderby, and Blackpool provides a stark contrast to these earlier characters. One of the Hands in Bounderby's factory, Stephen lives a life of drudgery and poverty. In spite of the hardships of his daily toil, Stephen strives to maintain his honesty, integrity, faith, and compassion. Stephen is an important character not only because his poverty and virtue contrast with Bounderby's wealth and self-interest, but also because he finds himself in the midst of a labor dispute that illustrates the strained relations between rich and poor. Stephen is the only Hand who refuses to join a workers' union: he believes that striking is not the best way to improve relations between factory owners and employees, and he also wants to earn an honest living. As a result, he is cast out of the workers' group. However, he also refuses to spy on his fellow workers for Bounderby, who consequently sends him away. Both groups, rich and poor, respond in the same self-interested, backstabbing way. As Rachael explains, Stephen ends up with the "masters against him on one hand, the men against him on the other, he only wantin' to work hard in peace, and do what he felt right." Through Stephen, Dickens suggests that industrialization threatens to compromise both the employee's and employer's moral integrity, thereby creating a social muddle to which there is no easy solution. Through his efforts to resist the moral corruption on all sides, Stephen becomes a martyr, or Christ figure, ultimately dying for Tom's crime. When he falls into a mine shaft on his way back to Coketown, where he is going to clear his name of the charge of robbing Bounderby's bank, Stephen comforts himself by gazing at a particularly bright star that seems to shine on him in his "pain and trouble." This star not only represents the ideals of virtue for which Stephen strives, but also the happiness and tranquility that is lacking in his troubled life. Moreover, his ability to find comfort in the star illustrates the importance of imagination, which enables him to escape the cold, hard facts of his miserable existence.

Themes, Motifs, and Symbols

Themes

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.

The Mechanization of Human Beings - Hard Times suggests that nineteenth-century England's overzealous adoption of industrialization threatens to turn human beings into machines by thwarting the development of their emotions and imaginations. This suggestion comes forth largely through the actions of Gradgrind and his follower Bounderby: as the former educates the young children of his family and his school in the ways of fact, the latter treats the workers in his factory as emotionless objects that are easily exploited for his own self-interest. In Chapter 5 of the first book, the narrator draws a parallel between the factory Hands and the Gradgrind children—both lead monotonous, uniform existences, untouched by pleasure. Consequently, their fantasies and feelings are dulled, and they become almost mechanical themselves.

The mechanizing effects of industrialization are compounded by Mr. Gradgrind's philosophy of

rational self-interest. Mr. Gradgrind believes that human nature can be measured, quantified, and governed entirely by rational rules. Indeed, his school attempts to turn children into little machines that behave according to such rules. Dickens's primary goal in *Hard Times* is to illustrate the dangers of allowing humans to become like machines, suggesting that without compassion and imagination, life would be unbearable. Indeed, Louisa feels precisely this suffering when she returns to her father's house and tells him that something has been missing in her life, to the point that she finds herself in an unhappy marriage and may be in love with someone else. While she does not actually behave in a dishonorable way, since she stops her interaction with Harthouse before she has a socially ruinous affair with him, Louisa realizes that her life is unbearable and that she must do something drastic for her own survival. Appealing to her father with the utmost honesty, Louisa is able to make him realize and admit that his philosophies on life and methods of child rearing are to blame for Louisa's detachment from others.

The Opposition Between Fact and Fancy - While Mr. Gradgrind insists that his children should always stick to the facts, *Hard Times* not only suggests that fancy is as important as fact, but it continually calls into question the difference between fact and fancy. Dickens suggests that what constitutes so-called fact is a matter of perspective or opinion. For example, Bounderby believes that factory employees are lazy good-for-nothings who expect to be fed "from a golden spoon." The Hands, in contrast, see themselves as hardworking and as unfairly exploited by their employers. These sets of facts cannot be reconciled because they depend upon perspective. While Bounderby declares that "[w]hat is called Taste is only another name for Fact," Dickens implies that fact is a question of taste or personal belief. As a novelist, Dickens is naturally interested in illustrating that fiction cannot be excluded from a fact-filled, mechanical society. Gradgrind's children, however, grow up in an environment where all flights of fancy are discouraged, and they end up with serious social dysfunctions as a result. Tom becomes a hedonist who has little regard for others, while Louisa remains unable to connect with others even though she has the desire to do so. On the other hand, Sissy, who grew up with the circus, constantly indulges in the fancy forbidden to the Gradgrinds, and lovingly raises Louisa and Tom's sister in a way more complete than the upbringing of either of the older siblings. In the same way that fiction cannot be excluded from fact, fact is also necessary for a balanced life. If Gradgrind had not adopted her, Sissy would have no guidance, and her future might be precarious. As a result, the youngest Gradgrind daughter, raised both by the factual Gradgrind and the fanciful Sissy, represents the best of both worlds.

The Importance of Femininity - During the Victorian era, women were commonly associated with supposedly feminine traits like compassion, moral purity, and emotional sensitivity. *Hard Times* suggests that because they possess these traits, women can counteract the mechanizing effects of industrialization. For instance, when Stephen feels depressed about the monotony of his life as a factory worker, Rachael's gentle fortitude inspires him to keep going. He sums up her virtues by referring to her as his guiding angel. Similarly, Sissy introduces love into the Gradgrind household, ultimately teaching Louisa how to recognize her emotions. Indeed, Dickens suggests that Mr. Gradgrind's philosophy of self-interest and calculating rationality has prevented Louisa from developing her natural feminine traits. Perhaps Mrs. Gradgrind's inability to exercise her femininity allows Gradgrind to overemphasize the importance of fact in the rearing of his children. On his part, Bounderby ensures that his rigidity will remain untouched since he marries the cold, emotionless product of Mr. and Mrs. Gradgrind's marriage. Through the various female characters in the novel, Dickens suggests that feminine compassion is necessary to restore social harmony.

Motifs

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.

Bounderby's Childhood - Bounderby frequently reminds us that he is "Josiah Bounderby of Coketown." This emphatic phrase usually follows a description of his childhood poverty: he claims to have been born in a ditch and abandoned by his mother, raised by an alcoholic grandmother, and forced to support himself by his own labor. From these ignominious beginnings, he has become the wealthy owner of both a factory and a bank. Thus, Bounderby represents the possibility of social mobility: he embodies the belief that any individual should be able overcome all obstacles to success—including poverty and lack of education—through hard work. Indeed, Bounderby often recites the story of his childhood in order to suggest that his Hands are impoverished because they lack his ambition and self-discipline. However, "Josiah Bounderby of Coketown" is ultimately a fraud. His mother, Mrs. Pegler, reveals that he was raised by parents who were loving, albeit poor, and who saved their money to make sure he received a good education. By exposing Bounderby's real origins, Dickens calls into question the myth of social mobility. In other words, he suggests that perhaps the Hands cannot overcome poverty through sheer determination alone, but only through the charity and compassion of wealthier individuals.

Clocks and Time - Dickens contrasts mechanical or man-made time with natural time, or the passing of the seasons. In both Coketown and the Gradgrind household, time is mechanized—in other words, it is relentless, structured, regular, and monotonous. As the narrator explains, "Time went on in Coketown like its own machine." The mechanization of time is also embodied in the "deadly statistical clock" in Mr. Gradgrind's study, which measures the passing of each minute and hour. However, the novel itself is structured through natural time. For instance, the titles of its three books—"Sowing," "Reaping," and "Garnering"—allude to agricultural labor and to the processes of planting and harvesting in accordance with the changes of the seasons. Similarly, the narrator notes that the seasons change even in Coketown's "wilderness of smoke and brick." These seasonal changes constitute "the only stand that ever was made against its direful uniformity." By contrasting mechanical time with natural time, Dickens illustrates the great extent to which industrialization has mechanized human existence. While the changing seasons provide variety in terms of scenery and agricultural labor, mechanized time marches forward with incessant regularity.

Mismatched Marriages - There are many unequal and unhappy marriages in *Hard Times*, including those of Mr. and Mrs. Gradgrind, Stephen Blackpool and his unnamed drunken wife, and most pertinent, the Bounderbys. Louisa agrees to marry Mr. Bounderby because her father convinces her that it would be a rational decision. He even cites statistics to show that the great difference in their ages need not prevent their mutual happiness. However, Louisa's consequent misery as Bounderby's wife suggests that love, rather than either reason or convenience, must be the foundation of a happy marriage.

