Abstract

A Study of Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* in Terms of its Critics

Assistant Lecturer Saad Mohammed Kadhum Al-Maliky

Lecturer Dr Alaa Abdul-Hussein Hashim and

Department of English

College of Education

University of Basrah

In spite of the fairly consistent claims that it is one of Dickens's least popular novels since its publication 157 years ago, *Hard Times* has provoked a surprisingly diverse and rich series of responses from reviewers and critics. *Hard Times* has also engaged the serious attention, not just of professional academics and journalists, but of a series of influential writers and thinkers. However, it is arguably also one of the least understood of Dickens's major works, and is uncertainly poised between the poles of the widely adopted 'early Dickens' vs. 'late, dark Dickens' paradigm. Although as a history it can appear to construct a continuous narrative and give a sense of a conscious tradition, on closer inspections gaps and aporiae emerge. Therefore, this study reviews and sums up the prominent critical opinions on the novel since it was first published up to modern times showing the fluctuation and diversity of these opinions. Thus, the study presents a new evaluation of the novel.

A Study of Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* in Terms of its Critics

It seems that recent approaches and critiques of Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* continue to struggle to offer multidimensional and truly comprehensive appraisals. Yet, given orthodox criticism's failure to resolve some of the central issues, it may nevertheless be helpful to begin by looking at two of the most substantial analyses of the novel to be published in the last few years. From these we proceed through crucial interventions within the novel's critical history, coming back eventually to the present.

Mel Bayley's 2007 article in *BHSM Bulletin* shows an approach tightly focused on the issue of statistics; Catherine Gallagher, meanwhile, in her influential chapter on *Hard Times* in *The Body Economic* (2006) is centred on the relationship between Dickens's view and those of crucial veins of economical and political thinking in the late-eighteenth and early-to-mid-nineteenth centuries. Their writing is closely focused, in the broadest sense, on *Hard Times'* relation to the work of Victorian science.

Mel Bayley chooses *Hard Times* as a model novel to study in relation to her wider investigation on the relations between mathematics and literature in the nineteenth century.[1] Statistics in *Hard Times* are not the kind of continental probability theory of the statistics of Adolphe Quetelet (1796-1874) but rather 'the mundane facts and figures of the much more prosaic English statistical movement' (p. 92). Critics have been mistaken in the knowledge of statistics that may be attributed to Dickens, Bayley maintains, and 'credit Dickens with a better understanding of contemporary mathematics than he in fact possessed' (p. 92).

In Germany, statistics includes an element of 'political inquiry', and this elemnt functions so as to bring to the English idea of 'statistics' the concept of future improvement (ibid.).

The two decades up to the writing of *Hard Times* had seen huge development in English statistics matching the country's fast-paced industrial advances. Bayley notes that during the period of writing *Hard Times*, a 'massive expansion of statistical knowledge' was duly associated with 'prolonged industrial unrest' so that 'the word "statistics" had become synonymous with Gradgrind's facts' (p. 97). The English (as opposed to Continental) development of statistics became "synonymous with quantitative accumulation of fact" and the "empirical arm of political economy" (p. 101).

Bayley notes therefore, that in *Hard Times* 'the gathering of social and industrial statistics is pointless' given the mysteries of motivation within even the individual spirit, relating this with the retrospective analysis of G. H. Lewes in the 1870s, who saw 'the century's fascination with numerical representation as eclipsing the deeper moral issues that the facts and figures masked' (p. 93). To this extent, a keynote passage in the novel is the conversation between Tom Gradgrind and his father:

> "If a thunderbolt had fallen on me," said the father, "it would have shocked me less than this!"

[1] Mel Bayley, 'Hard Times and Statistics', *BSHM Bulletin*, 22 (2007), 92-103.

> "I don't see why," grumbled the son. "So many people are employed in situations of trust; so many people, out of many, will be dishonest. I have heard you talk a hundred times, of its being a law. How can *I* help laws? You have comforted others with such things, father. Comfort yourself!"[2]

Bayley is curiously anxious, however, to emphasise that while this deeply ironic passage in the novel might appear to deal with the fallacy of 'statistical determinism,' it is in fact rooted in the mindset of the insurance industry – an 'actuarial one' ─ and does not necessarily display 'any special knowledge of statistical determinism' (p. 96). Instead, Dickens more vaguely 'uses the words statistics, arithmetic, facts, figures, tabular statement, calculation and mathematics interchangeably, and sees them all as a manifestation of government intervention, which he resists' (ibid.). This is because, in Bayley's chronology, 'statistical determinism,' or, what is sometimes referred to as 'statistical fatalism was a deterministic way of thinking that came to prevalence in Britain in the late 1850s,' significantly after the writing of *Hard Times* (p. 99). It was only popularized via Henry Buckle's *The History of Civilization in England* (1857) (p. 101), which promoted the work of Adolphe Quetelet, the Belgian statistician: 'the result of Buckle's fatalistic interpretation of Quetelet's statistical laws was an explosion of determinism from 1857 onwards' (p. 102). However, while Bayley may in a sense have proven that Dickens could not have been explicitly working in *Hard Times* in response to Quetelet's ideas and 'statistical fatalism' in that narrow historical definition, the argument does not follow that Dickens's broader case – like Lewes's – against the inappropriate application of statistically-derived evidence to matters of moral motivation, is ineffectually or vaguely expressed in *Hard Times*. As a result, the essay as a whole does not seem to get to grips with the scope of the novel, and the final synthesis seems narrowly and somewhat uncritically articulated: 'if you can't give the people bread and circuses, Dickens is saying, at least give them circuses, because if you don't, if you let them live of statistics alone, they will rise up against you when you least expect it' (pp. 102-3).

Nevertheless, we have at least seen how Dickens's response to statistics brings into play such crucial aspects of the novel as education, fact-finding, government 'knowledge', moral discrimination and the wider science of political economy in the mid-Victorian era. This is Catherine Gallagher's starting point in reappraising the famous opening description of Coketown,[3] and noting how Dickens's narrator 'gives us a dry and schematic premise [. . .] made of figures almost as abstract as those of the despised statisticians' (p. 62):

---

[2] pp. 215-16 (book III, chapter 8); All references to *Hard Times* are to page numbers in *Hard Times*, ed. by George Ford and Sylvère Monod (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1966).

[3] Catherine Gallagher, '*Hard Times* and the Somaeconomics of the Early Victorians', in *The Body Economic* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 62-85.

> It was a town of red and black like the painted face of a savage. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled. It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of building [. . . .] Where the pistons of steam-engine worked monotonously up and down like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness. It contains several large streets all very like one another, and many small streets still more like one another, 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 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.[4]

This excerpt reflects the melancholy of the setting of the novel and this 'melancholy is created by the labored tedium of the paragraph's rhythms' and the tedious repetitions of 'it was', 'It was', 'It had', 'It contained' (p. 63). For Gallagher, *Hard Times* may deal with many of the following issues: 'factory hours, low wages, child labor, dangerous machinery, unsanitary housing and neighborhoods, pollution, unemployment, class conflict, unsympathetic masters' but 'the most pervasive problem' is 'labor itself in its repetitious invariability'; Gallagher continues, 'monotonous work by itself makes people unhappy' because 'they are incessantly working' (pp. 62-63).

