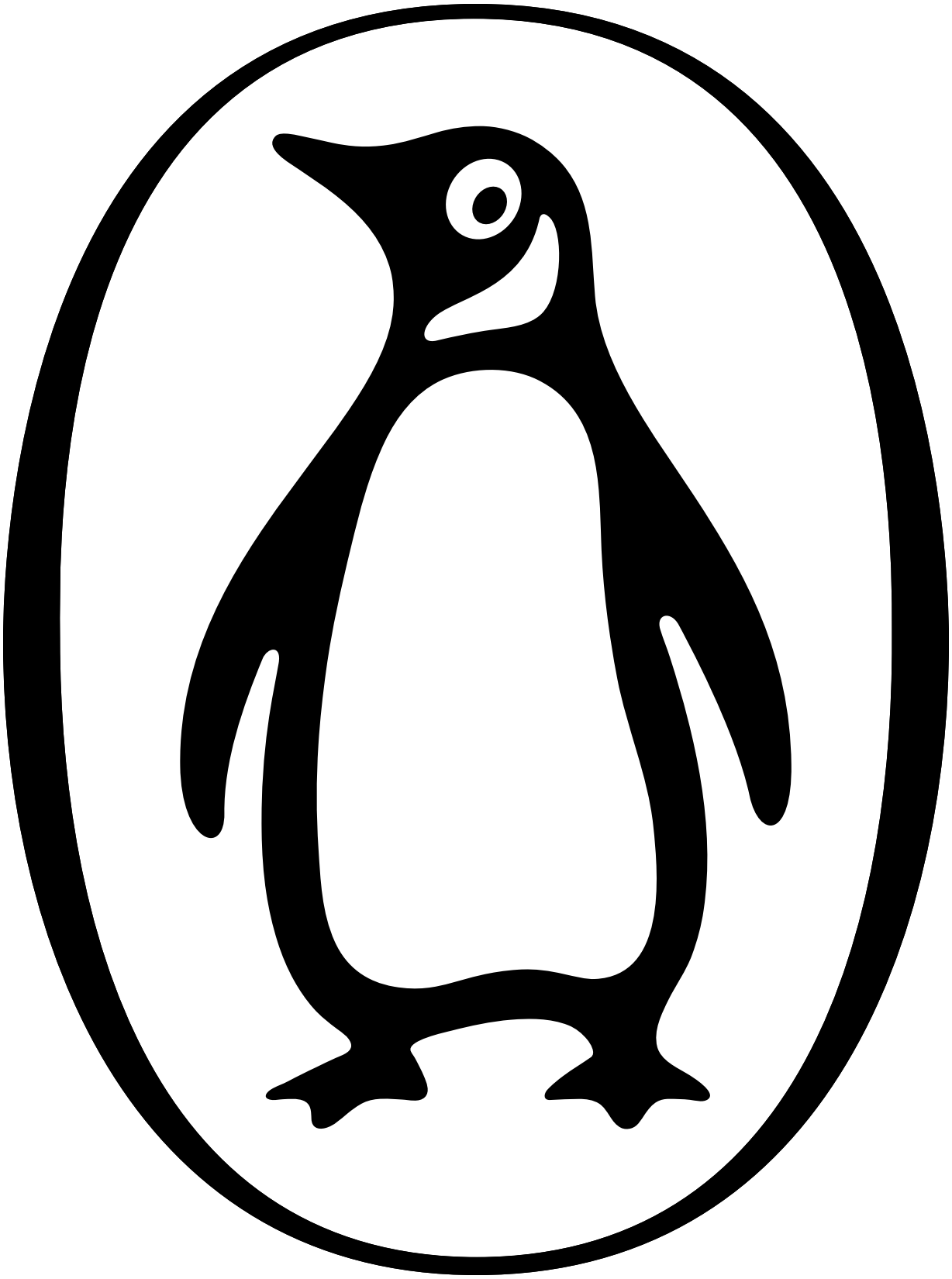
PENGUIN CLASSICS

CHARLES DICKENS

# *Hard Times*



PENGUIN CLASSICS

# HARD TIMES

CHARLES DICKENS was born at Portsmouth on 7 February 1812, the second of eight children. Dickens's childhood experiences were similar to those depicted in *David Copperfield*. His father, who was a government clerk, was imprisoned for debt and Dickens was briefly sent to work in a blacking warehouse at the age of twelve. He received little formal education, but taught himself shorthand and became a reporter of parliamentary debates for the *Morning Chronicle*. He began to publish sketches in various periodicals, which were subsequently republished as *Sketches by Boz. The Pickwick Papers* were published in 1836–7 and after a slow start became a publishing phenomenon and Dickens's characters the centre of a popular cult. Part of the secret of his success was the method of cheap serial publication which Dickens used for all his novels. He began *Oliver Twist* in 1837, followed by *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838) and *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840–41). After finishing *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) Dickens set off for America; he went full of enthusiasm for the young republic but, in spite of a triumphant reception, he returned disillusioned. His experiences are recorded in *American Notes* (1842). *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843–4) did not repeat its predecessors' success but this was quickly redressed by the huge popularity of the *Christmas Books*, of which the first, *A Christmas Carol*, appeared in 1843. During 1844–6 Dickens travelled abroad and he began *Dombey and Son* while in Switzerland. This and *David Copperfield* (1849–50) were more serious in theme and more carefully planned than his early novels. In later works, such as *Bleak House* (1853) and *Little Dorrit* (1857), Dickens's social criticism became more radical and his comedy more savage. In 1850 Dickens started the weekly periodical *Household Words*, succeeded in 1859 by *All the Year Round*; in these he published *Hard Times* (1854), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) and *Great Expectations* (1860–61). Dickens's health was failing during the 1860s and the physical strain of the public readings which he began in 1858 hastened his decline, although *Our Mutual Friend* (1865) retained some of his best comedy. His last novel, *The Mystery of Edwin*

*Drood*, was never completed and he died on 9 June 1870. Public grief at his death was considerable and he was buried in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey.

KATE FLINT is Professor of English at Rutgers University, having previously been Reader in Victorian and Modern Literature at Oxford University. Author of *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (2000), *The Woman Reader, 1837–1914* (1993) and *Dickens* (1986), she has published extensively on Victorian, modernist and contemporary literature, painting and cultural history. Her current research is on the British and Native Americans during the nineteenth century.

CHARLES DICKENS

# Hard Times

FOR THESE TIMES

*Edited with an Introduction and Notes by*
KATE FLINT

PENGUIN BOOKS

PENGUIN BOOKS

Published by the Penguin Group
Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England
Penguin Putnam Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA
Penguin Books Australia Ltd, 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia
Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 10 Alcorn Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4V 3B2
Penguin Books India (P) Ltd, 11, Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi – 110 017, India
Penguin Books (NZ) Ltd, Cnr Rosedale and Airborne Roads, Albany, Auckland, New Zealand
Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

www.penguin.com

First published 1854
Published in Penguin Classics 1995
Reissued with revised Note on the Text, revised and updated Further Reading and new appendices 2003
1

# Contents

# A Dickens Chronology

**1812** *7 February* Charles John Huffam Dickens born at Portsmouth, where his father is a clerk in the Navy Pay Office. The eldest son in a family of eight, two of whom die in childhood.

**1817** After previous postings to London and Sheerness and frequent changes of address, John Dickens settles his family in Chatham.

**1821** Dickens attends local school kept by a Baptist minister.

**1822** Family returns to London.

**1824** Dickens's father in Marshalsea Debtors' Prison for three months. During this time and afterwards Dickens employed in a blacking warehouse, labelling bottles. Resumes education at Wellington House Academy, Hampstead Road, London, 1825–7.