Symbols

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, or colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

Staircase - When Mrs. Sparsit notices that Louisa and Harthouse are spending a lot of time together, she imagines that Louisa is running down a long staircase into a "dark pit of shame and ruin at the bottom." This imaginary staircase represents her belief that Louisa is going to elope with Harthouse and

consequently ruin her reputation forever. Mrs. Sparsit has long resented Bounderby's marriage to the young Louisa, as she hoped to marry him herself, so she is very pleased by Louisa's apparent indiscretion. Through the staircase, Dickens reveals the manipulative and censorious side of Mrs. Sparsit's character. He also suggests that Mrs. Sparsit's self-interest causes her to misinterpret the situation. Rather than ending up in a pit of shame by having an affair with Harthouse, Louisa actually returns home to her father.

Pegasus - Mr. Sleary's circus entertainers stay at an inn called the Pegasus Arms. Inside this inn is a "theatrical" pegasus, a model of a flying horse with "golden stars stuck on all over him." The pegasus represents a world of fantasy and beauty from which the young Gradgrind children are excluded. While Mr. Gradgrind informs the pupils at his school that wallpaper with horses on it is unrealistic simply because horses do not in fact live on walls, the circus folk live in a world in which horses dance the polka and flying horses can be imagined, even if they do not in fact exist. The very name of the inn reveals the contrast between the imaginative and joyful world of the circus and Mr. Gradgrind's belief in the importance of fact.

Smoke Serpents - At a literal level, the streams of smoke that fill the skies above Coketown are the effects of industrialization. However, these smoke serpents also represent the moral blindness of factory owners like Bounderby. Because he is so concerned with making as much profit as he possibly can, Bounderby interprets the serpents of smoke as a positive sign that the factories are producing goods and profit. Thus, he not only fails to see the smoke as a form of unhealthy pollution, but he also fails to recognize his own abuse of the Hands in his factories. The smoke becomes a moral smoke screen that prevents him from noticing his workers' miserable poverty. Through its associations with evil, the word "serpents" evokes the moral obscurity that the smoke creates.

Fire - When Louisa is first introduced, in Chapter 3 of Book the First, the narrator explains that inside her is a "fire with nothing to burn, a starved imagination keeping life in itself somehow." This description suggests that although Louisa seems coldly rational, she has not succumbed entirely to her father's prohibition against wondering and imagining. Her inner fire symbolizes the warmth created by her secret fancies in her otherwise lonely, mechanized existence. Consequently, it is significant that Louisa often gazes into the fireplace when she is alone, as if she sees things in the flames that others—like her rigid father and brother—cannot see. However, there is another kind of inner fire in *Hard Times*—the fires that keep the factories running, providing heat and power for the machines. Fire is thus both a destructive and a life-giving force. Even Louisa's inner fire, her imaginative tendencies, eventually becomes destructive: her repressed emotions eventually begin to burn "within her like an unwholesome fire." Through this symbol, Dickens evokes the importance of imagination as a force that can counteract the mechanization of human nature.

Book the First: Sowing: Chapters 1–4 Summary

Chapter 1: The One Thing Needful

In an empty schoolroom, a dark-eyed, rigid man emphatically expresses his desire to the schoolmaster and to a third adult for children to be taught facts, saying that "nothing else will ever be of any service to them."

Chapter 2: Murdering the Innocents

In the industrial city of Coketown, a place dominated by grim factories and oppressed by coils of black smoke, the dark-eyed, rigid man—Thomas Gradgrind—has established a school. He has hired a teacher, Mr. McChoakumchild, whom he hopes will instill in the students nothing but cold, hard facts. Visiting the school, Gradgrind tests a pair of students by asking them to define a horse. Sissy Jupe, the daughter of a horse-riding circus entertainer, is unable to answer, but a pale young man called Bitzer gives a cut-and-dried definition that pleases Gradgrind.

Chapter 3: A Loophole

While walking back to his home, appropriately named Stone Lodge, Gradgrind catches his two eldest children spying on the circus through a peephole in the fence. Having raised his children according to his philosophy of fact and permitting them no imaginative entertainment, Gradgrind becomes furious. He drags the young Tom and sixteen-year-old Louisa home. Louisa admits that curiosity drew her to the circus and tries to defend her brother by saying she dragged him there, but all Gradgrind can do is ask angrily what Mr. Bounderby would say.

Chapter 4: Mr. Bounderby

This same Mr. Bounderby—a wealthy, boastful industrialist who owns factories and a bank—is at that very moment in the drawing room at Stone Lodge, pontificating to the pallid and lethargic Mrs. Gradgrind about his poverty-stricken childhood. Bounderby never fails to talk at length about this subject. He reminds Mrs. Gradgrind that he was born in a ditch, abandoned by his mother, and raised by a cruel, alcoholic grandmother. At this point, Gradgrind enters and tells Bounderby about his children's misbehavior. Mrs. Gradgrind scolds the children halfheartedly, admonishing them to "go and be somethingological." Bounderby theorizes that Sissy Jupe, the circus entertainer's daughter who attends Gradgrind's school, may have led the young Gradgrinds astray. Gradgrind agrees, and they set out to inform Sissy's father that Sissy is no longer welcome at the school. Bounderby demands a kiss from Louisa before they leave.

Analysis

While *Bleak House* addresses a vast social panorama, Dickens' next novel, *Hard Times*, serialized weekly for five months, is both shorter in length and more concise in its condemnation. In it, Dickens turned his art on the inhumanity and soullessness of Victorian materialism. Set in a mill town in the 1840s, when industrial expansion was at its height, it shows with awful clarity the dehumanizing results of capitalist "Utilitarian" (Jeremy Bentham) ethics, which insisted on the primary importance of high profits (and, therefore, cheap labour) for the good of the country: "the greatest good for the greatest number". Part of this ethic was the worship of quantifiable facts and observably "useful" behaviour -love, imagination and creativity have no place. In this world, human beings are reduced to numbers in the industrial machine.

In the year Dickens was born there were riots in England carried out by a group called the Luddites who opposed the introduction of factory machinery and the advance of industrialization. They were unemployed men who thought that their troubles were mainly caused by the arrival of the machines. The two themes of machines against men and of hungry workers recur in a number of key scenes in *Hard Times*. The workers of the time had no formal associations or trade unions. Various efforts were made to form such organisations but these were inevitably frustrated and met by force (i.e. the Tolpuddle martyrs from Dorset). Another important form of public protest was the rise of Chartism, a movement ineffectually organised and no longer in force when *Hard Times* appeared.

Dickens' despair at the condition of English society was at its deepest during the years he was

writing *Hard Times*, and his next novel *Little Dorrit*. The end of the Crimean War in 1856 -which had been an excuse for Parliament not to proceed with reforms at home -was greeted with apathy, and Dickens became increasingly sceptical that real social change could or would come about through the conventional channels.