From this perspective, *Hard Times* emerges as neither a precise satirical attack on the Benthamite Utilitarian school[5] and political economists, nor as particularly representative of Thomas Carlyle[6] to whom the novel was dedicated. Indeed, Gallagher goes further to detect considerable confusion in the aim of Dickens's satire, in presenting the workfulness of Coketown as unremittingly melancholy: 'was all of this lost on Dickens when he so completely bent the logics of Benthamism and Carlylism that he attributed the latter's gospel of work and disregard for happiness to the former?' (p. 67).

The sequence of contemporary critical reviews summed up below in fact documents a variety of surprisingly negative responses to the achievement of the fiction, though not necessarily – in the researcher's opinion ─ on stronger grounds than those of the very recent contributors. The majority of these reviews are excerpted in Sylvia Manning's *Hard Times: An Annotated Bibliography* (1984).

---

[4] p. 17 (Bk. I, Chap. 5)

[5] Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), English Philosopher, early exponent of utilitarianism in *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789). He taught that government should consider the greatest good for the greatest number.

[6] Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) Scottish writer who believed in divinely-informed hero, which was expressed in his book *French Revolution 1837.*

One of the first reviews of *Hard Times* to appear was in the *Athenaeum.*[7] Although the review is very short, it demonstrates the desire to focus as minutely as possible on the limitations and flaws of the novel or the novelist whereas the *British Quarterly Review*[8] argued that there are many faults that are common to Dickens's authorship which are 'one-sidedness and exaggeration'. 'Bounderby, as a representative of his class, is "falsehood and calumny". Gradgrind is similarly 'over-drawn' (p. 38). Dickens's characters, the reviewer complains, are not deep-rooted in their religious convictions (ibid).

South London Athenaeum and Institution Magazine's reviewer[9] found the novel 'thoroughly' disappointing because its apparent themes – the Preston strike issues, utilitarianism, divorce – are 'imperfectly developed' (p. 38). It serves as nothing more, ultimately, than a 'domestic tale' and as such, it is 'ill-constructed'. Stephen Blackpool, the Coketown factory hand, suffers from 'merciless curtailing' and the reviewer believes that Dickens does not criticise the divorce laws sufficiently or powerfully enough (pp. 38-39).

Yet the conclusion of the novel found 'a sort of hollow praise' in the November 1854 review in *Graham's Magazine*, at the end of a longer catalogue of quibbles:[10] Dickens 'evidently was tired himself of his materials, and huddled them up to a conclusion long before his original intention' (p. 39.). 'There is more caricature, more repetition, more painful striving after effect, more dullness, and less geniality of sentiment and humor, in this novel than in any of his previous efforts' (pp. 39-40). Nevertheless, the account concludes: 'Yet it contains, with all its faults, enough genius to make a reputation, and it is calculated to impress the reader all the more with the author's great powers' (p. 40).

In her much longer overview article for *Blackwood's Magazine*,[11] Margaret Oliphant criticises 'the shifting from the labour/capital question to the lame and impotent conclusion of the education theme' (p. 40) with its unconvincing portrayal of Gradgrind's change of mindset. Her judgment, though expressed quite haughtily, at least coincides with some of the puzzlement of twentieth-century critics with the novel's apparent shifts of gear and target. However, as is common even during the period of the so-called 'Higher Criticism' of the mid-century, it disturbs at times in its ability to turn personal. The varied theses of the novel, inconsistent as they may be, are at one point baldly described as 'the petulant theory of a man in a world of his own making, where he has no fear of being contradicted' (p. 40).

---

[7] 'Our Library Table *Hard Times* for These Times'. *Athenaeum*, 12 August 1854, p. 992.
[8] '*Hard Times*', *British Quarterly Review*, 20 (October 1854), 581-82.
[9] '*Hard Times*', *South London Athenaeum and Institution Magazine*, October 1854, pp. 115-19.
[10] *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens', *Graham's Magazine*, 45 (November 1845), 493.
[11] [Margaret Oliphant], 'Charles Dickens'. *Blackwood's Magazine*, 77 (April 1855), 451-66.

Such a summary obviously neglects minor details, and may not be wholly representative. However, it will hopefully indicate shortcomings at the commencement of *Hard Times*'s critical history as well as at its close.

*

This section contrasts in more detail two influential early views of *Hard Times*, both by significant intellectuals. They seem to set up straightaway a dichotomy that often surfaces in the critical tradition between positive and negative appraisals. The first is a review of the book by Richard Simpson[12] ; the second is John Ruskin's allusion to the novel in his 1860 lecture 'The Roots of Honour'.[13]

Simpson summarizes the plot selectively and subjectively, focusing on the fate of Stephen Blackpool as both a social and political issue, i.e. on Stephen as working-class and on his desire to divorce his drunken wife. When he goes to see Bounderby to ask for help in divorcing his wife, Bounderby lets him know bluntly that divorce is only for the rich, and Simpson notes acerbically his and 'Mr Dickens' disgust [that] neither death nor the laws will divorce him' (p. 333). Simpson reminds us of the idea of agricultural development embodied in the titles of each book of *Hard Times* (Sowing, Reaping, and Garnering) when he rehearses some aspects of the plot.

> Simpson sets up a powerful binary between amusement and instruction:
>
> > It is a thousand pities that Mr Dickens does not confine himself to amusing his readers, instead of wandering out of his depth in trying to instruct them. The one, no man can do better; the other, few men can do worse. With all his quickness of perception, his power of seizing salient points and surface-shadows, he has never shown any ability to pierce the depth of social life, to fathom the wells of social action. (p. 333)

This criticism, made so early and so concisely, seems a powerful anticipation of John Holloway's critique over a century later (see below). In effect Simpson is demanding of Dickens that he maintains just one style right through from his first novel *Pickwick Papers* (1836) to *Hard Times* (1854): 'Here and there we meet with touches not unworthy of the inventor of Pickwick' (ibid.). Simpson's nostalgia for *Pickwick* may be what distorts his view of the lack of depth of real social life and action in the novel. In effect he notes the different kinds of genres in *Hard Times*: 'The story is stale, flat, and unprofitable; a mere dull melodrama, in which character is caricature, sentiment tinsel, and the moral (if any) unsound' (ibid.). Of course his first words here are from Shakespeare, and perhaps unconsciously he seems to be seeking a phrase to convey the gloom of

[12] Richard Simpson, *Rambler*, 2 (1854), 361-2
[13] John Ruskin, 'The Roots of Honour', *Cornhill Magazine*, 2 (August 1860), 155-9

the novel's atmosphere, by characterizing Dickens's vision via Hamlet's words. He surely believes that Dickens, like Hamlet, looks at the world with melancholic eyes. Simpson expects that the novel should hold up a mirror to life, and when it does not do this, he finds it lacking.