**1827** Becomes a solicitor's clerk.

**1830** Admitted as a reader to the British Museum.

**1832** Becomes a parliamentary reporter after mastering short-hand. In love with Maria Beadnell, 1830–33. Misses audition as an actor at Covent Garden because of illness.

**1833** First published story, 'A Dinner at Poplar Walk', in the *Monthly Magazine*. Further stories and sketches in this and other periodicals, 1834–5.

**1834** Becomes reporter on the *Morning Chronicle*.

**1835** Engaged to Catherine Hogarth, daughter of editor of the *Evening Chronicle*.

**1836** *Sketches by Boz*, First and Second Series, published. Marries Catherine Hogarth. Meets John Forster, his literary adviser and future biographer. *The Strange Gentleman*, a farce, and *The Village Coquettes*, a pastoral operetta, professionally performed in London.

**1837** *The Pickwick Papers* published in one volume (issued in monthly parts, 1836–7). Birth of a son, the first of ten children. Death of Mary Hogarth, Dickens's sister-in-law. Edits *Bentley's Miscellany*, 1837–9.

**1838** *Oliver Twist* published in three volumes (serialized monthly in *Bentley's Miscellany*, 1837–9). Visits Yorkshire schools of the Dotheboys type.

**1839** *Nicholas Nickleby* published in one volume (issued in monthly parts, 1838–9). Moves to 1 Devonshire Terrace, Regents Park, London.

**1841** Declines invitation to stand for Parliament. *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge* published in separate volumes after appearing in weekly numbers in *Master Humphrey's Clock*, 1840–41. Public dinner in his honour at Edinburgh.

**1842** *January–June* First visit to North America, described in *American Notes*, two volumes. Georgina Hogarth, Dickens's sister-in-law, becomes permanent member of the household.

**1843** Speech on the Press to Printer's Pension Society, followed by others on behalf of various causes throughout Dickens's career. *A Christmas Carol* published in December.

**1844** *Martin Chuzzlewit* published in one volume (issued in monthly parts, 1843–4). Dickens and family leave for Italy, Switzerland and France. Dickens returns to London briefly to read *The Chimes* to friends before its publication in December.

**1845** Dickens and family return from Italy. *The Cricket on the Hearth* published at Christmas. Writes autobiographical fragment, ?1845–6, not published until included in Forster's *Life* (three volumes, 1872–4).

**1846** Becomes first editor of the *Daily News* but resigns after seventeen issues. *Pictures from Italy* published. Dickens and family in Switzerland and Paris. *The Battle of Life* published at Christmas.

**1847** Returns to London. Helps Miss Burdett Coutts to set up, and later to run, a 'Home for Homeless Women'.

**1848** *Dombey and Son* published in one volume (issued in monthly parts, 1846–8). Organizes and acts in charity performances of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Every Man in His Humour* in London and elsewhere. *The Haunted Man* published at Christmas.

**1850** *Household Words*, a weekly journal 'Conducted by Charles Dickens', begins in March and continues until 1859. Dickens makes a speech at

first meeting of Metropolitan Sanitary Association. *David Copperfield* published in one volume (issued in monthly parts, 1849–50).

**1851** Death of Dickens's father and of infant daughter. Further theatrical activities in aid of the Guild of Literature and Art, including a performance before Queen Victoria. *A Child's History of England* appears at intervals in *Household Words*, published in three volumes (1852, 1853, 1854). Moves to Tavistock House, Tavistock Square, London.

**1853** *Bleak House* published in one volume (issued in monthly parts, 1852–3). Dickens gives first public readings for charity (from *A Christmas Carol*).

**1854** Visits Preston, Lancashire, to observe industrial unrest. *Hard Times* appears weekly in *Household Words* and is published in book form.

**1855** Speech in support of the Administrative Reform Association. Disappointing meeting with now married Maria Beadnell.

**1856** Dickens buys Gad's Hill Place, near Rochester.

**1857** *Little Dorrit* published in one volume (issued in monthly parts, 1855–7). Dickens acts in Wilkie Collins's melodrama *The Frozen Deep* and falls in love with the young actress Ellen Ternan. *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices*, written jointly with Wilkie Collins about a holiday in Cumberland, appears in *Household Words*.

**1858** Publishes *Reprinted Pieces* (articles from *Household Words*). Separation from his wife followed by statement in *Household Words*. First public readings for his own profit in London. Dickens's household now largely run by his sister-in-law Georgina.

**1859** *All the Year Round*, a weekly journal again 'Conducted by Charles Dickens', begins. *A Tale of Two Cities*, serialized both in *All the Year Round* and in monthly parts, appears in one volume.

**1860** Dickens sells London house and moves family to Gad's Hill.

**1861** *Great Expectations* published in three volumes after appearing weekly in *All the Year Round* (1860–61). *The Uncommercial Traveller* (papers from *All the Year Round*) appears; expanded edition, 1868. Further public readings, 1861–3.

**1863** Death of Dickens's mother, and of his son Walter (in India). Reconciled with Thackeray, with whom he had quarrelled, shortly before the latter's death. Publishes 'Mrs Lirriper's Lodgings' in Christmas number of *All the Year Round*.

**1865** *Our Mutual Friend* published in two volumes (issued in monthly parts, 1864–5). Dickens severely shocked after a serious train accident at Staplehurst, Kent, when returning from France with Ellen Ternan and her mother.

**1866** Begins another series of readings. Takes a house for Ellen at Slough. 'Mugby Junction' appears in Christmas number of *All the Year Round*.

**1867** Moves Ellen to Peckham. Second journey to America. Gives readings in Boston, New York, Washington and elsewhere, despite increasing ill-health. 'George Silverman's Explanation' appears in *Atlantic Monthly* (then in *All the Year Round*, 1868).

**1868** Returns to England. Readings now include the sensational 'Sikes and Nancy' from *Oliver Twist*; Dickens's health further undermined.

**1870** Farewell readings in London. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* issued in six monthly parts, intended to be completed in twelve.

*9 June* Dies, after stroke at Gad's Hill, aged fifty-eight. Buried in Westminster Abbey.

Stephen Wall, 2002

# Introduction

*(New readers are advised that this Introduction makes the detail of the plot explicit.)*

The little Gradgrinds had cabinets in various departments of science … They had a little conchological cabinet, and a little metallurgical cabinet, and a little mineralogical cabinet; and the specimens were all arranged and labelled … (p. 17)

*Hard Times* itself, by contrast, resists labels and categorization – not least because it sets itself up against a mid-nineteenth-century passion for mustering, controlling and imparting knowledge. Certainly, it is to some extent an industrial novel, relating to northern, industrial England in the mid nineteenth century, and the dreary, oppressed conditions of the workers. It also investigates the mindsets of those who persist in seeing these workers as mere useful tools, as 'hands', rather than as fully functioning, complex human beings. At the same time, it operates as a critique on certain forms of education, particularly those that set out to fill a child full of 'useful facts' rather than to introduce them in any way to the world of the imagination, to concepts of aesthetic pleasure removed from functionality, and to the idea that compassionate understanding of the lives and circumstances of others is of infinitely more use than the accumulation of knowledge. Simultaneously, Dickens implicitly attacks all those who attempt to make sense of the world through statistics, through the gathering of information about material circumstances, without tempering this fact-gathering with any kind of imaginative projection as to how an individual's life might actually be perceived and experienced by him- or herself. The world is not composed of such an easily legible set of signs as certain of his contemporaries would wish.

Dickens's concerns in the novel are far from being entirely with the public world, however. Rather, *Hard Times* is increasingly taken over by an examination of the family, showing how damaging and limiting an upbringing which allows no place for imagination and fancy can be, and how an educational and social philosophy based on the recognition of the necessity of looking after one's own interests can blind one to the needs of

others. The broad world of society, Dickens shows us in *Hard Times*, will function unsatisfactorily unless we sort out the values around which home life should be organized. Yet he avoids, in many respects, over-emphasis on conventionalized domestic norms. The most caring of families may prove to be an extended, genealogically confusing one, like the one at the core of Sleary's circus; his plot is not structured on familiar romantic treatments of courtship and marriage; mid-Victorian idealism about sexual roles is shown as something which can be manipulated as well as providing a pattern to follow.