Coketown is the Lancashire town of Preston. Dickens travelled there to gain first-hand knowledge of union activities - a strike in 1854 which lasted several weeks- against the Cotton Lords (Boulderby), who were supported in Parliament by men whom Dickens satirises in *Hard Times* as "the Hard Facts men" (Thomas Gradgrind), men whose economic principle of "laissez faire" ('do as you please'), free enterprise without government interference originated in the work of Adam Smith (1723-90; *The Wealth of Nations* (1776)). Notice that one of Gradgrind's children is called Adam Smith.¹

The novel is dedicated to Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), a severe critic of political and economic developments and precursor to many of Dickens's own statements in *Hard Times*:

Were we required to characterise this age of ours by any single epithet, we should be tempted to call it not an Heroical, Devotional, Philosophical, or Moral Age, but, above all others, the Mechanical Age. It is the Age of Machinery in every outward and inward sense of that word; the age which, with its whole undivided might, forwards, teaches and practises the great art of adapting means to ends. Nothing is now done directly or by the hand; all is by rule and calculated contrivance... Men are grown mechanical in head and in heart, as well as in hand. (From *Signs of the Times*, 1829)

Dickens was extremely concerned with the miserable lives of the poor and working classes in the England of his day, and *Hard Times* is one of several of his novels that addresses these social problems directly. *Hard Times* is not Dickens's most subtle novel, and most of its moral themes are explicitly articulated through extremely sharp, exaggerated characterization and through the narrator's frequent interjection of his own opinions and sentiments. For instance, in the opening section of the book, a simple contrast emerges between Mr. Gradgrind's philosophy of fact and Sissy Jupe's frequent indulgence in romantic, imaginative fancy. While Gradgrind's philosophy includes the idea that people should only act according to their own best interests, which they can calculate through rational principles, the actions of the simple, loving Sissy are inspired by her feelings, usually of compassion toward others. The philosophy of fact is continually shown to be at the heart of the problems of the poor—the smokestacks, factory machines, and clouds of black smog are all associated with fact—while fancy is held up as the route to charity and love among fellow men. Philosophically, this contrast is a drastic and obvious oversimplification. Clearly, a commitment to factual accuracy does not lead directly to selfishness, and a commitment to imagination does not signify a commitment to social equality. But for the purposes of *Hard Times*, these contrasting ideas serve as a kind of shorthand for the states of mind that enable certain kinds of action. Cold rationalism divorced from sentiment and feeling can lead to insensitivity about human suffering, and imagination can enhance one's sense of sympathy.

Moreover, Gradgrind's philosophy of fact is intimately related to the Industrial Revolution, a cause of the mechanization of human nature. Dickens suggests that when humans are forced to perform the same monotonous tasks repeatedly, in a drab, incessantly noisy, and smoky environment, they become like the machines with which they work—unfeeling and not enlivened by fancy. The connection between Gradgrind's philosophy of fact and the social effects of the Industrial Revolution is

¹ Dickens was at pains to discount the claim that *Hard Times* was born at the Preston Strike. He saw it as a threat to his literary reputation; thus he wrote to a friend Peter Cunningham (1818-67): "The mischief of such a statement is twofold. First it encourages the public to believe in the impossibility that books are produced in that very sudden and cavalier manner... and secondly in this instance it has this bearing: localises... a story which has a direct purpose in reference to the working people all over England, and it will cause, as I know by former experience, characters to be fitted onto individuals whom I never saw or heard un my life."

made explicit by two details in the first section of the novel. First, the narrator reports that when Gradgrind finds his children at the circus, "Tom gave himself up to be taken home like a machine." By dulling Tom's feelings and his sense of free will, his education has rendered his thoughts and actions mechanical. The second detail illustrating the connection between Gradgrind's philosophy and the process of industrialization is the choice of names for Gradgrind's two younger sons, Adam Smith and Malthus. These children play no role in the plot, but their names are relevant to the novel's themes. Adam Smith (1723–1790) was a Scottish economist who produced the theory that the economy is controlled by an "invisible hand," and that employers and workers do not control the fluctuations of supply and demand. Malthus (1766–1834) was an economist who argued that poverty is a result of overpopulation and that the poor must have smaller families in order to improve the general standard of living in society. Both of these writers addressed the poverty of mind and body that accompanies industrialization. Through these two names, Dickens suggests that the philosophy of fact to which Gradgrind subscribes and the deleterious social effects of the Industrial Revolution are inextricably related.

This first section serves mainly to introduce the contrast between fact and fancy and to establish the allegiances of the main characters. From the very first paragraph, Mr. Gradgrind is established as the leading disciple of fact, but he is also shown to be a loving, if deluded, father. The real villain of the novel is Mr. Bounderby, who seems to share Mr. Gradgrind's love of fact but has no difficulty lying about himself, as later events show. Sissy is clearly on the side of feeling and fancy, as are all the circus performers. Louisa seems torn between the world of her upbringing and a deep inner desire to experience imagination and feeling—a desire that she lacks the vocabulary even to name. Her unhappy status, lost between the worlds of fact and fancy, combined with Bounderby's obvious attraction toward her, serves as the catalyst for the principal conflict in the novel.

However, as Terry Eagleton points out in his introduction to the novel (Methuen 1987), Dickens treats Trade Unionism as a pardonable error of the misguided and oppressed and as such, an agent in the martyrdom of the good working man. He presents Slackbridge as half trade union militant and half ferocious revolutionary, not the right leader.

According to Eagleton, Dickens's attention to the cult of facts serves to distract the reader from more fundamental injustices of industrial capitalism for which there is no plausible solution or even adequate analysis. The novel's alternative to Gradgrindery is the circus, symbol of artistry and spontaneity, but basically an anarchic image, an asocial fantasy, not an alternative social vision of industrial capitalism.

Dickens's position is more in line with Thomas Carlyle's Romantic Humanism, a paternalist care for the lower orders. Although opposed to notions of equality it desires a society which will provide all of its members with a useful social function (Eagleton 6) He is convinced that a completely Utilitarian education can only create emotionally handicapped people.

Hillis Miller's classic book on Dickens (1991) points out that) in Dickens's later novels where the focus is an entire society, people are shown imprisoned by forces descending from the past rather than liberated by them (Stephen/Rachael) Dickens proposes a reorientation towards the free human spirit as the only true source of value. The subject of the book can then be man's reaffirmation.

Christian morality plays a role in this dualism because there is a contradiction between Christian values of love and charity and the Calvinist Heritage which encourages profit making by individuals. The ideological position of Dickens is a complex contradictory amalgam of both tendencies. According to Eagleton the mixed nature and structure of the novel reflects something of Dickens's own ambiguous position as a writer, caught between high and popular culture. The industrial theme is

quickly overtaken by the more conventional plot elements of Louisa's affair and the bank robbery². This division of interests is fairly typical of the social problem novel of Mid-Victorian England.

In a similar way, F.R. Leavis believes that Dickens had the genius of an entertainer and had no profounder responsibility as a creative artist, but he cites *Hard Times* as an exception. He says that in this novel Dickens is possessed by a comprehensive vision, an art which has stamina, flexibility combined with consistency and depth. The symbolic interior emerges out of metaphor and the vivid evocation of the concrete, eg: description of Sissy and Bitzer. He writes with a poetic force of evocation.

² "What promised to be a novel with its finger bodily on the pulse of Victorian society as a whole is curiously dissipated, in its final chapters, into a more stock kind of romantic fiction". (Eagleton)

Structure and the role of Biblical quotations

The sub-titles to the three parts of the novel -Sowing, Reaping and Gardening- call to mind the biblical words "as ye sow, so also shall ye reap". These words were familiar to Victorian readers, and could be found framed and displayed in many a middle-class Victorian home. They had a special reference to the upbringing and education of children. Dickens uses in his opening chapter introducing Mr. Gradgrind's classroom. At the same time, the irony of the agricultural metaphor of sowing and reaping gains considerable significance, given the novel's preoccupation with industrialism.

Chapter 1: The One Thing Needful. The heading is taken from the story of Martha and Mary in the Gospels, where Jesus makes an appeal for a quiet, almost passive life, one free of the pursuit of material things (Mr. Gradgrind's facts). Exaggerated description, repetitiveness of style, echoing Mr. Gradgrind.

Chapter 2. Murdering the Innocents. The title is again taken from the New Testament. The innocent children are described in terms of color contrast "Sissy...came in for the beginning of a sunbeam, of which Bitzer... caught the end". Note the symbolism of the name Mr. Choakumchild.

Chapter 3. A Loophole. The links are being established between the three households: the Jupes, the Gradgrinds and the Bourderbys

Chapter 4. Mr Bourderby. He is described in terms emphasising his roundness and coarseness as his name suggests. Mrs Gradgrind is feeble, submissive, plagued by ill-health and a useless mother. Two of Mr. Gradgrind's children are called Adam Smith (Scottish economist 1723-90 who advocated free trade and laissez-faire) and Malthus (English economist and churchman 1766-1834 who advocated population control).

Chapter 5. The Key-note. Coketown is described in all its horror (serpents of smoke). Dickens attacks organised religion as well as the philanthropic societies represented by the "Teetotal Society". His treatment of religion is much in the spirit of Carlyle's description of its mechanical nature in his Signs of the Times: Then, we have Religious machines, of all imaginable varieties; the Bible society, professing a far higher and heavenly structure, is found, on enquiry, to be an altogether earthly contrivance: supported by collection of maneyes, by fomenting of vanities, by puffing, intrigue and chicane; a machine for converting the Heathen.

