Victorian Novels
Year 3
2019-2020

Dr Saad Al-Maliky

Book the third: ‘Garnering’ Brief summary of Ch. 1, bk. 3 (another thing needful)

- Louisa’s continued suppression of her emotions is finally ended by the sheer force of Sissy’s compassion: Sissy undertakes to restore happiness to Louisa’s life.

Commentary:

- From the speech that Dickens gave in Birmingham 1844, just ten years before *Hard Times* was written, where he said, 'if you reward honesty, if you would give encouragement to good, if you would stimulate the idle, eradicate evil, or correct what is bad education is the one thing needful, and the one effective end'. Here, Dickens chooses to use 'the one thing needful' as the title for his first chapter. This is again proves Dickens's feeling towards education.

- Although Gradgrind no longer believes that fact (wisdom of Head) alone is necessary, he thinks that there is wisdom of Heart, but he does not know exactly what else is needed to make Louisa happy. Recognizing that he is not a fit teacher for his daughter, Gradgrind hopes that Sissy will be able to help her since Sissy succeeded in looking after Jane, Louisa'a young sister.
- In this chapter I would like to remind you with essay written by John Ruskin in which he claims that political economists (represented by Gradgrind and Bounderby) are deluded, satirically making the political economist condemn himself through his own words. Human beings are presented by this persona (the aspect of a person's character that is presented to or perceived by others), 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. 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..

Brief summary of Ch. 2, bk. 3 (very ridiculous)

It is very ridiculous that Harthouse, the worldly cynic, a person who believes that people are only interested in themselves and are not sincere, is persuaded by Sissy to abandon Louisa and leave Coketown forever.

Commentary:

- Like Bounderby, Gradgrind, Tom, and Mrs. Sparsit, Harthouse is motivated only by his own interest and does not consider how his actions might impact other people. Through these characters, Dickens again illustrates the moral dangers of a society that values fact more than feeling. Ultimately, Harthouse is completely overpowered by Sissy Jupe, the loving innocent; he is easily sent away from Coketown, never to threaten Louisa again.

Brief summary of Ch. 3, bk. 3 (very decided)

- Bounderby confronts Gradgrind over the latter's custody (legal duty) of Louisa. As his wife refuses to accompany him home, Bounderby declares the marriage to be over.

Commentary:

A part of Louisa's dilemma in her marriage to Bounderby might be disparity of age between husband and wife. It expresses that the agony of a young woman who is married off to a grey man. Anne Humpherys believes that Louisa's mismatched marriage to Bounderby creates havoc (confusion and lack of order) for the men of the novel: her father, her husband, her brother, and Stephen Blackpool. 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.

Louisa'a unhappy and repressed childhood and disastrous marriage can be directly traced to the inadequacies of her father's system of education. Through the disastrous breakdown of Bounderby's marriage with the unhappy Louisa Gradgrind, Dickens appears to be saying that such a marriage of fact and profit can only lead to unhappiness and ruin.

Victorian Novels
Year 3
2021-2022
Week 11

Dr Saad Al-Maliky

Brief summary of Ch. 4, bk. 2 (Men and Brothers)

- For the next three chapters, attention reverts to Stephen Blackpool. Stephen is disciplined, behaving in a very controlled way, at a union meeting for refusing to support official union policy. Only Stephen refuses to join because he feels that a union strike would only increase tensions between employers and employees.

Commentary:

- In this chapter, a trade union agitator, Slackbridge, addresses a meeting of factory-workers concerning the case of Stephen, who has refused to join the union on account of a promise he made to Rachael not to become involved in possible trouble. Stephen defends himself against Slackbridge's attack, but with no success; for the meeting agrees that he will be sent to Coventry (i.e. ostracised by his fellow-workers, who will henceforth refuse to speak to him). At the end of the chapter, Stephen is sent for by Bounderby.

Commentary:

- Dickens has little enthusiasm for the trades unions. The decision of the meeting has the effect of adding to Stephen's burden, since not only his private life but his working life is now a source of unhappiness to him. The isolation imposed upon him leads to 'the loneliest of lives, the life of solitude among a familiar crowd'.

- New Character: Slackbridge is the spokesperson of the Hands, but rather he is a figment (sounds real but he is not) of worker's imagination; what is the meaning of this name?