The different worlds of this novel are yoked together by a recurrent emphasis on Dickens's part: that contemporary society, and the forms of its culture, can be classified as either natural or artificial. The former is always to be preferred over the latter: it is persistently characterized by imagery drawn from a vegetative, non-industrial world, suggesting that underlying organic patterns will always win out over human-imposed ones. This is apparent in the titling of the three sections of the book: 'Sowing', 'Reaping' and 'Garnering', which deliberately parallel the development of human lives with the inevitable cycles of agriculture, rather than appropriating the vocabulary of machine culture. There is a solemnity about them, too, echoing the injunction of Galatians 6:7, 'For whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap', a text appropriate to the educational theme, and a biblical evocation which encourages the reader to find something of the parable, the exemplar, in this novel. The way in which the natural world underpins human thinking is made apparent even in the first paragraph of the book, when Gradgrind, the former business-man, shortly to become an M P, and resolute believer in the value of facts, cannot even enunciate his philosophy of education without vegetative metaphors creeping in: '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' (p. 9).

Nature, though, is not solely to be equated with a physically fertile environment. It consists also, for Dickens, in habits of the mind, in allowing a certain amount of play to the imagination, in acknowledging the transformative, illuminating power of creativity. The metaphors through which he presents both the industrial world and the grimmer aspects of family relationships are testimony to the importance of inventiveness at a

linguistic level. This emphasis on the value of verbal dexterity exemplifies Dickens's claim that:

> It does not seem to me to be enough to say of any description that it is the exact truth. The exact truth must be there; but the merit or art in the narrator, is the manner of stating the truth. As to which thing in literature, it always seems to me that there is a world to be done. And in these times, when the tendency is to be frightfully literal and catalogue like – to make the thing, in short, a sort of sum in reduction that any miserable creature can do it in that way – I have an idea (really founded on the love of what I profess) that the very holding of popular literature through a kind of popular dark age, may depend on such fanciful treatment.[1]

Given the emphasis in *Hard Times* on the stultifying effects of a society dominated by productivity and profits, it is ironic that the novel's immediate genesis was determined by these twin necessary evils. At the end of 1853, the circulation of Dickens's magazine, *Household Words*, was flagging, and 'there is such a fixed idea on the part of my printers and co-partners in Household Words, that a story by me, continued from week to week, would make some unheard-of effect with it, that I am going to write one'.[2] The first time that he had written for weekly, rather than monthly, publication since completing *Barnaby Rudge* thirteen years earlier, Dickens found the task taxing, complaining of the effort as if he, rather than his words, were physically constrained and suffering: 'The experience of patient fiction-writing with some elbow-room always, and open places in perspective' … 'the compression and close condensation necessary for that disjointed form of publication gave me perpetual trouble.'[3]

But publication in *Household Words* brought advantages, too. From its first appearance, on 1 April 1854, the episodes of Dickens's novel opened each number of the magazine, in a place usually occupied by a leading article. Frequently, such an article dealt with important social issues, and this, combined with the inevitable fact that each episode was printed alongside articles on other matters, blurred the distinction between real and fictional worlds. The social questions alluded to within *Hard Times* form a dialogue with articles which looked at appalling sanitary conditions, at the need for a sympathetic form of education for the working classes, at the disgrace of those manufacturers who refused to obey the law and fence in industrial machinery. For example, in the same issue of *Household Words* that contained Chapters 7 and 8 of *Hard Times*, there was an article by Henry Morley entitled 'Ground in the Mill':

> There are many ways of dying. Perhaps it is not good when a factory girl, who has not the whole spirit of play spun out of her for want of meadows, gambols upon balls of wool, a little too near the exposed machinery that is to work it up, and is immediately seized, and punished by the merciless machine that digs its shaft into her pinafore and hoists her up, tears out her left arm at the shoulder joint, breaks her right arm, and beats her on the head.[4]

He points out, quietly, that this girl still lives. That a close connection existed, in Dickens's mind, between fictional text and non-fictional prose is shown by the fact that he deleted a long speech in Book 1 Chapter 13, by Stephen Blackpool, telling how the very same kind of accident happened to Rachael's little sister, and that, despite government directives, manufacturers regarded the boxing off of dangerous machinery as '"On reasonable Inconvenient! Troublesome!"' Rachael tells Stephen to let such things be, since too much anger will only lead to hurt, and submissively – over-submissively, perhaps – he agrees. This is the basis of the promise which is alluded to later in the text, but never fully explained: the promise that means that he does not join the trades union, is thus sent to Coventry by his workmates, and leaves us with the paradox that the person set up as Dickens's representative working man within the novel is actually placed in a position of isolation from his fellow men. The point of Stephen's speech is reinforced, in the proof version of this chapter, by a footnote which directed the reader back to the Morley article: a linking of fiction with factual reportage which is unprecedented elsewhere in Dickens's work. Yet by the time *Hard Times* appeared in print he had chosen to edit out not just the footnote, but the whole paragraph, which was not just topical, but graphic and effective, and clearly antagonistic towards the millowners.

This last factor may well provide one reason why Dickens deleted the paragraph: a suspicion of anything that would allow the novel to be categorized too easily as an 'industrial fiction', as well, perhaps, as an evasion of anything which might appear to support working-class radical behaviour. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that despite the unsympathetic treatment which is meted out to organized workers' activity in the novel, he had already published in February of the same year an account of his visit to observe striking workers in Preston ('On Strike': *Household Words*, VIII, 11 February 1854), in which the men are described as possessing 'general civility and perfect good humour', and the ranting demagogue is introduced as an exception to the rule, not an archetypal orator. Probably

Dickens's belief that fiction should not be overdidactic, but should amuse as well as instruct, furnished an additional, aesthetic reason for dropping this passage. After all, the original readers of *Hard Times* would encounter plenty of instruction elsewhere in the magazine, although information was imparted not in M'Choak-umchild-style bare, unconnected facts, but through little narratives, and through encouraging the active, wondering curiosity of the readers about the world around them. Moreover, the context in which the novel appeared encompassed more than an interest in the public issues of poverty, education and industrial hardship. It included acknowledging the importance Dickens placed on fantasy, on leisure time, on, above all, extending the imagination. To do this was to justify the very existence of this novel's medium. In his 'Preliminary Word' to his magazine, Dickens had already written of how 'we would tenderly cherish that light of Fancy which is inherent in the human breast';[5] in 'The Amusements of the People I', he had drawn attention to 'a range of imagination in most of us, which no amount of steam-engines will satisfy'.[6]

The need for imaginative engagement with the world is a repetitive theme in *Hard Times*. It crops up in relation to the education of the Gradgrind children, deprived of fairy-tales, deprived of nursery rhymes: 'No little Gradgrind had ever associated a cow in a field with that famous cow with the crumpled horn who tossed the dog who worried the cat who killed the rat who ate the malt, or with that yet more famous cow who swallowed Tom Thumb: it had never heard of those celebrities, and had only been introduced to a cow as a graminivorous ruminating quadruped with several stomachs' (p. 16). They are made to suffer for their father's belief that 'The reason is … the only faculty to which education should be addressed' (p. 24). Yet in a novel as much dramatically concerned with the belated education of Gradgrind, the older man, as with the consequences of his children's upbringing, he is shown as getting his come-uppance, through feeling remorse at the unhappiness his daughter finds herself in, and through the guilty embarrassment induced by the self-interested thieving of his son Tom. The irony of his earlier position is brought home most strongly when he encounters his previous model pupil, Bitzer, pursuing and attempting to arrest Tom. '"Bitzer," he implores, pathetically, '"have you a heart?"'