Chapter 6: Sleary's Horsemanship. Notice the symbolism of the names: Childers, Kidderminster, Sleary...

Chapter 7: Mr. Sparsit. Her importance in the novel is indicated by her having a chapter dedicated to her.

Chapter 8: Never Wonder. Repeats the theme of fact versus fancy.

Chapter 9: Sissy's Progress. Irony because in the eyes of Mr. Gradgrind she is not making any progress.

Chapter 10: Stephen Blackpool. 40 years old but looks like an old man. Raquel is 35. In this chapter Dickens introduces his sub-plot which quickly shows to have narrative links with the main plot.

Chapter 11: No way out. Dickens's most trenchant condemnation of the working conditions of the "hands". The jungle images of serpents and elephants can fruitfully be contrasted with the idyll suggested by Dickens's earlier picture of the circus folk.

Chapter 12: The Old Woman. This chapter increases suspense.

Chapter 13: Rachael. She's depicted as a nurse to Stephen's wife.

Chapter 14: The Great Manufacturer. Time has passed (not very credibly/ Dickens forces us to "suspension of disbelief")

Chapter 15: Father and Daughter.

Chapter 16: Husband and Wife. The interview between Mrs Sparsit and Mr. Bounderby is really the

central issue in this chapter which contains the marriage of Bounderby and Louisa, and concludes the First Book.

Book 2. Its title is Reaping, in other words, the deeds you perform at one stage in your life will make their effects felt later.

Chapter 1: Effects in the Bank. The stranger appearing in this chapter is a kind of threat. Many questions are raised. In this chapter we are introduced to the notion of union organisation in the novel.

Chapter 2. Mr. James Harthouse. A typical member of the self-interested, spoilt, privileged section of society, indifferent to anything serious and unashamed that he has no real and lasting beliefs or loyalties.

Chapter 3. The Whelp. It's the name given to Tom Gradgrind by James Harthouse. It means young pup, suggesting worthlessness and underhandedness. And so it is with Tom who, in the hands of the sophisticated Harthouse proves a malleable puppy. Harthouse is described as Lucifer, a demon.

Chapter 4. Men and Brothers. Dickens -through Stephen- shows himself to be out of sympathy with the Union orator, Slackbridge. He suggests that any organization which acts like this is as inhumane as the system it opposes. Stephen's role as the martyr of the novel continues.

Chapter 5: Men and Masters. Stephen's fate grows worse and worse. He is dismissed by Mr. Bounderby.

Chapter 6: Fading Away. Mrs Pegler's reveals that she had a child but "lost" him (Mr. Bounderby).

Chapter 7: Gunpowder. It deals with the growing relationship between Louisa and Harthouse and Tom's economic dependency on her sister.

Chapter 8: Explosion. The bank has been robbed. The police suspects Stephen. There is an amusing interlude in which Dickens describes Mrs Sparsit's behaviour to cause discomfort to Louisa (whom she insists in calling Miss Gradgrind). Louisa suspects Tom and she questions him.

Chapter 9: Hearing the last of it. Louisa goes to Coketown where her mother is dying. Her response to her mother's death is offered as further evidence of her growing sensibilities: she kisses her hand. Jane has also propered under Sissy's influence.

Chapter 10. Mrs Sparsit's Staircase. An allegory of Louisa's descend towards an inevitable doom.

Chapter 11. Lower and Lower. Mrs Sparsit's insane jealousy makes her follow the lovers. Critics have commented on the melodramatic tone of this chapter.

Chapter 12. Down. "And he laid her down there, and sow the pride of his heart and the triumph of his system, lying, an insensible heap, at his feet". This is a dramatic conclusion to the Second Book, and it comes as the climax to Louisa's heart-searching confession to her father. Again influence of drama and melodrama in the novel.

Book 3. Garnering.

Chapter 1: Another Thing Needful. We witness Louisa's struggle to find a new self. She shows a deep resentment for Sissy.

Chapter 2: Very Ridiculous. Our incredulity is stretched a little too far when Sissy asks Harthouse to leave Coketown and Louisa and he yields instantly to her request and even repents of being the cause of so much unhappiness. It may be a way of substantiating Sissy's angelic influence in the novel.

Chapter 3. Decided. Harthouse is gone but the after-effects of his actions are seen. Mrs. Sparsit tells Mr. Bounderby but she is then proved wrong when Bounderby hears of Louisa's flight to her father. While Bounderby had previously indicated that the severing of ties between man and wife was unthinkable in his interview with Stephen, he is now ready to cut the knot himself on the ground of "incompatibility".

Chapter 4. Lost. Dickens tries to tie up loose ends by dealing with the sub-plot. Although Rachael defends Stephen's innocence he is nowhere to be found.

Chapter 5. Found. Mrs. Pegler, suspected of being involved in the robbery, tells the true story of Bounderby being "abused by his irresponsible mother".

Chapter 6: The Starlight. Mrs. Pegler, Sissy and Rachael are walking near Coketown when they discover Stephen's hat (he has fallen in one of the deserted mines). A rescue operation is organized but Stephen dies in Rachael's hands. He asks Gradgrind to clear his name.

Chapter 7. Whelp-hunting. Gradgrind realises Tom's responsibility for Stephen's death and loss of good name. Sissy has helped him to escape, by encouraging him to join Sleary's circus, near Liverpool, where he could escape by ship. Mr. Gradgrind, Louisa and Sissy go their separate ways in his search but is Bitzer who arrests him. Dickens's concern for continuity and coherence in his novel is clear.

Chapter 8: Philosophical. A dancing dog and a prancing dog are the final instruments in Tom's escape.

Chapter 9. Final. Mrs Sparsit is discharged. Gradgrind grows to old age having renounced his factual approach to life and he's helped by Louisa to exonerate Stephen. Louisa never remarries and lives to look after her father and fellow-men. Rachael continues to nurse Stephen's drunken wife. Tom reforms but dies of fever on his journey back to England. Sissy becomes the happy mother of happy children.

Important Quotations Explained

1. 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. You can only form the mind of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them.

Explanation for Quotation 1

These are the novel's opening lines. Spoken by Mr. Gradgrind, they sum up his rationalist philosophy. In claiming that "nothing else will ever be of service" to his pupils, Gradgrind reveals his belief that facts are important because they enable individuals to further their own interests. However, Tom and Louisa's unhappy childhood soon calls into question their father's claim that "[f]acts alone are wanted in life." Ironically, while Gradgrind refers to the pupils in his school as "reasoning animals" and compares their minds to fertile soil in which facts can be sowed, he treats them like machines by depriving them of feeling and fantasy. His jarringly short sentences and monotonous repetition of the word "Fact" illustrate his own mechanical, unemotional character. Finally, it is significant that Gradgrind's call for facts opens a work of fiction. By drawing attention to the fact that we are reading fiction, Dickens suggests to us that facts alone cannot bring intellectual pleasure.

2. It is known, to the force of a single pound weight, what the engine will do; but not all the calculators of the National debt can tell me the capacity for good or evil, for love or hatred, for patriotism or discontent, for the decomposition of virtue into vice, or the reverse, at any single moment in the soul of one of these quiet servants, with the composed faces and the regulated actions.

Explanation for Quotation 2

This passage provides insight into the narrator's beliefs and opinions. Dickens's omniscient narrator assumes the role of a moral guide, and his opinion tends to shape our own interpretations of the story. Here, we learn that the narrator disagrees with Gradgrind, believing instead that human nature cannot be reduced to a bundle of facts and scientific principles. The narrator invokes the mystery of the human mind, pointing out how little we actually know about what motivates the actions of our fellow beings. The "quiet servants" to whom the narrator refers are the factory Hands. In representing these people as an unknown quantity, the narrator counteracts Boudier's stereotypes of the poor as lazy, greedy good-for-nothings. While he suggests that we need to understand these people better, the narrator also implies that this knowledge cannot be attained through calculation, measurement, and/or the

accumulation of fact.