The views of John Ruskin (1819-1900), art critic and social critic, could hardly be more different. In 'The Roots of Honour', his writing on political economy bears a resemblance to Thomas Carlyle's thoughts, his 'rejection of social and aesthetic arrangements under capitalism and his [preference] for those of the Middle Ages' (p. 395). His essay is explicitly an attack on political economy, and implicitly on Utilitarianism that are arguably two of the most important issues in *Hard Times*, Ruskin claims that political economists are deluded, satirically making the political economist condemn himself through his own words. Human beings are presented by this persona, as machines motivated by 'avarice and desire of progress'; later on, Ruskin's paraphrase comforts us, we can adjust the machines for the 'accidentals' like social affections (ibid.). In his own voice, Ruskin then argues that we cannot presuppose these mechanical motives and then add on the soul later because the soul and affections of the heart are not accidental but fundamental. The most interesting part of the essay is manifestly its famous footnote:

> The essential value and truth of Dickens's writings have been unwisely lost sight of by many thoughtful persons, merely because he presents his truth with some colour of caricature. Unwisely, because Dickens's caricature, though often gross, is never mistaken. Allowing for his manner of telling them, the things he tells us are always true. I wish that [. . .] when he takes up a subject of high national importance, such as that he handled in *Hard Times*, that he would use severer and more accurate analysis. The usefulness of that work (to my [Ruskin's] mind, in several respects the greatest he has written) is with many persons seriously diminished because Mr Bounderby is a dramatic monster, instead of a characteristic example of a worldly master; and Stephen Blackpool a dramatic perfection, instead of a characteristic example of an honest workman. But let us not lose the use of Dickens's wit and insight, because he chooses to speak in a circle of stage fire. He is entirely right in his main drift and purpose in every book he has written; and all of them, but especially *Hard Times*, should be studied with close and earnest care by persons interested in social questions. They will find much that is partial, and, because partial, apparently unjust; but if they examine all the evidence on the other side, which Dickens seems to overlook, it will appear, after all their trouble, that his view was the finally right one, grossly and sharply told. (p. 399)

Ruskin thus sets up, for the purposes of his continuing discussion, an alternative model for good industrial relations between masters and men, claiming that the social affections need and must be cultivated, not for any ulterior motive or purpose beyond their fundamental rightness. Ruskin offers an extended summary of the moral values of *Hard Times* in political economic terms, and in so far as industrial relations are concerned.

*

After Dickens's death in 1870, critically, assessments tended to be cumulative and holistic; *Hard Times* fades from view to a large extent. Nevertheless, its treatment in John Forster's biography needs brief mention in terms of late nineteenth-century views. Forster begins discussing *Hard Times* as a 'story written by him for his weekly periodical'.[14] The initial focus is in terms of the pressure that writing a weekly serial put on Dickens's naturally diffused style: an approach which Anne Humpherys's recent essay has pursued with notable success:

> [The] schematic structure in its simplicity may seem a weakness to twenty-first-century readers. But the issues that it articulates so efficiently, coherently, and powerfully are still very much a part of our lives: repression and abuse of children, the unintended consequences of abstract theories of child-rearing, the persistence of unsafe and unrewarding work, education made dull and useless by rote and drill, social and political decisions based on general ideological principle rather than on individual human needs, mistaken and mercenary marriages and their consequences, and the healing power of love and pleasure and art. The clarity and intensity of these persistent human issues continue to resonate in *Hard Times*.[15]

Although Forster quotes Ruskin's encomium (the footnote) in its entirety, he supports it with only lukewarm words, conceding that 'it is a wise hint of Mr Ruskin's that there may be, in the drift of a story, truths of sufficient importance to set against defects of workmanship'.

In 1877, Edwin P. Whipple's *Atlantic Monthly* review[16] argues ad hominem that the author of *Hard Times* 'was evidently in an embittered state of mind in respect to social and political questions' (p. 315). He claims that

---

[14] John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens* 1852-1870, p. 47.

[15] Anne Humpherys, '*Hard Times*', in *A Companion to Charles Dickens*, ed. by David Paroissien (Oxford: Blackwell Publication, 2008), p. 399.

[16] Whipple, Edwin P., review of *Hard Times*, *Atlantic Monthly*, 39 (1877), 353-58

Dickens is in revolt against the demonstrated laws of political economy in terms of distribution of wealth, and commits the 'intellectually discreditable' error of challenging these laws because his 'mind was so deficient in the power of generalization' (ibid). It seems that an artificial distinction is drawn between Dickens as a dramatist – 'creator of character' – and as a satirist. As a dramatist, he is 'always tolerant and many sided' but 'as satirist he is always intolerant and one-sided' (p. 316). Whipple disagrees with Ruskin; sees the whole effect of the novel as 'ungenial and unpleased' and has presented the relations between employers and employees as 'a hopeless "muddle" (p. 317). Finally, with an odd kind of conditional, Whipple concedes that if he could forget Adam Smith, Ricardo, and John Stuart Mill and look at Dickens as 'a humorous satirist profoundly disgusted with prominent evil of his day', then he will 'warmly praise the book as one of the most perfect of its kind' (p. 320). We will never know if he did.

*

Gilbert Keith Chesterton (1874–1936) is always a force to be dealt with in Dickens criticism. Chesterton's Preface to the novel, collected in *Criticisms & Appreciations of the Work of Charles Dickens* (1911), sets up characteristic binaries between 'religion and politics', 'sentimental hospitality' and 'narrow political conviction', 'narrow radicalism' and the 'broad fireside', 'real conviction and real charity' (p. 169), between Dickens as 'lover' and Dickens as 'fighter' (p. 170). Chesterton considers Dickens a judge who recognizes who bears guilt and who is to be excused; he is 'always generous', 'generally kind-hearted', 'often sentimental', and 'sometimes intolerably maudlin' (p. 170).

Chesterton presents *Hard Times* as a tale that offers Dickens's sternness in strict isolation from his softness. But, although it may be 'bitter', it was a 'protest against bitterness'; it may be 'dark', but it is 'the darkness of the subject and not of the author' (ibid.). He claims that *Hard Times* is Dickens's harshest novel as well as the only work in which Dickens did not remind us of 'human happiness by example as well as by precept', 'even his sympathy is hard' (ibid.). Dickens would later publish novels which are 'better' than the one at hand and written in a sadder tone but 'it is as hard and as high as any precipice or peak of the mountains. The highest and hardest of these peaks is *Hard Times*' (ibid).

In light of the French Revolution's impact upon the English, Chesterton believes that the English people interpret democracy totally in terms of liberty and care little as to whether they get any equality or any fraternity (p.174). In this respect, Chesterton believes that such views violate 'the sacred trinity of true politics' (ibid.). But nevertheless Dickens was:

> [a] real Liberal demanding the return of real Liberalism. Dickens was there to remind people that English had rubbed out two words of the revolutionary motto, had left only Liberty and destroyed Equality and Fraternity. (p. 175)

Using a paradoxical, epigrammatic style, Chesterton makes Dickens an almost supernatural force: 'the one living link between the old kindness and the new, between the good will of the past and the good works of the future. He links May Day with Bank Holiday, and he does it almost alone'; Dickens is the only tongue that spoke out for 'a more humane and hilarious view of democracy' (p. 176).

In a Preface to an edition of Dickens's novels, George Bernard Shaw (makes explicit reference back to Ruskin's judgment: [17] 'John Ruskin once declared *Hard Times* Dickens's best novel. [. . .] Ruskin meant that *Hard Times* was one of his special favourites among Dickens's books. Was this the caprice of fancy? or is there any rational explanation of the preference? I think there is' (p. 125). Shaw glories in presenting Dickens as a revolutionary in the tradition of (actually a rather strange grouping): Karl Marx, Carlyle, Ruskin, Morris, and Carpenter, who suddenly in this book 'rise[s] up against civilization itself as against a disease, and declare[s] that it is not our disorder but our order that is horrible; that it is not our criminals but our magnates that are robbing and murdering us' (pp. 127-128).

Hard Times is thus a turning point and a great 'conversion novel' and so Shaw provides an answer to Richard Simpson's nostalgia for the age of *Pickwick*:

> You must therefore resign yourself, if you are reading Dickens's books in the order in which they were written, to bid adieu now to the light-hearted and only occasionally indignant Dickens of the earlier books, and get such entertainment as you can from him now. (p. 128)

For the book was written 'to make you uncomfortable; and it will make you uncomfortable (and serve you right) though it will perhaps interest you more, and certainly leave a deeper scar on you, than any two of its forerunners' (p. 130).