‘The circulation, sir,’ returned Bitzer, smiling at the oddity of the question, ‘couldn’t be carried on without one. No man, sir, acquainted with the facts established by Harvey relating to the circulation of the blood, can doubt that I have a heart.’

‘Is itaccessible,’ cried Mr Gradgrind, ‘to any compassionate influence?’

‘It is accessible to Reason, sir,’ returned the excellent young man. ‘And to nothing else.’ (pp. 276–7)

But in this novel which insists on the dangers of schematization, Dickens does not present us with anything like a simply evaluated dichotomy between fact and fiction. When he told Charles Knight, ‘My satire is against those who see figures and averages, and nothing else – the representatives of the wickedest and most enormous vice of this time’,[7] the very existence of these men was as much a ‘fact’ as were the ‘killing airs and gases’ which were built into the Coketown courts, or the ‘river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye’, or the unguarded pit shaft down which Stephen falls. The presupposition of facts, of a real world outside textual invention, is intrinsic to the novel’s existence. Nor, by any means, is fancy presented as being unequivocally a good thing. Mythmaking, the novel demonstrates, can be turned to falsifying, destructive ends as well as to good ones. The prime example of this is Bounderby, continually telling people that his mother abandoned him, and left him to be brought up by his drunken grandmother. He has had to fight against all the odds: his, as he tells it, is the archetypal progress of the self-made man: ‘Vagabond, errand-boy, vagabond, labourer, porter, clerk, chief manager, small partner, Josiah Bounderby of Coketown’ (p. 22). Myth, Dickens shows us, breeds myth. Outside orators incorporate Bounderby – probably at his own prompting – into a myth of National Greatness which carries little credibility when placed against the novel’s social critique. ‘They made him out to be the Royal arms, the Union-Jack, Magna Charta, John Bull, Habeas Corpus, the Bill of Rights, An Englishman’s house is his castle, Church and State, and God save the Queen, all put together’ (p. 47). Dickens’s own scornful treatment of English institutions, by contrast, can be read into the terms in which he describes Mr Gradgrind’s job as MP for Coketown: ‘one of the respected members for ounce weights and measures, one of the representatives of the multiplication table, one of the deaf honourable gentlemen, dumb honourable gentlemen, blind honourable gentlemen, lame honourable gentlemen, dead honourable gentlemen, to every other consideration’ (pp. 92–3). Gradgrind is easily assimilated into the mass of pontificating but

ineffectual Members of Parliament–Boodle, Coodle, Foodle and so on – named by Dickens in *Bleak House* (1853), his previous novel.

As well as re-inventing his own life history, Bounderby is also responsible for fabricating and circulating further fictions. He creates a privileged and aristocratic past for Mrs Sparsit, which she never overtly troubles to contradict (though doubtless it contributes to her impression of her employer as a Noodle): 'You were coming out of the Italian Opera, ma'am, in white satin and jewels, a blaze of splendour, when I hadn't a penny to buy a link to light you' (p.49). Notably, these fictions in volve his projections about the characteristics of the working people. He uses his own myth of self-fashioning on which to base the presumption that if he can rise from rags to riches, so could any man who put his mind to it. So far as he is concerned, 'the sole, immediate, and direct object of any Hand who was not entirely satisfied' was 'to be set up in a coach and six, and to be fed on turtle soup and venison' (p. 72); later, we see his view that 'Show me a dissatisfied Hand, and I'll show you a man that's fit for anything bad, I don't care what it is' (p. 179). The narrator for once underscores the point with direct comment: 'Another of the popular fictions of Coketown, which some pains had been taken to disseminate–and which some people really believed' (p. 179).

Yet the portrayal of the working classes and their environment which Dickens gives us is not, in its turn, immune to his own rhetorical effects and, indeed, mythmaking. Herein lies one of the problems of the novel itself. At times, he cannot resist flourishes of his own idiosyncrasy, which have the potential to open up trains of intertextual association, productive of effects quite contrary to the sympathetic thrust of the novel. Thus, for example, there is an amusing quirkiness in hearing that Coketown was 'a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage' (p. 27), until one recollects Dickens's hysterical attack in an article of 1853 on 'The Noble Savage', the 'howling, whistling, clucking, stamping, jumping, tearing, savage … cruel, false, thievish, murderous; addicted more or less to grease, entrails, and beastly customs; a wild animal … a conceited, tiresome, bloodthirsty, monotonous humbug'[8] – a bloodthirsty savage not all that different, in some of these respects, from a member of the angry – and by racist implication, inferior – industrial masses as portrayed in the fiction of some of Dickens's contemporaries.

This is far from being an isolated instance of that double movement in the novel consequent on the fact that Dickens's tendency to metaphorization and metamorphosization sometimes cuts across his insistence that, even if our leisure time may be impoverished without the opportunity to respond, in an escapist way, to fantasy, the imaginative world is not that in which one should live all the time. 'The lights in the great factories' looked, 'when they were illuminated, like Fairy palaces' – and then this description is immediately undercut by the phrase '– or the travellers by express-train said so' (p. 66), implying that both narrator and reader, with a more sensitive grasp of what it means to work and live among these citadels of industrialism, would not fall into such a falsifying trap. Nonetheless, Dickens cannot quite escape from the habits of his own transformative imagination, turning the town into a giant-inhabited fairy-land: a page or so later, we are told that the night-time clouds have broken up, 'and the moon shone – looking down the high chimneys of Coketown on the deep furnaces below, and casting Titanic shadows of the steam engines at rest' (p. 69). The place where Stephen worked is described as a 'forest' of looms, and the two examples taken together imply that neither nature nor myth can be quite cast out of the ugliness of the industrial town. Dickens may rightly be accused of defamiliarizing, even beautifying, through language that would necessarily prove far more resistant to material alteration. Nonetheless, Dickens does not ignore the fact that the world of fantasy and legend is not imperatively a sunshine world, but encompasses myths of cruelty and confusion: thus the tall factory chimneys rise up 'like competing Towers of Babel' (p. 81) (if one may include Old Testament stories under the rubric of myth); thus, although we are told that Mr Gradgrind, surrounded by blue books, 'did not take after Blue Beard' (p. 95), the mention of this marital murderer casts a pall over the arrangements made in the rest of the chapter for Louisa and Bounderby's marriage. Suggestively, too, Dickens implies that fantasy is tied to the workings of what we would now call the unconscious, as with the terrifying dream of death and destruction which Stephen Blackpool experiences, which leads him very close to willing his drunken wife's death – only to be saved in the nick of time by the action of the saintly Rachael.

Most vertiginously of all, Dickens suggests that the realm of fact can itself produce a form of fancy. The person who most strongly brings home

the message about the absurdity of living in a world of statistics and abstractions is Sissy Jupe, who, despite her original home in the circus, proves to be one of the most matter-of-fact people in the book. When she is asked about statistics at school, by means of a set of exemplary vignettes, her 'wrong' answers are manifestly, for Dickens, the 'right' ones. She reports: 'Mr M'Choakumchild said he would try me again. And he said, This schoolroom is an immense town, and in it there are a million of inhabitants, and only five-and-twenty are starved to death in the streets, in the course of a year. What is your remark on that proportion? And my remark was – for I couldn't think of a better one – that I thought it must be just as hard upon those who were starved, whether the others were a million, or a million million. And that was wrong, too' (p. 60). Although she was brought up in the world of the circus, what remains with her of its values is the spirit of compassion and mutual co-operation, rather than the art of illusion. It is worth noting, in passing, and whilst stressing the resistance of *Hard Times* to a reading governed by clear categories, that Sleary's Horse-riding is not the complete antithesis of the industrial and business world that some critics have made it out to be, even if it appears less urgently driven by financial imperatives than Crummles's strolling players in *Nicholas Nickleby*, or the travelling shows of *The Old Curiosity Shop*. When we first see Sleary himself, he is 'a stout modern statue with a money-box at its elbow' (p. 17), and the circus is unmistakably run as a commercial enterprise. Mr Childers quickly judges from Bounderby's appearance that he is someone who can make more money of his time than he can of his. Moreover, just as we have seen that vegetative imagery infiltrated Dickens's descriptions of the industrial world, so, when we learn that Sissy's father was to exhibit 'his astounding feat of throwing seventy-five hundredweight in rapid succession backhanded over his head thus forming a fountain of solid iron in mid-air' (p. 18), his action seems like a human parody of the processes of an iron foundry.

