

Hard Times

Novel by Charles Dickens

Who is Charles Dickens?

Hard Times Structure

Hard Times Summary

Hard Times Themes

Hard Times Analysis

Hard Times Pdf

In Urdu and Hindi

Lecture by Uffaq Zahra

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what is Style in Literature /
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ARISTOTLE CONCEPT OF EPIC
IN HIS BOOK POETICS
EXPLAINED IN URDU AND HINDI
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Aristotle Concept of Epic in
his Book Poetics Explained ...

Charles John Huffam Dickens was an English writer and social critic who created some of the world's best-known fictional characters and is regarded by many as the greatest novelist of the Victorian era.

Born: February 7, 1812, Landport, Portsmouth, United Kingdom

Died: June 9, 1870, Gads Hill Place, United Kingdom

Dickens is perhaps most famous for his novella, A Christmas Carol. Although it is a glorious story about the power of change and redemption, as well as a very warming tale of festive tradition, it was not at all what Dickens initially set out to write.

Dickens was a master of high humor—satire, puns, wordplay, and a curious method of characterizing that poked fun at his own creations even as he fleshed them out with life and a persona all their own. The satire Dickens lavishes on the upper class in Bleak House is often laugh-out-loud funny.

Key Facts

Full title: Hard Times for These Times

Author: Charles Dickens

Type of work: Novel

Genre: Victorian novel; realist novel; satire; dystopia

Language: English

Time and place written: 1854, London

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

Publisher: Charles Dickens

setting (time): The middle of the nineteenth century

setting (place): Coketown, a manufacturing town in the south of England

Protagonist: Louisa Gradgrind

Book 1: Sowing.

Book 2: Reaping.

Book 3: Garnering.

Themes

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

The Mechanization of Human Beings. Hard Times suggests that nineteenth-century England's overzealous adoption of industrialization threatens to turn human beings into machines by thwarting the development of their emotions and imaginations.

The Opposition Between Fact and Fancy.

The Importance of Femininity.



Hard Times Character List

Mr. Thomas Gradgrind

Mr. Gradgrind is the intellectual founder of the Gradgrind educational system and he is also a member of Parliament. He represents the rigor of "hard facts" and statistics. It is only after Louisa's emotional breakdown that he has a change of heart and becomes more intellectually accepting of enterprises that are not exclusively dedicated to profit and fact.

Mrs. Gradgrind

Mrs. Gradgrind is the ignorant wife of Thomas Gradgrind and the mother of Louisa, Tom and the other Gradgrind children. She dies in the middle of the novel.

Mr. Josiah Bounderby

Mr. Bounderby is one of the central characters of the novel. He is a business acquaintance of Mr. Thomas Gradgrind. He employs many of the characters in the novel and he is very wealthy. He marries Louisa Gradgrind (several decades his junior) and the marriage eventually ends unhappily. In the tumult of a bank robbery investigation, Bounderby's true identity is revealed much to his shame. Throughout the novel, Bounderby is an emblem of hypocrisy.

Louisa Gradgrind/Louisa Bounderby

Louisa is one of the central characters of the novel. She is the eldest of the Gradgrind children and the prize pupil of the educational system. When she grows older, her father arranges her marriage to Mr. Bounderby. Throughout her life, Louisa is very unfulfilled because she has been forced to deny her emotions. She has an emotional breakdown after being tempted into infidelity by Mr. Harthouse. Her marriage with Mr. Bounderby is soon dissolved and she never remarries.



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Jane and Adam Smith Gradgrind

The younger children of Mr. and Mrs. Gradgrind. They are better off than Tom and Louisa because Sissy Jupe has assisted in their upbringing.

Tom Gradgrind

Tom is also referred to as "the whelp." He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Gradgrind and an employee of Mr. Bounderby. He is resentful towards his sister, Louisa, though she is only kind towards him. His ultimate misdeed comes when he steals money from his safe in the bank and then announces the loss as a true theft. In the end, Tom is forced to flee the country to escape punishment. He dies overseas and full of regret.

