

Assignment I

Hard Times in Household Words

Hard Times was serialized in Charles Dickens' weekly magazine, *Household Words*, from 1 April to 12 August 1854. Each issue of the magazine featured an installment of a novel, a short story, a poem or two, and several articles on social or economic issues sometimes presented in a humorous manner. As Anne Lohrli states in her guide to the periodical, "Articles on the raising up of those that are down, articles warring against social evils and abuses, occupied an important place in *Household Words*" (4).

Many of these articles were written by Henry Morley, a sub-editor for the magazine who had more pieces than anyone – including Dickens – published in the magazine. Though Dickens did not write most of the magazine's articles, he had a strong influence on what appeared in the magazine and he played a very active role as editor, often extensively revising submissions. Considering the novel's place within the magazine, then, allows us to better understand how nineteenth-century readers may have responded to it. It may even alter our reading of one of Dickens' most controversial works.

The following articles appeared in the *Household Words* alongside *Hard Times*. They are just a few examples of the many articles that are relevant to the plot and themes of the novel. Consider how they might influence your interpretation of the novel:

- **“Rights and Wrongs of Women” (April 1, Eliza Lynn).** Eliza Lynn (later Linton) was a professional journalist and frequent contributor to the magazine. Here, Lynn discusses women's legal rights and moral obligations in ways that could have an impact on our reading of the characters of Sissy and Louisa.

“In the American Utopia that is to come, women are to be voters, barristers, members of congress, and judges. They are to rush to the polling-booth, . . . they are to mingle with the passions and violences of men by way of asserting their equality, and to take part in their vices by way of gaining their rights. . . . Women have grave legal and social wrongs, but will this absurd advocacy of exaggeration remedy them? . . . Give women public functions, and you destroy the very springs of her influence. For her influence is, and must be, moral more than intellectual. . . . Her flaccid muscles, tender skin, highly nervous organization, and aptitude for internal injury decide the question of offices involving hard labour; while the predominance of instinct over reason, and of feeling over intellect, as a rule, unfits her for judicial or legislative command. Her power is essentially a silent and unseen moral influence; her functions are those of a wife and mother.”
- **“The Quiet Poor” (April 15, Henry Morley).** Morley writes about the unseen lives of the poor who work in their homes. How does his analysis of their situation resonate with the lives of Rachael and Stephen?

“The summer heat lifts out of the filthy courts a heavy vapour of death, the overcrowded rooms are scarcely tenable, and the inhabitants, as much as time and weather permit, turn out into the road before their doors. The air everywhere is stifling, but within doors many of the cottages are intolerable. . . . [The poor] are refined by suffering, and have depths of feeling stirred up within them which the more fortunate are only now and then made conscious of themselves.”

- **“Ground in the Mill” (April 22, Henry Morley).** This article about industrial accidents that maim and kill innocent workers includes the following brutal description of industrial work. How does this compare or contrast to Dickens’ account of the working condition in Coketown and/or his description of Stephen’s accident?

“A man was lime-washing the ceiling of an engine-room: he was seized by a horizontal shaft and killed immediately. A boy was brushing the dust from such a ceiling, before whitewashing: he had a cloth over his head to keep the dirt from falling on him; by that cloth the engine seized and held him to administer a chastisement with rods of iron. A youth while talking thoughtlessly took hold of a strap that hung over the shaft: his hand was wrenched off at the wrist. A man climbed to the top of his machine to put the strap on the drum: he wore a smock which the shaft caught; both of his arms were then torn out of the shoulder-joints, both legs were broken, and his head was severely bruised: in the end, of course, he died. . . . [These workers were a] sacrifice to the commercial prosperity of Great Britain. There are few amongst us—even among the masters who share most largely in that prosperity—who are willing, we will hope and believe, to pay such a price as all this blood for any good or any gain that can accrue to them.”
- **“One of Our Legal Fictions” (April 29, Eliza Lynn).** This article calls for reform of the divorce laws in order to bring justice to women. It is printed alongside chapter 10 in which Stephen laments the impossibility of legally ending his unfortunate marriage. It is also interesting in relation to Louisa’s marriage to Bounderby.

“Yet what can be more beautiful than the idea of an English marriage! The strict union of interests—although it does mean the absorption of the woman’s whole life in that of the man’s—although it does mean the entire annihilation of all her rights, individuality, legal existence, and his sole recognition by the law—yet how beautiful it is in the ideal! . . . Justice to women. No fanciful rights, no unreal advantages, no preposterous escape from womanly duty, for the restless, loud and vain; . . . but simple justice. The recognition of their individuality as wives, the recognition of their natural rights as mothers, the permission to them to live by their own honorable industry, untaxed by the legal Right and moral Wrong of any man to claim as his own that for which he has not wrought—reaping where he has not sown, and gathering where he has not strawed. Justice to women.”
- **“Death’s Doors” (June 10, Henry Morley).** In this essay, which runs alongside the union scenes in the novel (chapters 20-21), Morley discusses the need for immediate action on behalf of the poor. After describing the deplorable living conditions and filth in which the poor must live, he calls directly upon readers to act on their behalf:

“Now is the hour, if ever the hour will strike, when every man . . . who can get a hearing must speak for those weak and silent sufferers among us whom it would now be more cruel than ever to forget. We must unite to be helpful—helpful each in his own sphere. No hand lent helpfully is weak when it is unwilling.”
- **“Smoke or No Smoke” (July 21, unknown contributor).** This piece explores diseases and deaths caused by domestic and industrial chimney smoke. How does it compare or contrast to the fairy-tale style descriptions of Coketown Dickens provides in the novel?

“The great destruction of life from pulmonary disease is due to the fact that the soot which smudges the collars and chitterlings of our citizens, that ruins our finest paintings, that blackens our public buildings, that suffocates our country-born babies, that kills our plants, that fleeces our sheep of their whiteness, that blackens our faces, and buries our whole bodies in palls of fog, is also constantly passing into our lungs.”