Shaw cites the way in which Bounderby is continually portrayed in one scene as drumming hard upon his hat, and Dickens's final outlandish simile 'Mr

[17] G. Bernard Shaw, 'Hard Times' [1912], in *The Dickens Critics*, ed. George H. Ford and Lauriat Lane (New York: Cornell University Press, 1961), p.p. 125-35.

Bounderby put his tambourine on his head, like an oriental dancer' (p. 131). Shaw comments of this kind of embellishment when it is taken to extremes: 'it must be admitted that it is not only not entertaining, but sometimes hardly bearable when it does not make us laugh' (p. 131). Nevertheless, like most critics to date, Shaw is prepared to detect weaknesses of craftsmanship, whilst admiring the courage of the assault on government: there are two artistic failures in the novel, Cissy and the trade unionist Slackbridge, the latter: 'a mere figment of the middle-class imagination. No such man would be listened to by a meeting of English factory hands' (pp. 131-2).

*

F. R. Leavis's 'Analytic Note' [18] is a landmark piece of writing which highlights pioneering merits of Dickens in relation to *Hard Times*, and seeks to institute a revival in its critical fortunes. Leavis suggests the novel is a 'masterpiece'. Leavis seems to show Dickens as a self-conscious, skilled, and deliberate novelist, 'a major artist' (p. 251). He considers *Hard Times* to be a remarkable novel because it achieves a coherent whole, its moral fable matched by its creative exuberance, and the satiric irony of the first two chapters displaying a brilliant drawing together of melodrama, pathos, and humour (p. 252). Leavis takes seriously Dickens's philosophical and social judgments of the world in which he lived (p. 253), and this philosophical profundity is matched by the art of the novel, the way it forms a truly dramatic and profoundly poetic whole (p. 255). Leavis takes seriously Dickens's intellectual intent, his attack on Utilitarianism and aspects of contemporary industrial practice (p. 259). He also focuses on the flexibility of Dickens's art (p. 260). The humane aspect in Dickens only occasionally lapses into sentimentality, and this does not seriously impair the novel. Leavis gives us a good example of sentimentality in the depiction of Stephen Blackpool (p. 261). Leavis considers *Hard Times* 'a moral fable [. . .] an essay turned into art' (p. 277) and in this way he attempts to rescue it from the poor quality of criticism it has previously received. Dickens is 'a proud and conscious major artist' (p. 281). In fact, the words 'art' and 'artist' come up again and again in Leavis's argument, as he seeks to establish that Dickens's writing is not inspired by simple or unrefined emotional or psychological drives, nor by the desire merely to entertain.

Leavis is threatened by the notion that Dickens might be seen as a mere 'entertainer', and he is mainly concerned to establish Dickens as a self-conscious artist of high order — particularly so in the striking passage where he

[18] F. R. Leavis, '*Hard Times:* An Analytic Note' *The Great Tradition* (1948) repr. as '*Hard Times*: The World of Bentham', in *The Dickens the Novelist* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), p.p. 251-81.

compares Dickens with Flaubert: 'Dickens, we know, was a popular entertainer, but Flaubert never wrote anything approaching this in subtlety of achieved art. Dickens, of course, has a vitality that we don't look for in Flaubert' (p. 272). He does concede one significant area of weakness in the novel, in the depiction of Stephen Blackpool and of Trade Unionism (pp. 273-74), but he quickly glosses this over. So, there see a paradox in Leavis's viewpoint in p. 261: Leavis says that Stephen Blackpool's role is sentimental in the novel, on the other hand he seems happy to see Blackpool as a real martyr. It seems that he wants to insert *Hard Times* into the tradition of high art he so admires. His essay sets up an insistent binary between '[high] art' and '[mere] entertainment'. Here, we disagree particularly with Leavis's structuring of this binary and how it lies at the heart of his whole view of the novel. But it partly seems a response to the novel itself and Dickens's own widespread use of binary oppositions. The novel, of course, is full of oppositions. Here is a simple list for clarity: (fact and fancy); (agricultural time and natural time); (Horse-riding and Gradgrind's school); (Mr and Mrs Gradgrind); (emotion versus rationality); (Louisa and Bounderby); (Bitzer and Sissy); (workers union's interpretation of strike and Blackpool's); (workers and owners of factories); and (the intellectual idea of Gradgrind at the beginning of the novel and at the end of it). The novel's use of binaries is highly creative, but Leavis's repeated use of the binary of 'art' versus 'entertainment' seems in comparison quite static and narrow.

This leads through to a final point: how Leavis's reading is focused on morality and aesthetics and rather quickly turns aside from history and politics. This is clearest in those parts of the essay where Leavis quickly marginalizes the parts of the novel he finds unsatisfying: notably Stephen Blackpool and the treatment of Trade Unionism, which he discusses in cursory terms. This relative marginalizing of history and politics is something later treatments of the novel would fully reconsider.

*

The strongest counter-attack to Leavis came in 1962, with John Holloway's 'Hard Times: A History and a Criticism'.[19] Holloway aimed at disproving Leavis's interpretation of Dickens's understanding of society: where Leavis saw a profound 'work of art', a real and living critique of Utilitarianism, Holloway saw something much shallower, a 'moral fable' that was not directed from a 'fundamental' or totally grounded perspective. According to Holloway, Dickens neither fully understands nor properly presents Utilitarianism, indeed

[19] John Holloway, 'Hard Times: A History and a Criticism', in *Dickens and the Twentieth Century*, ed. by John Gross and Gabriel Pearson (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), pp. 159-74.

‘the ideas and attitudes which that word [Utilitarian] most readily calls up today prove not to be those which were most prominent in Dickens’s own mind or own time’ (p. 159). Dickens is not really taking up fully what Utilitarianism was in his own time, but only the narrow effects of one kind of statistical mindset, ‘the often naïve enthusiasm of the early nineteenth-century for undigested statistics of economics and social advance’ (p. 160).

Holloway argues that Dickens is only really dealing with one part of the Utilitarian mindset, its concern with statistics and mathematical formulae, and that he does not address it as a wide and ‘ambitious philosophical theory’ (p. 159). He supports this view by quoting the letter written by Dickens to Charles Knight, regarding the issues in the novel: ‘My satire is against those who see *figures and averages, and nothing else* ─ the representative of the wickedest and most enormous vice of this time’ (p. 162). Dickens, for Holloway, is narrowly concerned with just one possible aspect of Utilitarianism, ‘the world of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division’ which he rejects (p. 167) and not with any more rounded or fundamental critique. Holloway disagrees with Dickens’s idea of the circus – the circus as the world of mathematical symbols – because, Holloway thinks, this alternative is ‘outside the major realities of the social situation’ (pp. 167-8). Essentially he is accusing Dickens of misunderstanding his own age and seeing him as a superficially angry person with conventional tastes and limited cultural appreciation. His criticism is strong and stark: Dickens’s critique in *Hard Times*, against Gradgrind’s views, amounts to no more than the idea that ‘all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy’ based on Dickens’s assumption that the English were ‘the hardest-worked people on whom the sun shines’ (p. 168).

Holloway acknowledges the extent to which Leavis has shifted critical opinion on *Hard Times*, that it now has a high reputation, but he is still concerned that Dickens appears as bourgeois, ─ ‘the middle-class Philistine’, in his dealings with and descriptions of certain levels of society (pp. 165-70). Now the ─ ‘moral fable’ ─ impression is really a limitation on the novel’s achievement, not one of its strengths; it actually constrains Dickens as an artist.