Sissy is not merely a pattern of part-learnt, part-instinctual sympathy, understanding and good sense. She is also a prime illustration of the indecipherable, at least to those who presume they have an accurately calibrated set of perceptual tools with which to understand their fellow humans. She poses a particular puzzle to Mr Gradgrind:

> Somehow or other, he had become possessed by an idea that there was something in this girl which could hardly be set forth in a tabular form. Her capacity of definition might be easily stated at a very low figure, her mathematical knowledge at nothing; yet he was not sure that if he had been required, for example, to tick her off into columns in parliamentary return, he would have quite known how to divide her. (p. 92)

Similarly, Gradgrind's well-trained daughter, Louisa, is equipped with a multitude of facts about the Coketown workers: 'what results in work a given number of them would produce, in a given space of time' (p. 155). She has habitually cut them off from her consciousness as though they were as tiny, insignificant and indistinguishably numerous as ants and beetles – and indeed, knowing more about such insects than she does about 'these toiling men and women' (p. 155), has a problem separating them into units, and relating to Stephen and Rachael as individuals with their own emotions and needs.

In emphasizing the individuality of each human being, Dickens finds himself awkwardly caught. On the one hand, he wants to stress that education, upbringing and environment form people: if the environment of Coketown is one of grimy monotony, it thus follows that there will be a certain monotony about its population. Thus the fact that the town 'contained several large streets all very like one another, and many small streets still more like one another', means, according to the deliberately dull, hammering little blows of rhetoric through which he reinforces his point, these streets are 'inhabited by people equally like one another, who all went in and out at the same hours, with the same sound upon the same pavements, to do the same work, and to whom every day was the same as yesterday and tomorrow, and every year the counterpart of the last and the next' (pp. 27–8). The whole town, like Gradgrind's pedagogical system, seems to have been erected according to the principles of Fact: even the churches, with one exception, look like brick warehouses. 'The jail might have been the infirmary, the infirmary might have been the jail, the town-hall might have been either, or both, or anything else, for anything that appeared to the contrary in the graces of their construction. Fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the material aspect of the town; fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the immaterial' (p. 28). Nonetheless, even if the town itself remains a 'sulky blotch', a 'blur of soot and smoke' (p. 111) even on the sunniest midsummer day, human tendencies keep breaking through the bounds of the system. There are, we're told in passing, some remarkable 'Hands',

‘who, piecing together their broken intervals of leisure through many years, had mastered difficult sciences, and acquired a knowledge of most unlikely things’ (p. 66). Toys manage to find their way into butchers’ shop windows. Somebody, sometime, named a public house the Pegasus’s Arms, and hung the theatrical Pegasus, with gauze wings, golden stars stuck all over him, and a red silk harness, behind the dingy bar. Some people, after all, must have attended the circus performances. The brightest ray of light seems to have come from the library in Coketown. Mr Gradgrind used to torment his mind about what the people read there: not Euclid, or political economists: rather, an appetite for reading was indicative of a healthy appetite for wondering. These readers ‘wondered about human nature, human passions, human hopes and fears, the struggles, triumphs and defeats, the cares and joys and sorrows, the lives and deaths, of common men and women! They sometimes, after fifteen hours’ work, sat down to read mere fables about men and women, more or less like themselves, and about children, more or less like their own’ (p. 53).

To some extent, Dickens is defending his own role and purpose as a producer of fictions. Once again, however, we see a double movement at work in his rhetoric. Just as his descriptions of industrial grimness are undercut by the language of fantasy, here his apparent celebration of the importance of wonder and the imagination as a relief from the monotony of work is couched in vocabulary which emphasizes sameness, rather than individual distinctiveness. Whilst the passage *may* be read as a plea for recognizing a basis of common humanity linking everyone, it may also be put in the context of earlier comments about the cultural practices of factory workers. In *American Notes* (1842), Dickens praised the factories in Lowell, Massachusetts, not just for the healthy appearance of the women workers, and the ordered salubriousness of their surroundings, but for the cheerful ways in which the employees occupied their leisure time – playing the piano, reading books from circulating libraries, and putting together a periodical, the *Lowell Offering*. ‘It is pleasant to find that many of its Tales are of the Mills and of those who work in them; that they inculcate habits of self-denial and contentment, and teach good doctrines of enlarged benevolence.’[9] Faced with conditions which he explicitly contrasts favourably to those found within northern manufacturing towns, Dickens, rather than focusing on any potential expansion of mental

facilities, chooses to praise those cultural practices which bind their practitioners into hermetically sealed happiness with their lot. Both at Lowell and in Coketown, Dickens implicitly seems to be endorsing identificatory, rather than oppositional, modes of reading: there is certainly no sense that any literary encounters made in the Coketown library are going to lead the workers towards any active challenging of the system they inhabit.

When, in *Hard Times*, Dickens wishes to impress upon his readers that the working classes are not statistical abstractions, not mere numbers of hands, he invents the figure of Stephen Blackpool. Initially, Blackpool appears to be set up as one who resists interpretive systems, baffling any attempt to sum him up from his external appearance. Dickens is famously capable of turning the popular practice of physiognomy to his own ends when they suit him – we are invited, in caricatured form, to recognize Gradgrind's rigid mentality from his square wall of a forehead – but skill in reading faces is not necessarily to be relied upon:

> A rather stooping man, with a knitted brow, a pondering expression of face, and a hard-looking head sufficiently capacious, on which his iron-grey hair lay long and thin, Old Stephen might have passed for a particularly intelligent man in his condition. Yet he was not. (p. 66)

Stephen's main problem, as laid out in the novel, lies not, despite his class identification, in having been mentally numbed by his surroundings or physically maimed in his workplace. Despite setting up Coketown as a polluted, ugly centre, Dickens does not have Stephen directly suffer at the hands of this 'unnatural family, shouldering, and trampling, and pressing one another to death' (p. 66) in their struggle for survival. Rather, he is injured by his actual domestic relations, his unhappy marriage to a drunken wife who periodically comes and goes and sells off whatever household goods she can. Even though Dickens elsewhere suggests that one should understand alcoholism as a symptom rather than a cause – a symptom of poor housing, unsupportable working conditions, inadequate sanitation and above all ignorance[10] – he does not use the case of Stephen's wife to make any such generalization here. Instead, it is his inability to get a divorce from this drunken and, it is suggested, adulterous woman that stirs Stephen to impassioned rhetoric, as he sounds off to Bounderby about how 'th' supposed unpossibility o' ever getting unchained from one another, at any

price, on any terms, brings blood upon this land, and brings many common married fok to battle, murder, and sudden death' (p. 76). He can contrast this to the privileged position of 'great folk', but far from pointing out that the inequalities of the class system are based on inequalities of wealth, and thus that the class system itself may be in need of revision, Stephen deferentially adds a defusing aside about these 'great folk' ('fair faw 'em a'! I wishes 'em no hurt!') (p. 75). This workman is, in other words, like his patient, loving friend Rachael, another highly sanitized, unthreatening member of the masses with whom the reader is invited to sympathize, above all, on the grounds of a personal dilemma. It is clear, moreover, that Stephen becomes especially worthy of our interest not through being made a representative of the workers but through being ostracized by them: a condition reached, as we have seen, on the basis of a private promise he made. Personal ties are shown, in the novel, to have more pulling power than workers' solidarity.