3. Coketown lay shrouded in a haze of its own, which appeared impervious to the sun's rays. You only knew the town was there because you knew there could have been no such sulky blotch upon the prospect without a town. A blur of soot and smoke, now confusedly tending this way, now that way, now aspiring to the vault of Heaven, now murkily creeping along the earth, as the wind rose and fell, or changed its quarter: a dense formless jumble, with sheets of cross light in it, that showed nothing but masses of darkness—Coketown in the distance was suggestive of itself, though not a brick of it could be seen.

Explanation for Quotation 3

Like many other descriptions of Coketown, this passage emphasizes its somber smokiness. The murky soot that fills the air represents the moral filth that permeates the manufacturing town. Similarly, the sun's rays represent both the physical and moral beauty that Coketown lacks. While the pollution from the factories makes Coketown literally a dark, dirty place to live, the suffering of its poor and the cold self-interest of its rich inhabitants render Coketown figuratively dark. In stating that Coketown's appearance on the horizon is "suggestive of itself," the narrator implies that Coketown is exactly what it appears to be. The dark "sulky blotch" hides no secrets but simply represents what is on closer inspection a dark, formless town. Built entirely of hard, red brick, Coketown has no redeeming beauty or mystery—instead, it embodies Mr. Gradgrind's predilection for unaccommodating material reality.

4. Look how we live, an' wheer we live, an' in what numbers, an' by what chances, an' wi' what sameness; and look how the mills is awlus a-goin', and how they never works us no nigher to onny distant object—ceptin awlus Death. Look how you considers of us, and writes of us, and talks of us, and goes up wi' your deputations to Secretaries o' State bout us, and how yo are awlus right, and how we are awlus wrong, and never had'n no reason in us sin ever we were born. Look how this ha' grown an' grown sir, bigger an' bigger, broader an' broader, harder an' harder, fro year to year, fro generation unto generation. Who can look on't sir, and fairly tell a man tis not a muddle?

Explanation for Quotation 4

Stephen Blackpool's speech to Bounderby is one of the few glimpses that we receive into the lives of the Hands. His long sentences and the repetition of words such as "an" and "Look" mimic the monotony of the workers' lives. Similarly, Stephen's dialect illustrates his lack of education and contrasts with the proper English spoken by the middle-class characters and by the narrator. In spite of his lack of formal education, however, Stephen possesses greater insight about the relationship between employer and employee than does Bounderby. Stephen notes that "yo" (the factory owners and employers) and "us" (the Hands) are constantly opposed, but that the Hands stand no chance in the contest because the employers possess all the wealth and power. However, he does not blame the employers solely for the suffering of the poor, concluding instead that the situation is a "muddle" and that it is difficult to determine who is responsible for society's ills. Stephen also suggests that the monotony of factory labor seems futile to the Hands, who need to strive for some larger goal in order to make the endless round of production seem worthwhile. The "distant object" or larger goal that he mentions here is later symbolized by the bright star on which he gazes while trapped at the bottom of the mine shaft.

5. Thou art an Angel. Bless thee, bless thee!

Explanation for Quotation 5

More a symbol than a fully developed character, Rachael is often referred to as an angel by Stephen. Like Sissy Jupe, whom she later befriends, Rachael represents the qualities necessary to counteract the dehumanizing, morally corrupting effects of industrialization. She is compassionate, honest, generous, and faithful to Stephen even when everyone else shuns him and considers him a thief. As this remark illustrates, Rachael also draws out Stephen's good qualities, making him realize that joy can be found even in the moral darkness of Coketown. Rachael and Sissy are both socially marginal characters—the former is a Hand, and the latter is the daughter of a circus entertainer. Likewise, they are both relatively minor characters in the novel. Through their marginal status, Dickens implies that the self-serving rationalism that dominates Coketown threatens to exclude the morally pure people who are necessary to save society from complete corruption.

Study Questions

1. *Hard Times* is in many ways a novel about the social condition of poverty, but very few of its major characters are actually poor and comparatively little time is spent with the poor characters. With that in mind, do you think the book does an effective job of shaping our view of poverty? Why or why not?

Answer for Question 1

It may be that Dickens chose to center his novel on the wealthy middle class rather than on the lower classes he sought to defend because he realized that most of his Victorian readers would come from the middle classes and that very few of his readers would come from the lower classes. By centering his book on characters with whom his readers could identify, he was better able to awaken their feelings for characters with whom they might otherwise be unable to identify—namely, the poor of Coketown and of England in general. In that sense, the book does its job. Of course, the contrary argument could also be made that the novel simply reinforces comfortable middle-class stereotypes about the noble poor, and it offers no real solution or possibility for change.

2. Mrs. Sparsit is a fairly minor character in *Hard Times*. What themes does she illustrate? Why is she important in terms of plot development?

Answer for Question 2

Although Mrs. Sparsit is a relatively minor character, her pride drives much of the action in the second half of the novel. Originally from an aristocratic background, Mrs. Sparsit has fallen on hard times, and she must work as Bounderby's housekeeper for a living. Because she wants to marry Bounderby so that she can share his wealth, Mrs. Sparsit secretly connives to destroy his marriage to Louisa. Yet even while she panders to Bounderby, Mrs. Sparsit considers him an upstart "Noodle," and considers herself his superior because of her aristocratic blood. Although she is a proud aristocrat, Mrs. Sparsit shares the calculating self-interest of capitalists like Bounderby. Thus, Mrs. Sparsit illustrates the transition from a social hierarchy in which aristocrats hold the power to one in which the wealthy middle class holds the power. In her attempt to retain her power within a new social order, Mrs. Sparsit simply ends up looking ridiculous.

3. Think about the character of Bounderby. How might this character fit with Dickens's social program to explode the myth of the self-made man?

Answer for Question 3

One defense of the new economic conditions created by the Industrial Revolution was its expansion of individual opportunity. The wealthy could justify the condition of the poor by pointing out that if the poor worked industriously, they could work their way into a fortune. Dickens implicitly mocks that idea by presenting one such supposed self-made man as a blundering braggart. By exposing Bounderby as a fraud who did not actually start from nothing, as he so often claims, Dickens questions the validity of that entire justification for poverty. If the self-made man is a lie, then what can the poor hope to achieve? Moreover, Dickens raises the question of whether the self-made man owes anything to the rest of society. Are the wealthy under any obligation to help the poor? Or must the poor help themselves?

Suggested Essay Topics

4. What is the significance of the book's structure? What does each of its three parts represent? Why are the different sections given agricultural titles when the book is about industrial England?

5. Does *Hard Times* have a protagonist? Does it have a main character? What makes you think so, and who might the main character be?

6. *Hard Times* begins and ends with a meeting between Mr. Sleary and Mr. Gradgrind. How are the meetings different? What changes in Mr. Gradgrind's character and values do we see between his first and last encounter with the circus folk?

7. Discuss the character of Stephen Blackpool. How does he represent the poor Hands in *Hard Times*? Do you think it is an accurate representation? Is it meant to be?

8. *Hard Times* is built around a few very simple contrasting thematic ideas. What are some of them, and how do they function in the book? How does Louisa fit among these ideas?

9. As a child, Bitzer is a model pupil at Gradgrind's school. How does his conduct as a porter at Bounderby's bank reflect his early education? Would you consider him a "success" according to Gradgrind's criteria? Why or why not?

Charles Dickens is perhaps the archetype of the English 19th-century realist novelist and he gives a fairly panoramic view of the age. Point out some of the themes of his novels dealing with social issues at the time.

Some of his novels belong to the tradition of the educational novel, a genre dealing with the development of character and formative influences, seen from the standpoint of the hero's maturity and presented through his memory. Comment in relation to your own readings of Dickens.

'Change of heart' was a coined expression for the moral process undergone by the protagonist and the major characters of the Victorian novels. Secondary characters, or the foils to the protagonist, who failed in this task were "punished" in various ways. Write on the network of rewards and punishments explicit in the ending of *Hard Times*.

Discuss Dickens' method of characterisation. Compare the portrait of main characters with those of secondary or minor figures. What influence did the serial publication have on the features of secondary

figures?