*

Through the mid-twentieth century, Dickens’s critical reputation was rising generally, but at the same time the practice of criticism was devising new complexities and ways of subdividing itself: amongst vigorous debate across the Atlantic critics.

T. A. Jackson[20] finds in *Hard Times* a 'ferocious frontal attack' upon 'Manchester school economists' that certainly appealed to his marked Leftist views (p.143). Jackson's binaries have a distinct Marxist ring: masters and men in the novel are the 'bourgeoisie and the proletariat' (p. 145). Other classes are parasites: Mrs Sparsit lives 'as a decorative-parasite upon the vulgarly brutal exploiter, Bounderby' whereas Mr Harthouse is a parasite 'upon the Bounderby-Gradgrind class' (p. 146). And then Dickens creates another set of parasites who feed off the suffering and exploited proletariat ─ 'the demagogic agitators'─ who represent the corrupt trade union or an 'aggravation of evil' (p. 146). Dickens has a revolution in sight as great as 'the French Revolution'(p. 147).Jackson's response to the novel seems Marxit.

Edmund Wilson, [21] has little to say about the novel other than that in *Hard Times* Dickens engaged 'sympathetically with proletariat protest against intolerable industrial conditions but at the same time' he cannot support Trade Unionism (pp. 19-20). Stephen Blackpool, the honest worker who attempts to reconcile some struggles between the employers and the employed, is thus held powerless between three stronger forces: Bounderby (his master), society (the trade union and its organizers) and Rachael (his high-principled friend and mentor). Between them he finds himself so hopeless and unable to assert himself that he becomes an indecisive martyr (p. 20). Without further pinpointing the solution, Wilson emphasise the suffering and the despair: 'Ay, Rachael, lass, awlus a muddle'.[22]

Humphrey House, whose knowledge of the range of Dickens's work (letters, pamphlets, speeches, poems and journalism) seems very wide[23] notes how in the 'early fifties [of the nineteenth-century] the idea of muddle is spreading over wider and wider social fields' (p. 203). House disproves that 'the most common general explanation of the book's failure is that Dickens was writing of people and things quite outside the range of his own experience' (pp. 203-4). Rather, he is able to contend that *'Hard Times* is one of Dickens's most thought-about books' because Dickens's novels in the fifties show 'a greater complication of plot than before' and he is using them 'as a vehicle of more concentrated sociological argument' and indeed, throughout 'all his journalism' Dickens engaged much more in thinking through 'social problems' (p. 205). In the 1850s such topics of national discussion as 'Public Health' and 'Administrative Reform' made Dickens determined to get to grips with 'social-

[20] T. A. Jackson, *Charles Dickens*: *The Progress of a Radical* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1937), pp. 143-7.
[21] Edmund Wilson, 'Dickens: The Two Scrooges', in *The Wound and the Bow* (London: Methuen & co, 1961), pp. 19-20.
[22] p. 51 (book I, chapter 10)
[23] Humphrey House, *The Dickens World* (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1941), pp. 203-14.

political problems', so 'the creation of Gradgrind [. . .] the only major Dickens character who is meant to be an "intellectual" [. . .] is an attempt to track [. . .] down' the origins of national failings, and this leads to 'the despondent atmosphere of the whole book' because in turn it 'reflects the failure to do so' (pp. 205-6). In so far as 'this atmosphere is concentrated in Stephen Blackpool' (p. 205), House's position is ultimately quite similar to Wilson's: Blackpool finding himself in an environment where everything is organized against him (workplace, home and society) (p. 206).

Yet House is able to go some way further, and claim persuasively that in *Hard Times* Dickens's aim is to reduce the abuse of 'the principle of individual right' and to develop 'individualistic political ideas towards some kind of collectivism' (p. 212). House seems not to use any terminology too clearly inflected with the great political struggle of his day (Fascism vs. Socialism).

J. Hillis Miller, in a book that deliberately builds from House's title towards a new postmodern critical concern with textuality and the inner life of words,[24] supports that *Hard Times* offers 'a broad picture of all levels of society and their interactions' and it is 'concerned with the conflict between two forms of relationship: relation to society, and direct, intimate relation to other individuals' (p. 225). He maintains that *Hard Times*, for these times proves that 'society turns out to be a fraud' and 'the relation to society breaks beneath the pressure put on it by the individual, and reveals its nonentity' so 'against this destructive relation Dickens sets an increasingly profound analysis of the mystery of a direct relation between two people without intermediary: the relation of love' (p. 226).

Thus, in *Hard Times* Dickens plays a significant role in showing the formula between soul-destroyed relation to a utilitarian, industrial civilization and the reciprocal interchange of love (p. 226). In order to fully understand the first side of this formula we have to examine the men in the Coketown mills or factories who become like the machines with which they work or whose machines have reduced them into Hands as well as the second side which can be represented by exploring the language of the 'horse-riding' and the circus (p. 226). We are starting to discover through Hillis Miller the extraordinary life and potency of Dickens's rhetoric, and his gymnastic use of language as a basis for textual deconstruction.

*

Monroe Engel's major study for *PMLA* of December 1957[25] provides a comprehensive and distinctive analysis of Dickens's political standpoints by

[24] J. Hillis Miller, *Charles Dickens the World of his Novels* (1958), pp. 225-7.
[25] Monroe Engel, 'The Political of Dickens' Novels', *PMLA*, 71 (Dec., 1956), 945-974.

deriving them not exclusively from the novels, but by an attempt to induce the politics which must underlie the novels through a study of the opinions revealed in his letters, essays and the periodicals he conducted. Engel stresses that Dickens uses imagination as the only force that can change individual self-interest into common self-interest. For example, in the case of Louisa: 'the birth of her imaginative powers is accompanied by a growing realization of and sympathy for the condition of the poor' (pp. 172-4). However, the lack of fancy in Louisa's childhood makes it impossible for her to approach the scene of her mother's deathbed with full feeling or to respond appropriately in the scene of James Harthouse's attempted seduction. The great virtues of the novel are imagination and fancy which are incidental virtues but they are 'absolutely essential to its impact' (p. 175).

In his 1970's essay[26] Raymond Williams discuses how Dickens addresses Utilitarianism and the fact that really Dickens shared attitudes and ideals with aspects of the Utilitarian agenda, which was, after all, at its best, a reforming and progressive movement. He is making a clear distinction, in other words, not wanting us to see Dickens's attack on Utilitarianism in simplistic terms:

> What can readily be separated as contradictory ideas were in fact combined, as so often in real history, by the urgent and overriding interests of a class. I think that in *Hard Times* Dickens penetrated this contradiction, not analytically but in an act of emotional and substantial recoil and revulsion. He attacked the ideas, that is to say, as part of a more general attack on that practical combination of rationality and exploitation which dominated life in England and which was directly creating new kinds of distress and abuse even while it was reforming many inherited abuses and muddles. (p. 90)

In the end, Williams wants to locate Dickens as a warm-hearted liberal, his liberalism growing out of 'Romantic humanism' (p. 97). He is part of 'liberalism in its most general and heroic phase' (ibid). The implicit conclusion, however, is that Dickens was not a real radical nor Marxist.