Indeed, it is the family, or at least the home, which, ultimately, although far from unproblematically, lies at the centre of *Hard Times*. To be sure, the home may need an outside influence to set it to rights. This is provided in the Gradgrind household by the figure of Sissy. As Louisa's father tells her, quietly: 'I have a misgiving that some change may have been slowly working about me in this house, by mere love and gratitude; that what the Head had left undone and could not do, the Heart may have been doing silently' (p. 218). Sissy's positive human values supply what the perennially enfeebled Mrs Gradgrind, on her deathbed, searches after expressing, that 'something – not an Ology at all – that your father has missed, or forgotten, Louisa' (p. 194). Yet as we have already noted, Sissy herself has been formed in a family where parenting is not confined to biologically determined roles, and where, borrowing from the general sense of the carnivalesque, conventional rules of propriety have been jettisoned. The narrator betrays enjoyment, rather than disquiet, at the blurred relationship boundaries of 'two or three handsome young women … with their two or three husbands, and their two or three mothers, and their eight or nine little children, who did the fairy business when required' (p. 40), and is not remotely disturbed by the fact that none of these mothers 'were at all particular in respect of showing their legs' (p. 40). Despite its underlying commercialism, this is essentially a pre-industrial social microcosm of the sort John Ruskin was idealistically projecting, around

this time, back into the medieval period (and just hinted at in the 'ecclesiastical niche of early Gothic architecture' (p. 17), where Sleary sits with his money box), where there was little gap between work and the other aspects of life; where one did not see, as Ruskin put in *The Stones of Venice* (1853), the 'degradation of the operative into a machine', and one did not hear:

> the great cry that rises from all our manufacturing cities, louder than their furnace blast … that we manufacture everything except men; we blanch cotton, and strengthen steel, and refine sugar, and shape pottery; but to brighten, to strengthen, to refine, or to reform a single living spirit, never enters into our estimate of advantages.[11]

Does *Hard Times* carry the message, then, that society should be run along the same lines as a happy family, even if the definition of 'family' may incorporate extended models of the institution? To some extent, this is true. Dickens's tone is far from disingenuous when he asks, quite early on: 'Is it possible, I wonder, that there was any analogy between the case of the Coketown population and the case of the little Gradgrinds?' He continues, in unmissably scathing tones: 'Surely, none of us in our sober senses and acquainted with figures' (hardly sufficient tools, in other words, to come to conclusions about the nature of human happiness) – surely none of us are to be told 'that one of the foremost elements in the existence of the Coketown working population has been for scores of years, deliberately set at nought? That there was any Fancy in them demanding to be brought into healthy existence instead of struggling on in convulsions?' – once again, the imagery of nature, this time, of the body in sickness and in health, is being employed. 'That exactly in the ratio as they worked long and monotonously, the craving grew within them for some physical relief – some relaxation, encouraging good humour and good spirits, and giving them a vent…which craving must and would be satisfied aright, or must and would inevitably go wrong, until the laws of the Creation were repealed?' (p. 30). The parallelism is reversed when, in Chapter 9, we are told that life at Stone Lodge, the Gradgrinds' home, 'went monotonously round like a piece of machinery which discouraged human interference' (p. 59). Whatever relation this home has to the natural world is a perverted one, as Dickens tells us in biblically mediated language. When Louisa returns home to visit her dying mother:

> Her remembrances of home and childhood, were remembrances of the drying up of every spring and fountain in her young heart as it gushed out. The golden waters were not there. They were flowing for the fertilization of the land where grapes are gathered from thorns, and figs from thistles. (p. 192)

A little later, when Louisa returns again, perplexed and disturbed by the advances of the heartless would-be seducer, the ironically named Harthouse, she asks bitterly of her parent: 'What have you done, O father, what have you done, with the garden that should have bloomed once, in this great wilderness here!' (p. 208).

But if it is indeed the case that society should be cultivated on the same terms as compassionate, caring family life, it then follows that Dickens's view of society as a whole would enshrine the same values, espouse the same ideologies, as his vision of the family. This would inevitably lead, in turn, to a somewhat narrow and circumscribed view of what might be the most desirable role for women, and, by extension and analogy, the working classes. Women, in this novel, largely exist to serve: not spinelessly – Mrs Gradgrind provides a warning against that – but actively, providing a supportive domestic centre for their men. At their best, they represent the type notoriously advocated by early and mid nineteenth-century advice manuals. Sarah Lewis, for example, in *Woman's Mission* (1839), which had gone into thirteen editions by the late 1840s, defines woman's role as 'the establishment of peace and love, and unselfishness, to be achieved by any means, and at any cost to themselves; in the cultivation first in themselves, then in all over whom they have any influence, of an unselfish and unworldly spirit; the promotion even in the most minute particular of elegance, of happiness, of moral good'.[12] Writing several years after *Hard Times*, Samuel Smiles summed up a dominant viewpoint of the period: 'The Home is the crystal of society – the very nucleus of national character; and, from that source, be it pure or tainted, issue the habits, principles and maxims, which govern public as well as private life. The nation comes from the nursery; public opinion itself is for the most part the outgrowth of the home; and, the best philanthropy comes from the fireside.'[13] This is the ideal against which Louisa places the recognition of her own warped upbringing. For to be the truly feminine centre of the home is precisely what she laments to Tom that she cannot be: 'I often sit wondering here, and think how unfortunate it is for me that I can't

reconcile you to home better than I am able to do. I don't know what other girls know. I can't play to you, or sing to you. I can't talk to you so as to lighten your mind, for I never see any amusing sights or read any amusing books that it would be a pleasure or a relief to you to talk about, when you are tired' (pp. 54–5). Dickens seems to endorse these regrets, rather than hypothesizing that reading could extend Louisa's enjoyment and imaginative understanding of the world on her own behalf, or that piano-playing or singing might give her a sense of her own self-worth and creativity.

Yet his treatment of the home and family in *Hard Times* is by no means over-idealized: Dickens is sharply aware that the desiderata put forward by didactic writers are inevitably modified by actual circumstances. Thus the feminine paragon recommended by Sarah Stickney Ellis in *The Daughters of England* (1842), full of willing, helpful devotion towards her brother, is precisely the type manipulated by Tom, who sees his sister's marriage to Bounderby as a means of furthering himself: '"What a game girl you are, to be such a first-rate sister, Loo!"' (p. 108). Mrs Sparsit – albeit in the role of housekeeper rather than wife, although she clearly has half an eye on the latter position – gains far more power and pleasure from observing, manipulating and gloating over her employer than from servicing him, though ministering to his wants is an important weapon in her domestic armoury. The plot itself has little place for presenting actual domestic idylls. Louisa, despite her husband's early death, is granted no second chance, no family of her own; and the lilting rhythm of 'happy Sissy's happy children loving her' presents this future brood in the jaunty tones of a tongue-twister, rather than as part of a realistically envisaged courtship and marriage. Moreover, there is that sentence of Louisa's: 'I often sit wondering', and the repeated insistence that, despite Tom's censorship of the idea, and her mother's timorous disapproval of such an activity, Louisa has 'such unmanageable thoughts … that they *will* wonder'. The repression that her 'innate' nature suffers keeps showing itself, as when she asks Sissy, fascinated, about life in the circus, with 'a strong, wild, wandering interest peculiar to her; an interest gone astray like a banished creature, and hiding in solitary places' (p. 61). Once again, this imagery underscores the *naturalness* of such mental processes, and as such they are things to be cherished: on the other hand, a mind that is strong, wild and

wandering is hardly likely to be a mind softly submissive to any domestic ideal.

