

Research Paper on Hard Times in its Periodical Context

We will read *Hard Times* in serial parts as Victorian readers did, paying special attention to its original magazine context.

Hard Times was serialized in Charles Dickens' weekly magazine, *Household Words*, from 1 April to 12 August 1854. While Victorian readers consumed the novel in 20 weekly installments, we will have to read it in 5 sessions, covering approximately 4 parts for the first 4 sessions and 8 parts for the last session.

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. Though Dickens did not write all 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 own reading of one of Dickens' most controversial works.

Your assignment for this paper is to examine one installment of the novel within the magazine *Household Words*, paying particular attention to the relationship between the themes and issues in the novel and in the surrounding magazine.

Consider the following questions as you read:

- What subjects seem to be of interest to the magazine's readers?
- Are there any subjects that are repeated or emphasized in any way?
- What features open each issue of the magazine (a serial novel, a current news story, a poem, etc.) What significance might this have?
- Overall, what stands out to you about the magazine?
- Is it primarily entertaining, educational, news-oriented, literary, scientific, etc.?
- Are the themes in the novel reinforced or contradicted by the surrounding materials?
- How might the material in the magazine have influenced the original readers of *Hard Times*?

After conducting this research in *Household Words*, write a **6-8 page paper** that describes what you found and makes a convincing argument about what it tells us about how original readers may have experienced the novel. You will be required to share a draft of your paper with me and your teammates; this will factor into your participation grade.

The issues of *Household Words* containing the novel can be found in hard copy in Special Collections (room 411 MNL) or in the tall wall mounted microfilm cases. To use the microfilm, carry it up to the microfilm readers on the main floor of the library. There is usually an assistant there to help you load the reels. Please leave the reels in the designated box next to the microfilm readers rather than refilling it. We will visit the library on W 10/16 to get acquainted with these resources.