Warrington Winters's innovative psycho-biographical reading presents a striking contrast to the critical approaches identified to date.[27] Winters classifies the characters of *Hard Times* into four classes: the industrial middle class (Bounderby, Gradgrind and his two children, Louisa and Tom); the working

---

[26] Raymond Williams, 'Dickens and Social Ideas', in *Dickens 1970,* ed. by Michael Slater (London: Chapman and Hall; New York: Stein and Day, 1970), pp. 77-97.

[27] Warrington Winters, 'Dickens's Hard Times; The Lost Childhood', *Dickens Studies Annual,* 2 (1972), 217-36.

class (Slackbridge, Blackpool, his wife and his girlfriend Rachael); the 'show business' class (Sleary, the clown Jupe, Sissy Jupe and Master Kidderminster) and the upper class (James Harthouse and Mrs Sparsit) (p. 217). He wants us to see the successes and weaknesses of the novel as rooted in how much of Dickens' childhood and his own concerns with his failing marriage are implicitly and unconsciously filtered into the novel: 'the critics have almost universally ignored the autobiographical matrix of this novel' (p. 219).

In terms of Dickens's childhood, Winters proclaims that there are many commonalities between Dickens's sense of loss and trauma in his own childhood and what his characters suffer in their childhoods. For example, the child Bounderby (p. 221), Louisa and Tom (pp. 225–6), and Stephen Blackpool (p. 230). Winters' main concern is to show that there is a significant correlation between these three aspects of the novel: the author, the characters, and the themes. Dickens sees similarities between his characters and himself regarding the loss of childhood. In doing so, Dickens may be right or wrong but this is besides the point. The point is he is writing compulsively, bringing aspects of his own early trauma into his relationship as narrator with some of the characters in the novel; hence, the overt antipathies. Both Bounderby and Dickens, for example, 'seemed to rise from rags to riches by means of a tremendous application of genuine, utilitarian self-interest. [. . .] The most striking resemblance between Bounderby and Dickens lies in their bitter relationships with their mothers' (p. 221). The narrator's antipathy to Tom Gradgrind may be rooted in his feelings about his own son Charles, and 'Louisa and Dickens are equally the victims of a lost childhood. It is true that Dickens' lost childhood derived from neglect [. . .] Louisa's from too much misguided attention' (p. 225), but these are the kind of parallels that Winters seeks out. His point in the end is that Dickens, speaking from an autobiographical point of the view, did not have a one-dimensional or simple relationship with 'Fancy'. His own father John Dickens, 'indulgent, good-natured and expansive' (p. 235), was not a safe role model and the trauma of the blacking factory was easily available for those not paying enough attention to 'Fact'. The theme of the novel is influenced by these considerations. So the success or failure of the novel is restricted by the success or failure of the characters who are located by the author as representatives of his own traumatic biography in the way suggested above. Winters believes that the flaw of any character in the novel cannot be attributed to the character *per se* but rather to the author's attitude towards the character. He concludes that 'Dickens's error in planning *Hard Times'* could have been reduced if he had not in effect documented some of his characters so directly from his own life! (p. 236).

*

In the 1980s and early 1990s, two books need to be referred to. These are Sylvia Manning's *Hard Times*: *An Annotated Bibliography* (1984) and Allen Samuels' *Hard Times: An Introduction to the Variety of Criticism* (1992). Manning believes critics in the second half of the century are unanimous that *Hard Times* must be taken seriously. It offers 'abundance of riches', she continues, so much so that 'by 1972, one critic, Thomas J. Robert, includes *Hard Times*, and of Dickens's work, only *Hard Times,* in the rank of *Hamlet*, *Tristam Shandy*, Wordsworth's *Immortality Ode*, [Meredith's] *Modern Love*, and *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, as works that critics readily admit to be great' (p. xvi). Manning notes huge growth in the frequency of references to *Hard Times* in various kind of criticism in the 1960s and 1970s:

> *Hard Times* is examined in the context of novels of social purpose, of condition-of-England novels, of education, of industrialism, of imagination and reason, of serialisation, of dramatic interpretation, of satire, of genres and mixed genres, of narrative structure, of verbal style, of patterns of imagery. (p. xvi)

Thus, it seems that *Hard Times* is important because it offers a humane critique of a society obsessed by ideology, one with no practical solutions to its problems. Dickens's great insight was into how selfishness and the language of the public discourse are deeply connected, but his own society had disagreed with him.

*

Apart from synthetic and retrospective accounts of past trends in criticism, arguably the most important intervention in criticism of *Hard Times* in the 1980s was by the major Marxist critic Terry Eagleton. Eagleton's introduction and 'Critical Commentary'[28] in his Methuen edition of the novel (1987) is a detailed and subtle Marxist analysis, placing Dickens exactly within the Victorian class system as writing from the perspective of the lower middle class, and drawing out the full implications of this and Dickens's wider ideological positions of his mixture of quasi-utilitarian reformism and Romantic humanism. He looks at the relationship between reader, novelist, and novel within a context where he prioritizes the historical, social, and political contexts of the 1850s.

Eagleton's main point of engagement with the novel can be summarized via the following central statement:

[28] Terry Eagleton, 'Critical Commentary', in *Hard Times,* ed. by Terry Eagleton (London and New York: Methuen, 1987), pp. 291-315.

> [T]he novel's attention to the cult of hard fact serves in part to distract its readership from the more fundamental injustice of industrial capitalism as such, for which it has no plausible solution or even any adequate analysis. (p. 292)

This embodies the way he views Dickens as ambivalent in political terms, as a novelist who senses that 'Victorian England is corrupt and exploitative as a system' (p. 2), but who does not really have hard or clear solutions to offer.

In relation to this last point Eagleton sets up many related ideas. So, he says this of Stephen Blackpool: 'the novel invites us to admire a muddled, uncommitted man, rather than one who clear-headedly fights to further his own and others' just interests' (p. 302); and indeed '[Dickens's own] sympathy for the oppressed coexists with a typically middle-class fear of the "mob"' (p. 4); or again, Dickens's 'easy sneers' at Gradgrind's 'blue books' show a lack of seriousness with regard to the real facts and statistics that form the ground-work for real social reform. In this way, in the end, 'the novel's "social" and human texts [. . .] fail fully to mesh with one another' (p. 303). Despite this, Eagleton acknowledges that Dickens is 'the first great urban novelist of English society' who planted the seeds of 'the imaginative habits' and 'modes of perception' in his character of 'urban life' (p. 293). So, *Hard Times* fulfils its task in this regard and these characters act out the roles entrusted to them.

From his perspective as a modern reader and critic, with a clear historicizing outlook, Eagleton concludes that *Hard Times* is a Victorian social and industrial problem novel that does not provide us with solutions to the problems it depicts. This is because 'the radicalism of [Dickens's] social vision [. . .] coexists uneasily with the moderately reformist, respectably middle-class nature of his personal views' (p. 3).

More recently Eagleton has clarified some of his critical beliefs about the novel in his wider study The *English Novel* (2005). In effect, Eagleton suggests that Dickens lampoons himself when he satirizes 'the Utilitarian Gradgrind' because there are common elements to Dickens's and Gradgrind's social views with regard to hard-headed reform (p. 157). In *Hard Times* Dickens raised problems which could be left without resolution, whereas nowadays readers will 'demand resolutions and feel cheated if they [are] not delivered' (p. 161). When Eagleton first wrote about the novel he was writing in the very middle of Mrs Thatcher's premiership, and aspects of his critique, his seeming animosity towards Dickens, may reflect the mood and frustrations of those years from a Leftist perspective.