Commentary:

- **Slackbridge**'s primary intention is apparently to stir up the workers' feelings until they are in an impassioned frenzy against their employers. Dickens's own feelings about labour unions, and about any attempt to right wrongs through hostility and conflict, are expressed through Stephen's views. Stephen immediately recognises that Slackbridge does not care so much about creating unity among workers as he does about creating tension between employers and employees. This tension, Stephen believes, will do nothing to aid the workers in their desire for better working conditions and pay. Thus, Stephen asks only to be allowed to make his living in peace. With his hardworking integrity, Stephen represents a very sentimental and idealized portrait of a poor worker, which Dickens wields to arouse our sympathy. Through the contrast between Slackbridge and Stephen, however, Dickens suggests that the working class contains both good and bad individuals, just like the rest of society.

Commentary:

‘**Mongrel dress**’: The mongrel, of course, a dog of no fixed breed and so Slackbridge is wearing a random mixture of clothes.

‘**United Aggregate Tribunal**’: This name is a reminder of the varied origins of the labour movement. One major source of trade unions was the clubs formed by working people in the eighteen century on the basis of self-help, a small weekly deduction from wages going towards a general fund to deal with crises such as illness and injury. These gradually led to larger groupings, especially in areas of the labour force particularly exposed to danger, such as coal-mining, and where the organisation of working people was assisted by their being gathered together in large numbers in towns and cities, as in cotton manufacture. The political and social upheaval of the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars led to the Combination Acts of 1799-1800 which banned, refused to allow all unions in Britain. The Acts were repealed in 1828 although many limitations on the freedom of the unions remained. The Trade Union Congress was formed in 1868 to facilitate the organisation and political acceptability of the union movement.

Commentary:

- '**A mess of pottage', soup or stew**: Jacob cheated his brother Esau out of his birthright, your right as human being, when he came home and asked for food: 'Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright'.
- '**Judas Iscariot**': The story of the disciple who betrayed Christ for thirty pieces of silver is told in Bible.
- '**Castlereagh**': Lord Castlereagh (1769-1822), an important statesman of the Napoleonic period, was hated by the poor and radicals as a tyrannical oppressor, especially for what was seen as his responsibility for the eleven people were killed and roughly four hundred injured in an attack by troops on a meeting in Manchester to demand Parliamentary reform.
- '**With all his troubles on his head**': This is a favourite Dickens allusion and refers to Hamlet's father who died 'with all my perfections on my head' (Act 1, sc. 5).

Brief summary of Ch. 5, bk. 2 (Men and Masters)

- At Bounderby's house, Stephen defends his fellow-workers against Bounderby's attack upon them: although he has been badly treated, he shows no resentment or ill-will. Bounderby accuses him of being a trouble-maker and gives him notice to leave the factory. Stephen knows that, having been dismissed from his job, he will find it very hard to obtain another because, simultaneously, the Hands prevented Stephen from the trade union as a result in searching for work; he will have to leave Coketown.

Commentary:

Stephen is compassionate for the fellow-workers who have rejected him, and in his readiness to explain their plight and defend their interests.

'Combination': The word was formerly used in a negative sense of those banding together for a common purpose and so came to be used of trade unions in the nineteenth century.

'Transportation': in the nineteenth century, and early, criminals were transported to then isolated parts of the world such as Botany Bay in Australia. The practice was abolished in 1867**.**

'Norfolk Island': a remote island in the Pacific Ocean to which criminals were transported between 1788 and 1805, and again between 1826 and 1855. Norfolk Island is about 900 miles north-east of New South Wales and its isolation made escape virtually impossible.

Brief summary of Ch. 6, bk. 2 (fading away), to slowly disappear

As he leaves Bounderby's house, Stephen again meets the mysterious old woman who appeared in book 1, chapter 12. This time she is in the company of Rachael. She explains that she has heard of Bounderby's marriage and is anxious to catch a glimpse of his young wife. Stephen breaks the news to Rachael that he has lost his job and must therefore leave Coketown in search of work elsewhere. He invites the old lady to his lodgings and learns that she is a widow named Mrs Pegler. When her husband is mentioned, she shows signs of nervousness; she also discloses that she once had a son but has 'lost him'. Louisa and Tom arrive, and Mrs Pegler shows signs of alarm at the mention of the name Bounderby, apparently because she thinks that Bounderby has also come. Louisa offers to help Stephen, and he accepts two pounds from her (she has offered him more) but insists that it is to be regarded as a loan.