Discuss Dickens' imaginative gifts and the mixture of realism, romance and grotesque elements which contribute to the very peculiar and idiosyncratic Dickensian world. Substantiate your comments with examples from your readings.

Personification was one of Dickens' favourite narrative devices. It means the attribution of human traits to objects. Conversely, he very often assigned the shape or features of material objects to human beings. It was an inexhaustible source of humour and satire as well as of symbolic import. Point out a few examples of this practice in the novel.

Discuss the ironic implications of :the title; the moral undertones under the physical features and verbal and gesture; the tics of the characters.

Utilitarianism & "laissez-faire" versus Romantic Humanism: explain the novel in these terms

Comment on Christian Morality in the novel

Comment on Terry Eagleton's criticism of the novel (Methuen, 1987) and F.R. Leavis in "The Great Tradition" (Penguin, Ch. 5)

Politics and *Hard Times*, what kind of solutions, if any, does Dickens provide? Does he favour right wing or left wing politics? Does he favour Trade Unionism?

Comment on the relationships between parents/children, husbands/wives, brothers/sisters, in the novel,

Discuss the characters as caricatures, as symbols in a fable or allegory. Note the symbolism of names

Discuss the variety of rhetorical devices, appealing to all our senses, used by Dickens in his descriptions. Discuss recurrent imagery and symbolism in the novel: the circus, the serpents...

Quiz

1. What is the name of Sissy's father's dog?

- (A) Happylegs
- (B) Bandylegs
- (C) Merrylegs
- (D) Mr. Snips

2. What is the main principle of Mr Gradgrind's philosophy?

- (A) Fact

- (B) Fancy
- (C) Love
- (D) Patriotism

3. Mrs Pegler is the mother of which character?

- (A) Gradgrind
- (B) Sissy
- (C) Stephen
- (D) Bounderby

4. Who robs the bank?

- (A) Stephen
- (B) Tom
- (C) Sissy
- (D) Mrs. Sparsit

5. What is the common name for poor Coketown factory workers?

- (A) Cogs
- (B) Scum
- (C) Hands
- (D) Proles

6. Sissy believes her father abandoned her for what reason?

- (A) Her own best interest
- (B) To elope with a Frenchwoman
- (C) Grief over her mother's death
- (D) A desire to see the world

7. Which of the following characters dies during the course of the novel?

- (A) Sleary
- (B) Mrs Gradgrind
- (C) Gradgrind
- (D) James Harthouse

8. Who is Kidderminster?

- (A) A circus worker who dresses up as Cupid
- (B) Mr. Gradgrind's fellow Member of Parliament
- (C) Sissy's father
- (D) The Hand who organizes the workers' union

9. What does Rachael find that leads her to believe Stephen has been murdered?

- (A) A trail of bloody footprints
- (B) A note from the killer
- (C) His hat, abandoned in a field
- (D) An empty bottle of poison

10. How does Stephen die?

- (A) He is crushed by factory machinery
- (B) A fall into Old Hell Shaft
- (C) Murder
- (D) Malnutrition as a result of poverty

11. Who runs the circus?

- (A) Sleary
- (B) Bitzer
- (C) Mrs. Pegler

(D) Sissy's father

12. About how much money is stolen from the bank?

(A) 150 pounds

(B) 3,000 pounds

(C) 40,000 pounds

(D) 128,000 pounds

13. Which character is a Member of Parliament?

(A) Bounderby

(B) Mr. McChoakumchild

(C) Bitzer

(D) Gradgrind

14. What is Bounderby's son's name?

(A) Bitzer

(B) Tom

(C) James Harthouse

(D) Bounderby has no son

15. In which city does most of the novel take place?

(A) Coketown

(B) Liverpool

(C) London

(D) Evenly divided between Coketown and London

16. From what does Mrs. Sparsit imagine Louisa falling?

(A) A ladder

(B) A staircase

- (C) The opera balcony
- (D) The moon

17. Who is the first character to speak in the novel?

- (A) Bounderby
- (B) Sissy
- (C) Bitzer
- (D) Gradgrind

18. Why is Stephen unable to marry Rachael?

- (A) He is already married
- (B) He is too old
- (C) He is too poor
- (D) She is in love with another man

19. How do the poor of Coketown attempt to improve their conditions?

- (A) By burning the factory
- (B) By looting the bank
- (C) By forming a union.
- (D) By petitioning Parliament for assistance.

20. What is the name of Mrs. Sparsit's aristocratic relative?

- (A) Col. Reginald Powler
- (B) Lady Scadgers
- (C) Rupert Hardwick, Esq.
- (D) Ephraim Gride

21. What does Gradgrind hope Tom will be able to do after Stephen's death?

- (A) Escape England

- (B) Move up at the bank
- (C) Marry Sissy
- (D) Inherit Stephen's fortune

22. What is Bitzer's defining characteristic?

- (A) His pale skin
- (B) His facial scar
- (C) His limp
- (D) His red hair

23. Where does Louisa flee after Harthouse's declaration of love?

- (A) Her husband's house
- (B) Her father's house
- (C) Stephen's room
- (D) The circus

24. What are Sissy's father's first words after he returns to his daughter?

- (A) "Oh, Sissy, how I've missed you!"
- (B) "At last . . . at long last . . . my daughter. . ."
- (C) "Child, do you not know me at last?"
- (D) He never returns

25. What motivates Harthouse to become one of Gradgrind's political disciples?

- (A) He believes in Gradgrind's philosophy of fact
- (B) Boredom
- (C) The desire for wealth
- (D) Pride

Bleak House (1853)

In the court of Chancery, the case of Jarndyce versus Jarndyce drags on and the slow working of the Law blight many lives. Esther Summerson (Hawdon), an orphan adopted by the kind John Jarndyce, becomes housekeeper at his home, Bleak House, and companion to his wards, Richard Carstone and Ada Clare, who fall in love. The Chancery case has heartrending consequences for them all.

Meanwhile, a mysterious connection comes gradually to light between Esther and the frozen-hearted Lady Dedlock which intrigues the lawyer Tullkinghorn. He sets out to investigate but, after finding the body of one poisoned man, Nemo (whose name means No-one), the inquisitive Tulkinghorn is murdered.

Suspicion falls on Lady Dedlock, and when her secrets are laid bare it becomes plain that her cold-heartedness conceals an all-too-passionate past. Vindication comes too late to save her life.

Dickens derived some of his hatred of the legal system from his own frustrating and unprofitable efforts to sue pirate publishers. He perceived that the only victors in any legal wrangle are the lawyer, assured of their fat fee whichever side they represent.

He also describes the Metropolitan Police with its nascent detective service.

The characters in true Dickensian fashion, are used to portray paradigms of their class and type, and include the well-meaning but incompetent philanthropists Mrs. Pardiggle and Mrs Jellyby, the solicitor Mr Vholes living off the victims of the Chancery court, the poor homeless crossing-sweeper Jo, the landed gentleman Sir Leicester Dedlock, owner of Chesney Wold, Miss Barbary, Krook, Grindley, Skimpole, Ironmaster Rouncewell & his wife, Allan Woodcourt, Guppy, Smallweed & his wife, Mr & Mrs Snagsby, Reverend and Mrs. Chadband, etc.