*

One very notable shift in the criticism of *Hard Times* in the last three decades has been the increasing number of female critics tackling it from a variety of angles: the rise of gynocriticism. Anne Humpherys deals with the issues of the novel from a feminist perspective, especially focusing on the tales of Louisa Gradgrind and Stephen Blackpool. Humpherys' essay[29] sets up an interesting panorama of the theme of mismatched marriages and divorces with the connection to the father-daughter plot. She initially analyses the narrative resemblance between Louisa's tale and that of Beatrice in Nathaniel Hawthorne's 'Rappacini's Daughter' (1844). Humpherys thinks that both Louisa and Beatrice are victims of their fathers' education systems (ibid). In the father-daughter plot there is a conflict between the father's private desires and the daughter's social needs, particularly in the case of the daughter's marriage (p. 178). So the father in the typical 'Western father-daughter narrative' frequently tries to convince his daughter that it would be a rational desire for her to marry a special man, and the daughter's story is the conflict between her social needs and her desire to redeem or please her father (p. 178).

Humpherys' focus is on how relatively repressed Louisa's story and her marriage are within the novel: what do we really know about the inside of Louisa's marriage? Humpherys believes that Louisa's mismatched marriage to Bounderby creates havoc for the men of the novel: her father, her husband, her brother, and Stephen Blackpool (p. 179). In the light of the structure of the novel Louisa's tale forms a set of 'alternatives' and 'contrasts' with Stephen's (p. 182); it lies at the centre of what novel is really about. Humpherys argues that even Louisa's failure to remarry after Bounderby's death 'is a kind of death' which is comparable to Blackpool's death (p. 178).

Rosemarie Bodenheimer's essay[30] focuses on the contrast between the two metaphors of time that are contained explicitly in the volume rather than the weekly periodical form of the novel's publication: mechanical or 'great manufacturer' time, the 'deadly statistical clock', versus natural or agricultural time, the passing of the seasons (p. 339). The latter is a more human time, which allows 'a history of feeling in time' as against aggressively constructed lies and fictions. In this way Dickens attempts to 'delegitimize a ruling form of social government' by showing there is misunderstanding between middle class and working class (pp. 339-4o). *Hard Times* aims at reducing the differences

[29] Anne Humpherys, 'Louisa Gradgrind's Secret: Marriage and Divorce in *Hard Times', Dickens Studies Annual*, 25 (1996), 177-95.

[30] Rosemarie Bodenheimer, 'The Interrupted Stories of *Hard Times', The Politics of Story in Victorian Fiction* (London: Hollington [1995], pp. 339-353).

between them by attacking 'the self-interested fictions through which the middle class imposes its power of social control' (p. 340). In his depiction of trade unionism and of the unsatisfactory sentimental relationship between Blackpool and Rachael, Dickens – in political terms – shares in the middle-class failure to understand the working class (ibid).

Bodenheimer's main concern is with Bounderby: 'Bounderby is the novel's most blatant demonstration of its thesis that fact is really "false fiction" against which the narrator offers the historical truths of story' (p. 346). She considers him as the hub around which the 'interrupted stories' of the plot circulate, for example: 'Sissy's life story sets an emotional history of parental abandonment against Bounderby's made-up and deceitful claim to that same experience' (p. 343). Likewise, Stephen's life history 'contends against Bounderby's reductive way of hearing it, and against middle-class ways of thinking about the working class satirized by the narrator' (ibid). Bounderby plays with Mrs Sparsit 'the game of rich and poor', with Harthouse 'the role of bluff manufacturer to Harthouse's gentleman of good family', and with Gradgrind he sets his ignorance against 'the utilitarian system of education' (p. 345).

It seems then that *Hard Times* might offer 'no shadow of hope' of reconciliation between employers and employees, instead it might offer a bleak social critique of mid-nineteenth-century mindset which is 'an expectedly radical social stance' (p. 351). In light of historical perspective Disraeli and Dickens accepted that to rely on 'the recovery of suppressed material' is 'the special justification of the novel in a political world' (ibid). Disraeli strives to 'save the state' whereas Dickens strives to 'save lives from the state' so that *Hard Times* - at its best - works 'as a fiction that liberates life stories from the rhetorical spells cast by antihistorical fictions of power' (p. 352).

*

In academic journals since 1986, a certain trend against the testing of *Hard Times* against large scale socio-political norms can be detected. Now studies are willing to explore the linguistic and representational economics/system at work in the novel, rather than attempting to pass judgment on its status or greatness.

Patricia Ingham's essay[31] deals with the treatment of dialect in the novel where 'the injustices of industrial society are central' (p. 518). *Hard Times* and Gaskell's *North and South* share in 'a documentary element in their representation of life in an industrial area', based on cotton manufacturing (p.

[31] Patricia Ingham, *Dialect as 'Realism': Hard Times and the Industrial Novel*, *Review of English Studies*, 37 (Nov., 1986), 518-527.

519). Ingham is concerned with the pronunciation and syntax of some words or idioms in *Hard Times* which are not standard English forms, particularly those uttered by industrial workers and the meanings of these words taken from their context (p. 522). Dickens uses Stephen Blackpool's speech as documentary evidence for industrial working dialect (pp. 523-4). In effect Ingham argues that Stephen's influential role in the novel comes to depend on his verbal confrontation with the master, Bounderby (p. 526). She ends her essay with Stephen's phrase: 'Tis a' a muddle', which signifies that he is 'morally and intellectually impoverished' but nevertheless, ironically, that he is 'a likely result of crushing poverty and inequality upon a limited intellect' (p. 527). Katherine Kearns's essay[32] attempts to show the industrial-based realism in *Hard Times* that reflects Dickens's political agenda: 'every character, every turn of the plot, every image has its doubled function as that which most precisely illustrates industrialism's ugly realities and as that which most thoroughly problematizes the notion of realism' (p. 859). She believes that even Dickens has a doubled authorial voice by which he balances 'the generative and therefore unpredictable "female" and the retributive, backward-looking "male"' (p. 861). Therefore, it is not necessary to resolve any dichotomy by which *Hard Times* works; it is crucial that both dichotomies may be true: '[T]he real and the surreal coexist because they are interdependent' (p. 877).

Christina Lupton's article[33] is concerned with the discussion of the Sissy-Bitzer response to the definition of horse, and Sissy's love of flowers in terms of Immanuel Kant's (1724-1804) work on aesthetic judgment: '[T]he subject-driven terms of aesthetic judgment actually do coincide with reason per se,' and 'this Kantian subjectivity does not depend for its validity on this coincidence of reason and feeling' because the subjective judgment may associate with an ostensible 'lack of social purpose' (pp. 151-2). She believes that the distinction between a rational system and fanciful girl indulged within this system is presented neither as antagonistic nor as mutually reinforcing modes of judgment, but rather that it is of 'the highest order of epistemological problems' (p. 152). She sees Sissy's love of carpet flowers may be a valid alternative to the industrial system because Sissy sees that the abstract pictures of flowers are more pleasant than the real flowers in 'the meadows outside Coketown' (pp. 155-6 and p. 158).

The article closes by suggesting several important reasons behind Dickens's distinction between fact and fancy: firstly, in the cases of both Sissy and trade union scenes, Dickens makes 'use of these two epistemological

[32] Katherine Kearns, 'A Tropology of Realism in Hard Times', *ELH*, 59 (Winter, 1992), 857-881.
[33] Christina Lupton, 'Walking on Flowers: The Kantian Aesthetics of "Hard Times"', *ELH*, 70 (Spring, 2003), 151-169.

categories to suggest the complex moments of understanding where they coincide' (p. 165). Secondly, he uses the opposition between fact and fancy to set up a figure of reversal that 'is crucial to the complexity of *Hard Times* as novel' (ibid).