Brief summary of Ch. 6, bk. 2 (fading away), to slowly disappear

Showing signs of excitement, Tom takes Stephen aside and, without giving any details, tells him he will do him 'a good turn': Stephen is to 'hang about the Bank' for an hour each evening until his departure. Stephen bids farewell to Rachael, both of them judging it better that she should not be seen with him again lest similar trouble fall upon her. During the next few days, he completes the work on which he is engaged at the factory; after work each evening, he loiters outside the bank as Tom has instructed him, without understanding what purpose it will serve. At the same time, he notices several people observing his loitering, the offence of waiting in a place, looking as if he is going to do something illegal, including Mrs. Sparsit and Bitzer, but no one comes to offer him help.

Commentary:

This is an important chapter in the development of the action and involves 'plotting' in two senses: Dickens the novelist is ingeniously preparing for later events, and Tom is hatching his own plot. (Even Mrs Pegler might be regarded as the author of a mystery story.) The reappearance of Mrs Pegler underlines the parallel between book 2, chapter 5 and book 1, chapter 12, the two scenes in which Stephen visits Mr Bounderby's house: in the earlier scene Bounderby callously told him that there was no hope for him of finding happiness through remarriage; in the later scene Bounderby, equally callously, turned away a good worker who had the courage - or audacity - to think for himself. The mystery of Mrs Pegler increases, though some readers, alerted by the ambiguous reference to a 'lost' son as well as by her obvious interest in Bounderby, will feel that they have solved it by now. The appearance of Tom and Louisa in Blackpool's lodgings is a mild coincidence that is necessary in order to show us Mrs Pegler's reactions. Louisa's sympathy for Stephen and her desire to help him show that, for all her upbringing, her heart is not without compassion. Tom's instructions to Stephen indicate that he has already formed the idea of robbing the bank and throwing the blame on Stephen: evidently the idea of using Stephen as a scapegoat has been quickly formed, for he can only just have learned that Stephen is to leave Coketown and will be suspected of harbouring some grudge against Bounderby.

Commentary:

- '**Sugar lump**': in the past sugar had been an expensive luxury, but its availability increased greatly in the nineteenth century. Lump was the dearest from of sugar and its consumption, along with new bread and fresh butter, at this little tea-party would have seemed to many an endorsement of Bounderby's view of the poor as craving luxury.
- '**Lord Chesterfield**': Lord Chesterfield (1694-1773) published his collection, *letters to his son 1774,* advising his illegitimate (born of parents not married to each other) son on matters of etiquette (the set of rules or customs which control accepted behaviour in particular social groups or social situations), good breeding and manners.

Commentary:

- '**The railway's crazy neighbourhood**': the upheaval caused by railway development was tremendous (very great in amount) laid waste many areas of large cities such as London and Birmingham, but the creation of the British railway system was one of the greatest Victorian achievement.
- '**Snuff-takers**': Snuff is a powdered tobacco which is sniffed up the nose as a stimulant or sedative, much used in the nineteenth century and into the twentieth.

Brief summary of Ch. 7, bk. 2 (Gunpowder)

Harthouse insinuates (to use clever, secret and often unpleasant methods to gradually become part of something) himself further into the affections of both Tom and Louisa. He sets about trying to corrupt Louisa.

The significance of the chapter-title, 'Gunpowder', becomes clear only when we reach the next chapter, 'Explosion'. Harthouse now spends a good deal of his time with Louisa during her husband's absence, and is more and more attracted to her. For her part, she shows only coldness towards him; but he perseveres, seeking to win her favour by appealing to her love for Tom. He tells her that Tom has been losing money at gambling, and Louisa admits that she has lent him 'a considerable sum'. Harthouse offers to try to persuade Tom to mend his ways, and subsequently has a conversation with Tom, who shows resentment that Louisa has not provided him with more money and insists that she could have obtained it from Bounderby if she had really tried. When Harthouse happens to use the word 'banker', Tom suddenly turns pale and is evidently disturbed. He tells Harthouse that it is now too late for any loan to be of use to him. Harthouse asks him to show more affection towards his sister; and when Tom next sees Louisa he speaks to her more tenderly - whereupon she smiles at Harthouse, recognising that this is his doing.