Stephen Blackpool

Stephen is a poor laborer in one of Josiah Bounderby's factories. He is married to a drunk woman who wanders in and out of his life. After losing his job at the factory, Stephen is forced to leave Coketown and find work elsewhere. In his absence, Stephen is accused of committing a crime that he did not actually commit. When returning to Coketown to defend his honor, Stephen falls into a pit and injures himself. He is rescued but he eventually dies.

James "Jem" Harthouse

The younger brother of a member of Parliament, Harthouse has agreed to spend some time teaching in the Gradgrind's school. He is lazy and immodest and finds himself tempting Louisa with offers of romance.



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Cecilia "Sissy" Jupe

Sissy is abandoned by her father who is a well-meaning circus performer. He feels that she will have a better life if he is not able to hinder her progress in society. Sissy lives with the Gradgrind family but she is a poor pupil at their school. In contrast to Mr. Gradgrind, Sissy lives by the philosophy of emotion, fancy, hope and benevolence. In the end, her kindhearted nature softens the rough edges of the Gradgrind family and they come to be grateful for what she has done for them. At the end of the novel, Dickens writes that Sissy grows ever more happy and she eventually has children of her own to care for.

Mrs. Pegler/"The mysterious old woman"

Mrs. Pegler is the old woman who makes a yearly pilgrimage to Coketown. At the end of the novel, she is discovered to be the mother of Mr. Josiah Bounderby.

Rachael

The unmarried companion of Stephen Blackpool. She keeps his spirits up while he is suffering and after he has left Coketown, she takes it as her responsibility to defend his honor.

Mr. Sleary

Is the manager of a traveling circus. After providing for Sissy at the beginning of the novel he assists Tom's escape at the novel's end.

Mrs. Sparsit

Mrs. Sparsit is a widow who has fallen on hard times. She is retained in Mr. Bounderby's service until her snooping gets her fired.



SUMMARY:

The novel begins with Mr. Thomas Gradgrind sternly lecturing a room full of school children on the importance of facts. He believes that facts, and not imagination or emotion, are the key to a good education, and he educates all the children of the school and his own children, Louisa and Tom, according to this philosophy. When one of his worst students, Sissy Jupe, is abandoned by her father (a circus performer), Mr. Gradgrind takes in Sissy to educate her along with his children according to his sacred system of facts.

Since their hearts and imaginations have been utterly neglected, Louisa and Tom grow into deformed human beings—inwardly, not outwardly. They know neither how to love nor how to be happy, and sense that there is something very wrong with the way they are living their lives. At Mr. Gradgrind's request, Louisa dutifully marries his older friend, Mr. Josiah Bounderby, who is a blustering manufacturer in Coketown. She agrees to marry Bounderby not because she loves him, but because she thinks it will help her brother Tom, who is apprenticed to Mr. Bounderby. Tom is the only person she cares for and, knowing this, Tom wheedles her into the marriage. Now both Louisa and Tom live with Mr. Bounderby, and Sissy stays back with Mr. and Mrs. Gradgrind and Jane, the youngest Gradgrind.

Mr. Bounderby's factory workers, also called "Hands," do not live happy lives under his rule. One factory worker by the name of Stephen Blackpool is daily worn out by his work at the factory, but what plagues him more is his unhappy marriage, for his wife has become a hideous drunk. He wishes to free himself from her and marry Rachael, a sweet, gentle woman in the village, but he cannot because of the ties of marriage. After he asks Bounderby for help on the matter, Mr. Bounderby informs him that he might be able to get out of the marriage if he had enough money to pay for a lawyer, but as he doesn't the cause is hopeless. As he resignedly leaves Mr. Bounderby's home, he runs into an old woman, who for some reason is very interested to hear any news about Mr. Bounderby and his successes.