*Hard Times*, ultimately, is not a programmatic book, and is the stronger for it. It is not certain enough for this; its apparent certainties are continually, and deliberately, undercut. Not for Dickens Elizabeth Gaskell's determined optimism that if masters and men could learn to see themselves as Christian brothers, bound together by human suffering, this would provide a route of acceptance through which they might learn to comprehend each others' demands; nor does he take up the equally hopeful line of Charles Kingsley, in *Alton Locke* (1850), that justice and true brotherhood await in heaven. It would, as we have seen, have been against Dickens's own aesthetic imperatives to write an overtly didactic text. Such a novel would conflict with Sleary, the circus manager's, observations – with which Dickens seems in complete agreement – that 'people must be amuthed … they can't be alwayth a working, nor yet they can't be alwayth a learning' (p. 45). Such imperatives doubtless lie behind the transparently ironic, self-mocking note of the occasional pointers which Dickens puts into the narrative voice, as at the opening of Chapter 10: 'I entertain a weak idea that the English people are as hard-worked as any people upon whom the sun shines. I acknowledge to this ridiculous idiosyncrasy, as a reason why I would give them a little more play' (p. 65). Indeed, the disavowal of overt didacticism would hardly be worth making, were it not that the final paragraph is the most exhortatory of any of Dickens's novels:

> Dear reader! It rests with you and me, whether, in our two fields of action, similar things shall be or not. Let them be! We shall sit with lighter bosoms on the hearth, to see the ashes of our fires turn grey and cold. (p. 288)

This is not entirely easy to interpret. From the point of view of the reader, perhaps, who has contact with children, whether his or her own, or those of a friend or relative, and who may come into contact with the working classes, the message has been put across clearly, if condescendingly enough in the previous paragraph: one should try hard to know one's 'humbler fellow-creatures, and to beautify their lives of machinery and reality with those imaginative graces and delights, without which the heart of infancy will wither up, the sturdiest physical manhood will be morally stark death …' (p. 287). But that 'Let them be!' is more opaque when it comes to the novelist's field of action. Doubtless, it would have been

within his inventive power to have provided a consolatory ending, finding a new partner for Louisa, and, for that matter, having refused to kill off Stephen, or having had his inebriated wife stumble to her death in his stead. Does Rachael really deserve to pass her life ministering to this 'degraded, drunken wretch', sweet-temperedly, serenely carrying on as 'a woman working, ever working, but content to do it, and preferring to do it as her natural lot' (p. 287)? The fact that he refused to take family-favouring sentimental ways out enables Dickens to show the instructive potential inherent in endurance, a reminder that the fairy-tale patterns which bestow happy endings on 'good' characters and punish the wrong belong too much to the realm of pure fiction to be appropriate here. But this decision does not entirely tally with the fact that throughout the text, his transformative treatment of the realities of the industrial landscape – his melancholy-mad elephants, his smoke-serpents, his forests of looms – distracts the reader from considering the appalling aspects of 'machinery and reality' and redirects their attention to verbal virtuosity instead: indeed, the industrial conditions furnish the occasion for it. 'Let them be!' reads two ways: both as a call to action, and, paradoxically and more troublingly, as a plea for passivity, the realities of industrial life providing the basis on which both didactic and imaginative writing are built.

From Dickens's own position, unwilling or unable to look at the problems which undeniably existed from *outside* that social structuring which he did not fundamentally wish to question, an appeal based on, and directed towards, the individual was the most feasible form of challenge – however ambiguous that appeal, on investigation, may prove to be. But since each individual reader must live within society, formed by it as well as being a potential reformer of it, such an appeal is necessarily a complex one. Moreover, and still less susceptible to clear-cut diagnosis, Dickens seems to suggest that some individuals have innate capacities which may render that individual liable to be worked upon, but others have not. Thus we see in the adolescent Louisa 'struggling through the dissatisfaction of her face … a light with nothing to rest upon, a fire with nothing to burn, a starved imagination keeping life in itself somehow' (p. 19). Yet the young Tom is marked only by 'an air of jaded sullenness' (p. 19), which reacts fatally with the educational principles which are tried out on him, so that he becomes 'that not unprecedented triumph of calculation which is usually at work on number one' (p. 65), an example of the selfishness of

self-help. Mr Gradgrind may see the light rather late in the day, but we are told, as early as Chapter 5, that 'though hard enough', he 'was by no means so rough a man as Mr Bounderby. His character was not unkind, all things considered; it might have been a very kind one indeed, if he had only made some round mistake in the arithmetic that balanced it, years ago' (p. 32). However, habit hardens the heart against the appeals which are made to it. Thus Gradgrind, when discussing Louisa's impending marriage with Bounderby, might have seen that she was on the point of throwing herself on his breast, and giving him the pent-up confidences of her heart:

> But, to see it, he must have overleaped at a bound the artificial barriers he had for many years been erecting, between himself and all those subtle essences of humanity which will elude the utmost cunning of algebra until the last trumpet ever to be sounded shall blow even algebra to wreck. (p. 99)

What *Hard Times* dramatizes so successfully is precisely this sense of uncertainty at quite how far any individual may be able to play an active part in reforming the society which has already helped to make them, and whose prejudices and values work to form their own positions. Such uncertainty was not just peculiar to *Hard Times*, or to Dickens, but was symptomatic of far more wide-reaching trends among members of a concerned, questioning and apprehensive Victorian middle class. In the context of *Hard Times*, it becomes almost a positive value, since it partakes of all that Dickens sees as opposed to the mechanical: it is inherent within human life:

> 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 its quiet servants, with the composed faces and the regulated actions. There is no mystery in it; there is an unfathomable mystery in the meanest of them, for ever. – Supposing we were to reserve our arithmetic for material objects, and to govern these awful unknown quantities by other means! (p. 71)

Similarly, 'unfathomable mystery' may be seen to be the principle which rules the rhetoric of *Hard Times*. Whether it is read in the context of the conventions of mid-Victorian fiction, or with attention to its own internal linguistic operations, the double movements of *Hard Times* render this novel peculiarly resistant to interpretive certitude.

## NOTES

1. Charles Dickens, quoted by John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens* (1872–4; ed. J. W. T. Ley, Cecil Palmer, 1928), pp. 727–8.
2. Charles Dickens to Angela Burdett-Coutts, 23 January 1854, Pilgrim Edition of *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, eds. Graham Story, Kathleen Tillotson and Angus Easson, vol. 7, 1853–5 (Clarendon Press, 1993), p. 256.
3. Charles Dickens to John Forster, ?February 1854, *Letters*, 7, p. 282, and to Mrs Richard Watson, 1 November 1854, *Letters*, 7, p. 453.
4. Henry Morley, 'Ground in the Mill', *Household Words*, IX, 22 April 1854, p. 224.
5. Charles Dickens, 'Preliminary Word', *Household Words*, I, 30 March 1850, p. 1.
6. Charles Dickens, 'The Amusements of the People I', ibid., p. 13.
7. Charles Dickens to Charles Knight, 30 January 1855, *Letters*, 7, p. 492.
8. Charles Dickens, 'The Noble Savage', *Household Words*, VII, 11 June 1853, p. 337.
9. Charles Dickens, *American Notes* (1842; Penguin Books, 1985), pp. 117–18.
10. See especially 'Demoralisation and Total Abstinence', *Examiner*, (27 October 1849), in *The Dent Uniform Edition of Dickens' Journalism, Volume 2, The Amusements of the People and Other Papers: Reports, Essays and Reviews 1834–51*, Michael Slater (Ohio State University Press, 1996), pp. 159–69.
11. John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice* (1853; *The Works of John Ruskin*, eds. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols., 1904–12, vol. 10, p. 196).
12. Sarah Lewis, *Woman's Mission* (1839; 7th edn, 1840), p. 134.
13. Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help, with illustrations of Character and Conduct* (John Murray, 1859), p. 294.