Commentary:

By this point in the action, both Tom and Louisa are now separately moving towards the climax of their separate lines of action. Tom's predicament is clearly reaching a crisis, though there is an element of mystery as to what he is planning to do: his turning pale at the mention of the word 'banker' is a clue that the skilful reader may be able to interpret. (As a generalisation, it may be said that Dickens likes to create his effects dramatically rather than analytically: in other words, we are given no insight into the secret workings of Tom's mind, but we hear his speech and witness the visible signs of his behaviour just as we might do in watching a play; and it is from this evidence that we must construct a hypothesis as to the state of his mind and its causes and possible results.) Louisa, too, is becoming more entangled in a relationship with Harthouse, who quite consciously exploits her affection for Tom in order to make her grateful to him and thus to deepen the intimacy between them.

Commentary:

- '**Mr Bounderby had taken possession**': Mr Bounderby has followed the traditional pattern of the successful merchant or manufacturer in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in moving out of town away from his place of business. In earlier times craftsmen and shopkeepers had lived above their premises, sharing them with workmen, apprentices and servants. This communal pattern of living began to break down in the eighteenth century, giving way to the desire for suburban existence or, for the really wealthy, a country estate. Despite its displacement from the economic centre, therefore, the aristocratic mode of life remained a social ideal, a fact which throws some light on the still class-ridden of British society.

Commentary:

- "**A man shaving himself in a boot**": The point here is that this engraved advertisement for shoe polish, or backing, suggests that the product is so successful that is possible to use a boot as a mirror in which to shave. This is one of many references in Dickens's work to Warren's Blacking, the shoe-polish factory at which he worked for several months when he was twelve.

Victorian Novels
Year 3
2021-2022
Weeks 9&10
Dr Saad Al-Maliky

Book the second: ‘Reaping Brief summary of Ch. 1, bk. 2 (Effects in the Bank)

- One year later, Bitzer is now a virtual spy, for Mrs Sparsit, on the activities of Bounderby and Louisa, where Bitzer is also employed as a porter. James Harthouse is introduced under the name of strange visitor. He, a wealthy young sophisticate from London, arrives in Coketown to begin a political career as a disciple of Gradgrind.

Commentary:

- A new focus of interest appears in the person of the stranger, soon to be identified as James Harthouse. He is ironically described as "a thorough gentleman' and represents Dickens's satire on the bored and effete privileged class: he has no real purpose in life and is entering politics not because he is eager to help run the country wisely, but in a half-hearted attempt to relieve his boredom. His interest in Louisa before he has even set eyes on her suggests that he is prepared to regard even a married woman as fair game in his rather languorous attempt to give variety to a life that is without purpose.

Commentary:

- To Dickens, who believed passionately in hard work and self-help, such an attitude was not merely immoral but despicable. Note that while the social world of Hard Times is almost entirely provincial and indeed northern, Harthouse represents a metropolitan upper class that Dickens identifies with parasitism: among the workers of Coketown (both factory hands like Stephen Blackpool and capitalists like Bounderby) this member of the 'idle rich' is like a fish out of water.

Commentary:

- In this chapter we have noticed an imagery of satire especially when Dickens called the mill-owners 'millers': it is a pun on mill-owners who are also millers in the sense suggested by the title of the article 'Ground in the Mill' published in Dickens's weekly magazine. The article is a well-documented and soberly written account of the nightmarish accident that occurred with machinery unfenced through employers' avoidance of safety regulations.
- It has been observed that the novel's use of binaries is highly creative: 'father and daughter', 'husband and wife', 'men and masters', 'men and brothers' . . . etc.

- Also in this chapter, Sparsit describes Harthouse '**like the Sultan who put his head in the pail of water':** This is a story in which Sultan seems to experience a great deal of his future life in the moment of dipping his head in water. The story clearly relates to the popular believe in the intense mental activities said to be experienced by those who are drowning, when someone dies because he is under water and cannot breathe.

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Brief summary of Ch. 2, bk. 2 (Mr James Harthouse)

The stranger is named as James Harthouse, the younger brother of an M.P. He meets Bounderby and Louisa, tours the town with Bounderby and dines at his home. He is attracted to the young bride since Louisa's coldness and indifference, rather than discouraging his attentions, only intrigue him the more; and he notices that Louisa shows unmistakable signs of animation when her brother appears. He therefore devotes himself to paying attention to Tom as a means of winning Louisa's favour.

Commentary:

- One of the critics of this novel says that James Harthouse is caricature. In the same context unconsciously Sylvia Manning answers him and she says that 'Hard Times is despite caricature because caricature portrays essence and the novel is true to class confrontation between capital and proletariat'.