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Tom is now a dissolute, lazy young man, very much in debt and inclined to a sulky attitude in front of everyone. His, Louisa's, and Mr. Bounderby's lives are somewhat enlivened by the arrival of a Mr. James Harthouse from London. Mr. Harthouse is a wealthy, pleasing young gentleman who is bored out of his mind and has come to work for Mr. Bounderby in hope of finding something entertaining. He quickly becomes very interested in Louisa, for he sees that a strong fire burns under the cold, impassive mask of a face she wears. Noticing that she softens and shows emotion only towards Tom, Harthouse sets about seducing her by pretending to be Tom's good friend. Mrs. Sparsit, an old widow who used to live with Mr. Bounderby before he married Louisa and was then unceremoniously kicked out, watches the progression of his seduction of Louisa with glee.

Mr. Bounderby's factory workers, restless with their bad lot and stirred on by the fiery words of a sleazy union orator named Slackbridge, decide to form a union. Stephen, present at the rowdy meeting at which they come to this decision, tells them that he cannot join because of a promise he has made to someone. The entire town then decides to shun him as a result of his decision. Bounderby brings Stephen in for questioning, but fires him when he won't reveal anything about the union. Louisa and Tom visit Stephen to give him some money before he leaves town in search of a new job, and before they leave, Tom secretly tells Stephen to hang around the bank the few nights before he leaves town... there might be something good in it for Stephen. Stephen does so, but nothing happens. Soon after that, the bank is robbed, and as a result of his suspicious activity, Stephen is the main suspect.

By a coincidence of events, Louisa is left alone at home one night while her husband is out of town, and Harthouse finds her, passionately declares his love for her, and begs her to elope with him. Louisa tells him that she will meet him somewhere later that night. Mrs. Sparsit, hiding in the vegetation near to where those two are standing, hears all this with a vengeful delight and follows Louisa when she leaves the house, but then loses her track. She hastily runs to tell Mr. Bounderby that his wife has all but eloped with Mr. Harthouse.

Louisa, in the meantime, has actually gone to her father's house and is at her wits' end. She confronts her father and tells him that the unhappiness of her entire life which has brought her to this point is all due to his education of facts, which quashed all feelings of the heart which are so essential to human existence. Dumbstruck and penitent, her father tries to catch her as she falls in a faint on the floor.

Thanks to Sissy's care and actions (Sissy persuades Mr. Harthouse to leave Coketown forever), Louisa gradually begins to recover at her father's house. Bounderby, who learned of the almost-elopement through Mrs. Sparsit, tells Mr. Gradgrind that if Louisa stays at her old home, he and she shall cease to live together as man and wife—and so they separate.



Meanwhile, tragedy has befallen Stephen. On his way back to Coketown to clear his name, he falls into Old Hell Shaft, a huge pit in the ground. Sissy and Rachael find him there, and the men of the surrounding village manage to rescue him, but he dies shortly after being retrieved from the pit, holding Rachael's hand and peacefully gazing at the stars. Before he dies, he asks Mr. Gradgrind to clear his good name, because it was Tom, who committed the robbery.

Sissy saves the day again: she tells Tom to hide with her father's old circus company, and from there Mr. Gradgrind and Louisa plan for him to slip out of the country. One of Mr. Gradgrind's old pupils, Bitzer, who has been brainwashed by his education of facts, almost prevents Tom's escape, but thanks to the cunning of the circusmaster, Tom manages to evade Bitzer's clutches and escapes to another country.

Back in Coketown, Mrs. Sparsit has accidentally revealed Mr. Bounderby to be a fraud. Everyone had thought Mr. Bounderby to be a self-made man, deserted by cruel parents at a young age... until Mrs. Sparsit dragged his very respectable and kind mother to the public eye, thinking her to be an aid to Stephen Blackpool in the Bank robbery. Mr. Bounderby, now shunned as a liar, "exiles" Mrs. Sparsit from his presence and she is forced to spend the rest of her days with an old, sick, miserly relation.

Mr. Gradgrind, having learned his lesson the hard way, devotes the rest of his life to faith, hope, and charity instead of facts. Louisa does not remarry, but finds some happiness in helping Sissy care for her own children. Tom dies far from home, and repents of his hardness towards his family on his deathbed.

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