# Further Reading

The standard biographies of Charles Dickens are John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens* (1872–4; ed. J. W. T. Ley, Cecil Palmer, 1928), which is invaluable for the first-hand knowledge and impressions which it gives; Edgar Johnson, *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph* (2 vols., Simon & Schuster, 1952), and Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens* (Sinclair-Stevenson, 1990): full, very informative, written in an engaging, and occasionally imaginatively idiosyncratic manner. Grahame Smith's *Charles Dickens: A Literary Life* (Macmillan, 1996), is a well-written and reliable assessment of Dickens's career.

General studies which contain useful chapters or sections on *Hard Times* include:

Rosemarie Bodenheimer, *The Politics of Story in Victorian Fiction* (Cornell University Press, 1988). *Hard Times* is usefully placed in the context of other 'social problem' fictions.

John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, *Dickens and Work* (Methuen, 1957). Chapter 7 discusses the novel in the context of its publication as a weekly serial, and examines Dickens's working methods in close detail.

Philip Collins, *Dickens and Education* (revised edition, Macmillan, 1965). Invaluable for understanding the context in which Mr Gradgrind's school, and Mr M'Choakumchild's school teaching, should be read.

Steven Connor, *Charles Dickens* (Basil Blackwell, 1985), pp. 89–107. A deft reading of the novel's language, showing the contradictions which undermine the text's apparently neat polarizing of Fact and Fancy.

Valentine Cunningham, *In the Reading Gaol: Postmodernity, Texts, and History* (Blackwell, 1994), pp. 129–51. Examines the way in which the language of *Hard Times* ensures the triumph of the metaphor world over that of factuality or reportage.

Catherine Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction: Discourse and Narrative Form* (University of California Press, 1985). Locates the novel in the context of discussion concerning industry, the

economy and reformist measures, in fiction and other texts in the mid nineteenth century.

Humphry House, *The Dickens World* (Oxford University Press, 1941). Still an excellent introduction to the social conditions of Dickens's time.

John O. Jordan, *The Cambridge Companion to Charles Dickens* (Cambridge University Press, 2001). In addition to a chapter by Hilary Schor on 'Novels of the 1850s: *Hard Times, Little Dorrit*, and *A Tale of Two Cities*', this volume contains many stimulating original essays on different aspects of Dickens's writing.

Paul Schlicke, *Dickens and Popular Entertainment* (Allen & Unwin, 1984). Explores the world of the circus in mid Victorian England, and, more widely, shows Dickens's fascination with itinerant shows and entertainments.

Hilary Schor, *Dickens and the Daughter of the House* (Cambridge University Press, 1999). Engages with the domestic politics of the novel, in the context of Dickens's writing more generally, and in relation to mid Victorian social beliefs.

Material specifically on *Hard Times*:

Margaret Simpson, *The Companion to Hard Times* (Greenwood Press, 1997), is a wonderfully informative volume, providing far closer and more exhaustive annotation than is possible in an edition like this one, and hence offering a very thorough contextualization of the novel. In addition to her valuable elucidation of textual references, the volume also contains a substantial bibliography, and some very useful material concerning the novel's relationship to *Household Words*.

Deborah A. Thomas, *Hard Times: A Fable of Fragmentation and Wholeness* (Twayne and Prentice Hall, 1997), offers a clearly written and thoughtful introduction to the novel and to the range of social issues which it raises.

For a comprehensive checklist of earlier studies of *Hard Times*, see Sylvia Manning, *Hard Times: An Annotated Bibliography* (Garland Publishing, 1984).

Among many valuable articles on the novel, the following are particularly worth consulting:

John D. Baird, '"Divorce and Matrimonial Causes": An Aspect of *Hard Times*', *Victorian Studies*, 20 (1977), pp. 401–12.

Patrick Brantlinger, 'Dickens and the Factories', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 22 (1971), pp. 270–85.

Joseph Butwin, '*Hard Times*: The News and the Novel', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 32 (1977), pp. 166–87.

Geoffrey Carnall, 'Dickens, Mrs Gaskell, and the Preston Strike', *Victorian Studies*, 8 (1964), pp. 31–48.

Jean Ferguson Carr, 'Writing as a Woman: Dickens, *Hard Times*, and Feminine Discourses', *Dickens Studies Annual*, 18 (1989), pp. 161–78.

Philip Collins, 'Queen Mab's Chariot Among the Steam Engines: Dickens and "Fancy"', *English Studies*, 42 (1961), pp. 78–90.

Razak Dahmane, '"A Mere Question of Figures": Measures, Mystery, and Metaphor in *Hard Times', Dickens Studies Annual*, 23 (1994), pp. 137–62.

Richard Fabrizio, 'Wonderful No-Meaning: Language and the Psychopathology of the Family in Dickens' *Hard Times', Dickens Studies Annual*, 16 (1987), pp. 61–94.

K. J. Fielding, 'The Battle for Preston', *Dickensian*, 54 (1954), pp. 159–62.

—, 'Mill and Gradgrind', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 11 (1956), pp. 148–51.

— and Anne Smith, '*Hard Times* and the Factory Controversy: Dickens vs Harriet Martineau', in *Dickens Centennial Essays*, eds. Ada Nisbet and Blake Nevius (University of California Press, 1971), pp. 22–45.

Roger Fowler, 'Polyphony and Problematic in *Hard Times*', in *The Changing World of Charles Dickens*, ed. R. Giddings (Vision, 1983), pp. 91–108.

Robin Gilmour, 'The Gradgrind School: Political Economy in the Classroom', *Victorian Studies*, 11 (1967), pp. 207–24. Michael Hollington, 'Physiognomy in *Hard Times*', *Dickens Quarterly*, 9 (1992), pp. 58–66.

Anne Humpherys, 'Louisa Gradgrind's Secret: Marriage and Divorce in *Hard Times*', *Dickens Studies Annual*, 25 (1996), pp. 177–96.

Katherine Kearns, ‘A Tropology of Realism in *Hard Times*’, *English Literary History*, 59 (1992), pp. 857–81.

David Lodge, ‘How Successful is *Hard Times*?’, in *Working with Structuralism* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 37–45.

Robert Lougy, ‘Dickens’s *Hard Times*: The Romance as Radical Literature’, *Dickens Studies Annual*, 9 (1980), pp. 237–54.

Martha Nussbaum, ‘The Literary Imagination in Public Life’, *New Literary History*, 22 (1991), pp. 877–910.

Mike Sanders, ‘Manufacturing Accident: Industrialism and the Worker’s Body in Early Victorian Fiction’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 28 (2000), pp. 313–29.

Paul Schacht, ‘Dickens and the Uses of Nature’, *Victorian Studies*, 34 (1990), pp. 77–102.

David Sonstroem, ‘Fettered Fancy in *Hard Times*’, *PMLA*, 84 (1969), pp. 520–29.

Stephen Spector, ‘Monsters of Metonymy: *Hard Times* and Knowing the Working Class’, *English Literary History*, 51 (1984), pp. 365–84.

Barry Stiltner, ‘*Hard Times*: The Disciplinary City’, *Dickens Studies Annual*, 30 (2001), pp. 193–215.

Raymond Williams, ‘The Reader in *Hard Times*’, in *Writing in Society* (Verso, 1983), pp. 166–74.

The Victorian Web’s Dickens site is *http://65.107.211.206/victorian/dickens/dickensov.html*

There is a well-maintained site, The Dickens Page, at *http://lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/~matsuoka/Dickens.html*