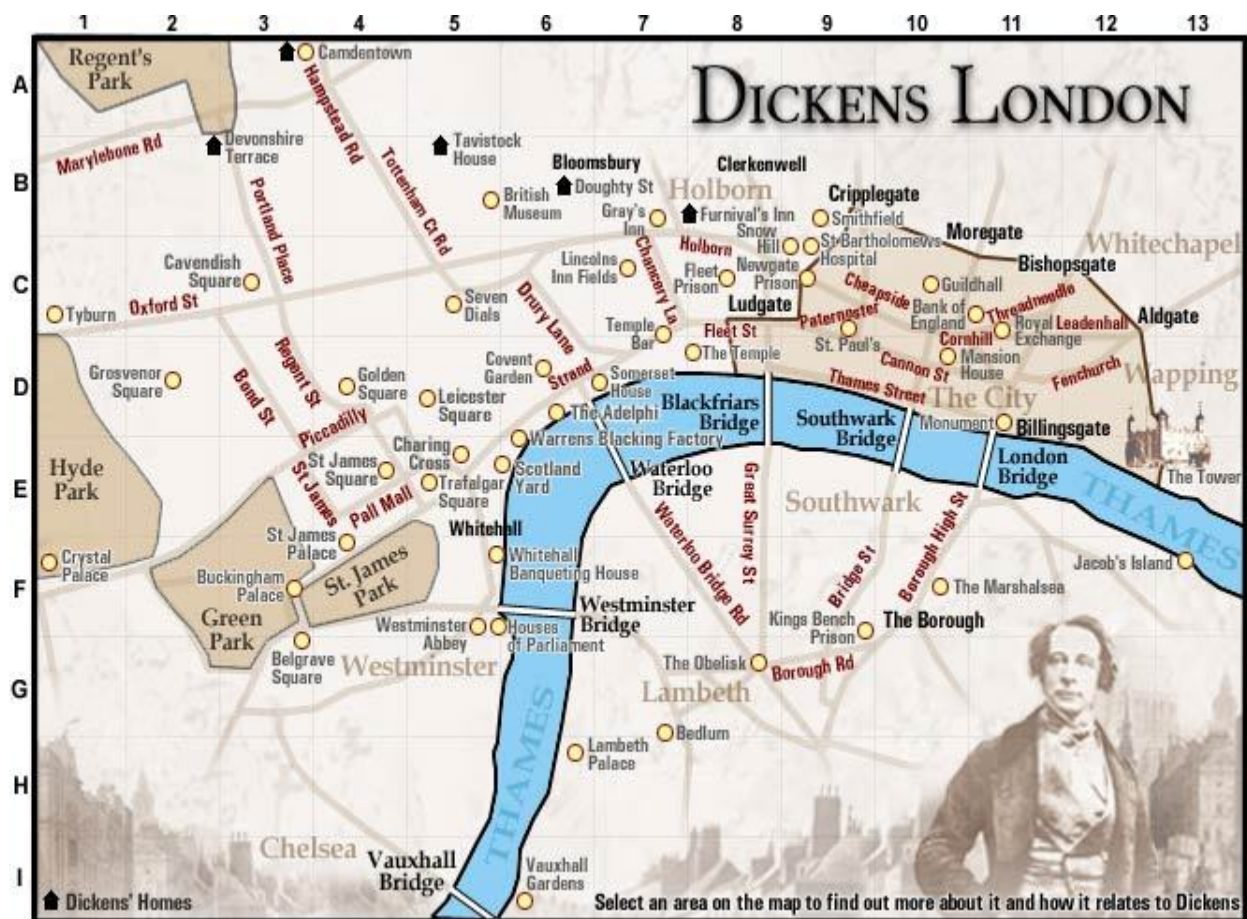
Bleak House was begun by Dickens at his London home -Tavistock House- in late 1851, continued at Dover, and finished at Boulogne during August 1853. It was first published in nineteen monthly parts from March 1852-September 1853. In book form in late 1853.

Dickens' London.

Already the largest city in Europe when Dickens was born in 1812, London was a melting-pot peopled by the rural poor of England and poverty-stricken Ireland, huddled together in what came to be known as "Rookeries", a world of vice and squalor, an ideal breeding ground for crime and prostitution. The most notorious "Rookery" of all was Seven Dials, an area close to Covent Garden. When on one occasion a house caught fire, 37 men, women and children were found occupying a single room.

Infant mortality was common and the city suffered from periodic epidemics of typhus, cholera and smallpox. The major cause of disease was bad drainage and inadequate sanitation. 369 sewers discharged their effluent into the River Thames, together with waste from tar and tanning factories and slaughterhouses. At low tide, the river banks were seen infested by all sort of scavengers while the so called "mudlarks", children searching for saleable items, sifted the sewer exists. After the "Great Stink" of 1858, when an exceptionally hot dry summer forced a mass evacuation from the Thames- a new and effective main drainage system was devised.

It has been calculated that around 80,000 "dolly mops", barely in their teens, crowded London alone. They were not confined to poorer areas but also found in richer neighborhoods such as Regent Street and the Haymarket. In 1846 Dickens helped the wealthy philanthropist Anglea Burdett Coutts to establish a home for fallen women.



Thieves, burglars, forgers, con-men abounded. The "Robin Redbreasts", red-waistcoated Bow Street runners, failed to stem the London crime wave in Dickens' youth. Matters improved somewhat with the introduction, in 1829, of "bobbies", or "peelers" (so-called after the Home Secretary of the day Sir Robert Peel).

The noise in London was deafening. Coaches, private carriages, hackney cabs, carts and wagons clattered through thoroughfares, many still narrow and winding. Congestion was frequent, and lack of regulation often led to chaos

In the 58 years of Dickens' life, London underwent drastic changes; reforms and improvements were urged upon a reluctant government.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Adrian, Arthur A. Dickens and the Parent-Child Relationship. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1984.

Barnard, Robert. Imagery and Theme in the Novels of Dickens. New York: Humanities Press, 1974.

Blake, K. Love and the Woman Question in Victorian Literature, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1983

Bloom, Harold, ed. Hard Times (Modern Critical Interpretations). New York: Chelsea House, 1992.

Calder, J. Women and Marriage in Victorian Fiction, Thames and Hudson: London, 1976

Cosslett, T. Woman to Woman, Female Friendship in Victorian Fiction, Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1988

Fairbanks, C. Women in Literature: Criticism of the Seventies, Methuen Press, 1976

Gissing, G. Critical Studies of the Works of Charles Dickens, London Balckie and Son Ltd, 1989

Glancy, Ruth. *Student Companion to Charles Dickens*. Greenwood, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999.

Hardy, Barbara. *The Moral Art of Dickens*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1970.

Higbie, Robert. *Dickens and Imagination*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998.

Hillis Miller, J. *Dickens-The World of His Novels*, Indiana University Press Bloomington and London, 1969

Hobsbaun,P. *A Reader's Guide to Charles Dickens*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1972

Jaffe, A. *Vanishing Points. Dickens Narrative and The Subject of Omniscience*, University of California Press Ltd. Oxford England, 1991

Leavis, F. R. and Q. D. Leavis. *Dickens the Novelist*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1970.

Mackenzie, Norman and Jeanne Mackenzie. *Dickens: A Life*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1979.

Manning, Sylvia Bank. *Dickens as Satirist*. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1971.

Rutgers, N.J. (ed.) *The Shaping of Social Motions in Dickens, Carlyle, Melville and Hawthorne* University Press, New Brunswick, 1979

Prochaska, F.K. *Women and Philantropy in Nineteenth-Century England*, Clarendon Press Oxford, 1980

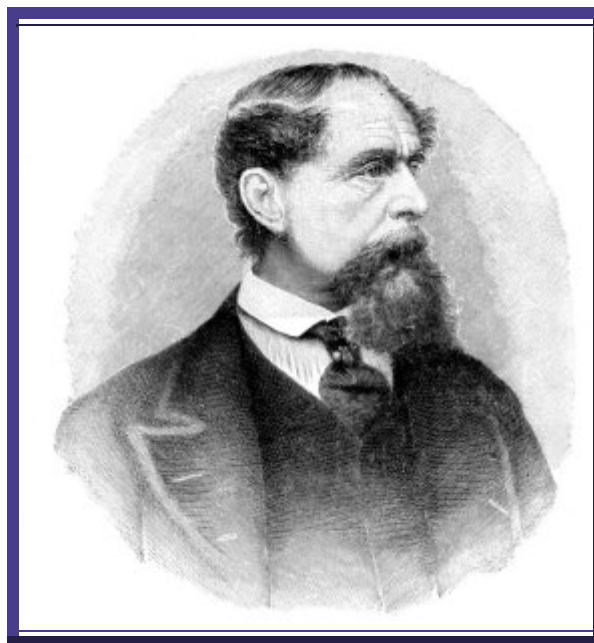
Slater, M. *Dickens and Women*, J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd. London and Melbourne, 1986

Showalter, E. *The Female Malady, Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* Virago Press, London, 1987

Watt, G. *The Fallen Woman in the 19th Century English Novel*, London: Croom Helm, 1984

Williams,M. *Women in the English Novel 1800-1900*,London: Macmillan, 1985

Charles Dickens Links



(1812-1870)

Major Works Most of the following are available in inexpensive Penguin or Oxford World's Classics editions.