It is worth noting that the confrontation between Stephen and his master, Bounderby, is Dickens's dramatic equation of modes of linguistic performance or even competence with modes of appropriation and ownership.

*

To conclude, the approaches and analyses propounded here offer a scope for advancing the overall debate that has unfolded around this major novel. In one sense, the preoccupation with postmodern concerns about language precludes the drawing of normative conclusions, or precise measurement of the novel's achievement. However, Ingham's essay, through its informed reference to other contemporaneous treatments of mid-Victorian industrial disputes through dialect and representations of the working men, shows a welcome attention to the competing discourse of nineteenth-century journalism and periodical fiction.

Readers might not find Dickensian caricature disappointing art, whatever their ideological stance. Marxist critic Georg Seehase concludes that '*Hard Times* is true despite caricature because caricature portrays essence and the book is true to the class confrontation between capital and proletariat'.[34] Even in describing Coketown's physical environment Dickens imbued bricks and buildings believing that 'architectural ugliness is an expression of spiritual unloveliness' and he seems to lament that 'There is no Golden Age but there is an Iron Time'.[35] Throughout the pages of *Hard Times,* Dickens paid sensitive attention to the workers' suffering, and satirical attention to the prevailing attitudes and mindsets of the governing classes, who took upon themselves to lecture, educate, and organise the poor. Through constant application and encouragement towards 'fanciful attraction' in his own writing, Dickens aimed to transform his Iron Age at least into a Silver one.

---

[34] Cited in Manning, p. 206.
[35] Michael Goldberg, *Carlyle and Dickens* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1972), p. 84.

Bibliography

Anon., '*Hard Times', British Quarterly Review,* 20 (October 1854), 581-82.

Anon., '*Hard Times', South London Athenaeum and Institution Magazine,* October 1854, pp. 115-19.

Anon., *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens', *Graham's Magazine*, 45 (November 1845), 493.

Anon., 'Our Library Table *Hard Times* for These Times'. *Athenaeum*, 12 August 1854, p. 992.

Bayley, Mel, 'Hard Times and Statistics', *BSHM Bulletin*, 22 (2007), 92-103.

Bodenheimer, Rosemarie, 'The Interrupted Stories of *Hard Times', The Politics of Story in Victorian Fiction* (London: Hollington [1995], pp. 339-353).

Chesterton, G. K., *Criticisms & Appreciations of the Work of Charles Dickens* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1933)

Dickens, Charles, *Hard Times* are to page numbers in *Hard Times,* ed. by George Ford and Sylvère Monod (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1966).

Engel, Monroe, 'The Political of Dickens' Novels', *PMLA*, 71 (Dec., 1956), 945-974.

Eagleton, Terry, 'Critical Commentary', in *Hard Times,* ed. by Terry Eagleton (London and New York: Methuen, 1987), pp. 291-315.

Forster, John, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, 3 vols (London: Chapman & Hall, 1872, 1874)

Gallagher, Catherine, '*Hard Times* and the Somaeconomics of the Early Victorians', in *The Body Economic* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp. 62-85.

Goldberg, Michael, *Carlyle and Dickens* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1972), p. 84.

Holloway, John, 'Hard Times: A History and a Criticism', in *Dickens and the Twentieth Century*, ed. by John Gross and Gabriel Pearson (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), pp. 159-74.

House, Humphrey, *The Dickens World* (London, New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1941), pp. 203-14.

Humpherys, Anne, '*Hard Times*', in *A Companion to Charles Dickens*, ed. by David Paroissien (Oxford: Blackwell Publication, 2008)

_____ , 'Louisa Gradgrind's Secret: Marriage and Divorce in *Hard Times',* *Dickens Studies Annual*, 25 (1996), 177-95.

Ingham, Patricia, *Dialect as 'Realism': Hard Times and the Industrial Novel, Review of English Studies*, 37 (Nov., 1986), 518-527.

Jackson, T. A., *Charles Dickens*: *The Progress of a Radical* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1937), pp. 143-7.
Kearns, Katherine, 'A Tropology of Realism in Hard Times', *ELH*, 59 (Winter, 1992), 857-881.
Leavis , F. R., '*Hard Times:* An Analytic Note' *The Great Tradition* (1948) repr. as '*Hard Times*: The World of Bentham', in *The Dickens the Novelist* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970), p.p. 251-81.
Lupton, Christina, 'Walking on Flowers: The Kantian Aesthetics of "Hard Times"', *ELH*, 70 (Spring, 2003), 151-169.
Miller, J. Hillis, *Charles Dickens the World of his Novels* (1958), pp. 225-7.
[Oliphant, Margaret], 'Charles Dickens'. *Blackwood's Magazine*, 77 (April 1855), 451-66.
Ruskin, John, 'The Roots of Honour', *Cornhill Magazine*, 2 (August 1860), 155-9
Shaw, G. Bernard, 'Hard Times' [1912], in *The Dickens Critics*, ed. George H. Ford and Lauriat Lane (New York: Cornell University Press, 1961), p.p. 125-35.
Simpson, Richard, unsigned review of *Hard Times*, *Rambler*, 2 (1854), 361-2 (repr. in *Hard Times*, ed. by Law, pp. 333-4).
Whipple, Edwin P., review of *Hard Times*, *Atlantic Monthly*, 39 (1877), 353-58
Williams, Raymond, 'Dickens and Social Ideas', in *Dickens 1970*, ed. by Michael Slater (London: Chapman and Hall; New York: Stein and Day, 1970), pp. 77-97.
Winters, Warrington, 'Dickens's Hard Times; The Lost Childhood', *Dickens Studies Annual*, 2 (1972), 217-36.
Wilson, Edmund, 'Dickens: The Two Scrooges', in *The Wound and the Bow* (London: Methuen & co, 1961), pp. 19-20.

الخلاصة

دراسة رواية الاوقات العصيبة لتشارلس دكنز في ضوء نقادها

بالرغم مما يشاع من ان رواية ((الاوقات العصيبة)) اقل شعبية من روايات تشارلس دكنز الاخرى منذ طبعتها الاولى قبل 157 عاماً، الا ان ما يثير الدهشه انها اثارت ردود فعل كثيرة ومختلفة من قبل العديد من النقاد. كما ان الرواية حظيت باهتمام كبير، ليس من قبل الدارسين المتخصصين والصحفيين فحسب، بل من قبل عدد كبير من الكتاب والمفكرين الكبار. وعلى اية حال فالرواية، كما يرى البعض، واحدة من اصعب رواياته، وقد ظهرت في فترة غير واضحة المعالم في سيرة دكنز فهي ليست من الروايات المبكرة الواسعة الانتشار كما انها لا تعود لرواياته المعاصرة الكئيبة. اما تاريخياً فالرواية تشكل قصاً متواصلاً ومنتظماً فتكونلتصبح بذلك تراثاً جلياً، الا ان الفحص الدقيق يظهر بعض الفجوات والتناقضات في السرد التاريخي. ولذلك فالدراسة الحالية تستعرض وتلخص الاراء النقدية البارزة التي ظهرت حول الرواية منذ طبعتها الاولى وحتى الوقت الحاضر وتبين كيف تنوعت هذه الاراء وهي بذلك تقدم تقييماً جديدا للرواية.