Sketches by Boz (1836).

Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club (1837).
Oliver Twist (1837-38). A novel about the London underworld . Available in a Norton Critical Edition edited by Fred Kaplan.
Nicholas Nickleby (1838-39).
The Old Curiosity Shop (1841).
Barnaby Rudge (1841).
American Notes (1842). Dickens found much to be desired in the America of his day.
A Christmas Carol (1843). The first of several 'annual' Christmas books.
Martin Chuzzlewit (1843-44).
The Chimes (1844).
The Cricket on the Hearth (1845).
Pictures from Italy (1846).
Dombey and Son (1847-48).
The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain (1846).
David Copperfield (1849-50). Available in a Norton Critical Edition, Jerome H. Buckley, Editor.
Household Words (1850-59). A weekly periodical.
Bleak House (1852-53). A case regarding an inheritance that is eventually eaten up by the legal fees. Also available in Norton Critical Edition, George Ford and Sylvère Monod, Editors.
A Child's History of England (1852-54).
Hard Times (1854). The disastrous effects of an education restricted to facts and numbers. Available in a Norton (2nd) Critical Edition, George Ford and Sylvère Monod, Editors.
Little Dorrit (1857-58).
A Tale of Two Cities (1859). Novel about the French Revolution. [On Line](#)
All the Year Round (1859-70). Another periodical.
Great Expectations (1860-61).
Our Mutual Friend (1864-65).
The Mystery of Edwin Drood (1870).
Dickens novels [On Line](#) from Bibliomania.

About Dickens

Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens*. HarperCollins, 1990. Massive.
Dickens' London. Introduced by Peter Ackroyd. Text by Piers Dudgeon. Headline, 1989. People and places in Dickens' London in photographs. Supplements and sometimes overlaps with *Street Life in London*. Text by Adolphe Smith. Photographs by John Thompson. Originally published in 1877, reprinted by Blom, 1969.
The Dickens Index. By Nicolas Bentley, Michael Slater, Nina Burgis. Oxford, 1990.
G. K. Chesterton, *Chesterton on Dickens*. Introduction by Michael Slater. Everyman, 1992.
John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*. Two Volumes. Dutton Reprint, 1927. Originally published in 1872-74.
The Charles Dickens Encyclopedia. Michael and Mollie Hardwick. Citadel, 1993.
Fred Kaplan, *Dickens: A Biography*. Morrow, 1988.
Sikes and Nancy and Other Public Readings. Edited with an introduction and notes by Philip Collins. Oxford, 1983. As one of the most widely-read authors of his day, Dickens gave numerous public readings from his works.
[Charles Dickens](#) from The Victorian Web.
[A Great Expectations Page](#). Has links.
[Dickens Criticism](#) from Internet Public Library.

[The Dickens Page](#) from Japan. Extensive.

Other Pages

E-texts:

[Oliver Twist](#) Zip at www.geocities.com/saberingles2/bookstore/etextsolivr10.zip

[Tale of Two Cities](#) at www.bibliomania.com/Fiction/dickens/Taleof2Cities/index.html and at www.angelfire.com/ma3/jackalt2c/

[Text of A Christmas Carol](#) at www.stormfax.com/dickens.htm

[Charles Dickens-Mastertexts TM](#) at www.mastertexts.com/Dickens_Charles/Index.htm

[Great Expectations online resources](#) at <http://www.canisiushs.buffalo.ny.us/ge/> and at

[Great Expectations](#) online text resource [http://www.vandebilt.edu/AnS/english/English104W-15/greatexpectations\[index\].htm](http://www.vandebilt.edu/AnS/english/English104W-15/greatexpectations[index].htm)

David Cooperfield, Oliver Twist & A Tale of Two Cities (ingles):

<http://www.mansioningles.com/Libros.htm>

On line Library:

www.literature.org/authors/dickens-charles/

["The Dickens House Museum"](#) at www.dickensmuseum.com/

[The Dickens House Museum London](#) at www.rmplc.co.uk/orgs/dickens/

www.charlesdickensbirthplace.co.uk/

Timeline:

www.dickenslive.com/journal

["Charles Dickens Oficial Site"](#) books online and information

at www.helsinki.fi/kasv/nokol/dickens.html

["David Perdue's Charles Dickens Page"](#) at www.fidnet.com/dap1955/dickens/index.html

[Charles Dickens Crossword Puzzle](#) at www.perryweb.com/Dickens/puzzle.html

[Charles Dickens - Gad's Hill Place](#) at www.perryweb.com/Dickens/

[Dickens: A Brief Biography](#) at www.landaw.stg.brown.edu/victorian/dickens/dickensbio1.html

[The Dickens Page](#) at www.lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/~matsuoka/Dickens.html

Withn [Dickens Web](#) , [Dickens Chronology](#) , [Discovering Dickens](#) and [Dickens Message Board](#) - Excellent place to post your Dickens questions at <http://www.lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/matsuoka/cgi-bin/bbs-dickens/bbs-dickens-board.cgi>

[The Dickens, You Say](#) at <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Styx/8490/>

The Dickens Project (la página de Landow en la U. de California):

<http://humwww.ucsc.edu/dickens/>

Otras páginas de Landow:

Victorian Web:

<http://www.victorianweb.org/> and at www.landaw.stg.brown.edu/victorian/victov.html

Postcolonial Web:

<http://www.postcolonialweb.org/>

Cyberspace, Hypertext, & Critical Theory:

<http://www.cyberartsweb.org/cpace/>

EPOPTeia net <http://www.epopteia.net>

A site with the genealogy of the British Royal Family from Queen Victoria onward: [Royal Genealogy](http://www.etoile.co.uk/Rgene.html) at <http://www.etoile.co.uk/Rgene.html>

[The Dickens Project](http://humwww.ucsc.edu/dickens/index.html) of the University of California at <http://humwww.ucsc.edu/dickens/index.html>

[Dickens Biography](http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/dickensbio1.html) - David Cody, Associate Professor of English, Hartwick College at <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/dickens/dickensbio1.html>

[Dickens' Journalistic Career](http://www.albion.edu/english/Diedrick/DICKENS.HTM) - By James Diedrick, Albion College at <http://www.albion.edu/english/Diedrick/DICKENS.HTM>

[Hunt for Charles Dickens](http://www.katyisd.org/pathways/resources/la/dickens7/huntcharlesdi.html) - An Internet Treasure Hunt by Joy Erwin, Santa Fe School at <http://www.katyisd.org/pathways/resources/la/dickens7/huntcharlesdi.html>

Section of an [1859 map of London](#), courtesy of [UCLA](#), and created by Ralph R. Frerichs.

Click on the locations taken from the [1879 Dickens's Dictionary of London by Charles Dickens Jr.](#) compiled for the web by Lee Jackson, who has also compiled [The Victorian Dictionary](#).
At <http://www.victorianlondon.org/publications/dictionary.htm>

David Copperfield (castellano):

<http://www.profesorenlinea.cl/quinto/castellano/cuentosynovelas/davidcopperfiel/copperin.html>

<http://www.bibliotecasvirtuales.com/biblioteca/dickens/DavidCopperfield/index.htm>

Canción de navidad (castellano):

http://www.alu.ua.es/m/msg1/Dickens_ChristmasCarol_esp.htm

<http://www.bibliotecasvirtuales.com/biblioteca/dickens/CanciondeNavidad/canciondenavidad.asp>

Algunos cuentos de Dickens y otros autores (castellano):

<http://www.tele-vicio.com/scripts/70/ficcion/index.asp>

Cintas Audio de las obras:

www.micromegas.com.mx/libromegas/libromegas-hm.htm

Galería de ilustraciones sobre Dickens, la época victoriana, Jack The Ripper. Etc.:

http://ludere.ual.es/bsk/modules.php?name=My_eGallery

Wilkie Collins y sus obras en bibliomanía : www.ctv.es/USERS/manbar/collins/home.htm

Las mejores páginas sobre Dickens:

<http://www.fidnet.com/~dap1955/dickens/>

[Back to English Victorian Literature](#)
[Back to English Novel](#)