Commentary:

- **‘And the honourable member had so tickled the House (which has a delicate sense of humour) by putting the cap on the cow’**: this frivolous way response to the loss of human life may seem like a satire exaggeration. In his speech, Dickens attacked the House of Commons and the Prime Minister of the day in delicate sense of humour that they are responsible for the plight of the country, Dickens said, ‘the PM did officially and habitually joke at a time when this country was plunged in deep disgrace and distress’. The next two chapters will advance one issue created by Mrs Sparsit and her spy, Bitzer, who will pave the way to Harthouse to seduce Louisa.

Brief summary of Ch. 3, bk. 2 (the whelp)

- Harthouse ingratiates himself with, to discover more about the Bounderby's marriage. When Tom told Harthouse that Louisa does not love Bounderby and only married him in order to secure advantages for her brother, Harthouse infers that Louisa does not love her husband. So he privately resolves to seduce her.

Commentary:

- These two chapters show Harthouse's developing interest in Louisa: learning that she does not love her husband, Harthouse conceives the idea of conducting an affair with her. He is not, of course, prompted by any real love for Louisa but takes her up, as he has taken up politics, in the hope of relieving his boredom. The ground is thus laid for important developments in the action - developments foreshadowed in the final paragraph of chapter 3, book the second, in which the reader is made aware that Tom's disclosures will have far-reaching effects.

Commentary:

‘**You are a piece of caustic, Tom,’ retorted Mr. James Harthouse**: that is biting or sarcastic from a substance that burns and corrodes, often used for cleaning purpose.
It has been noticed in this chapter that the lack of imagination and sentiment in Louisa’s childhood makes it impossible for her to respond appropriately in the scene of James Harthouse’s attempted seduction.

Victorian Novels
Year 3
2021-2022
Lectures Weeks 7&8

Dr Saad Al-Maliky

Brief summary of Ch. 13, bk. 1 (Rachael)

- Stephen returns to his lodgings and finds Rachael nursing his sick, bedridden wife, who is ill and delirious. The sick woman attempts to poison herself, but is prevented by Rachael; and Stephen realises with horror that he has been tempted to solve his problems by bringing about his wife's death - and indeed might have done so, depressed as he is by the discouraging news he has had from Bounderby, had it not been for Rachael's intervention. Urged to rest, Stephen's sleep is tormented, to cause a person to suffer or worry, by nightmares.

Commentary:

- At one point Stephen says to Rachael, 'Thou art an Angel', and it is in this superhuman or at least saintly role that Rachael appears in this episode. Like the Good Samaritan in Christ's parable, she shows love and concern for one whom she has no particular reason to feel affection for and indeed might be supposed to have reason to hate. Unlike her social betters, Rachael shows a genuine spirit of Christianity.

- Privately, *Hard Times* has been described as vast, extremely big, panorama of mid-Victorian England. During the Victorian Era, the home was widely regarded as a place of relaxation and pleasure and as an escape from the moral corruption of the business world and from the grinding monotony of factory life as a refuge from the working world.

Commentary:

- **Edmund Wilson** says that between his wife and his friend, Stephen finds himself so hopeless and unable to assert himself that he becomes an indecisive martyr. As same as Wilson, **Humphrey House** claims that Stephen Blackpool finding himself in an environment where everything is organized against him (workplace, home and society). In *Hard Times,* **House** claims, 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. **House** says that Dickens is using *Hard Times* 'as a vehicle of more concentrated sociological argument' and indeed, throughout 'all his writings' Dickens engaged much more in thinking through 'social problems'.

Commentary:

Stephen frequently refers to Rachael as his angel because she has feminine traits of Victorian Era: she is compassionate, honest, morally pure, and emotional sensitive.

'**Let him who is without sin among you cast the first stone at her**!': in this context Dickens points out that the relationship between Stephen and Rachael is non-sexual one or Platonic love. It seems to me that it is as same as the relationship between children.

Brief summary of Ch. 14, bk. 1 (The Great Manufacturer)

Time leaps, moves suddenly, forward. Tom, Louisa, and Sissy are grown, and Gradgrind becomes a MP. Tom, now working at the bank, hints to Louisa that their father is conspiring, planning secretly, with Bounderby over some matter.

Brief summary of Ch. 14, bk. 1 (The Great Manufacturer)

After four chapters devoted to Stephen Blackpool, we return to the Gradgrind- Bounderby centre of interest. Some time 'has passed since we last saw them. Tom has entered Bounderby's bank as a junior clerk; Sissy has left school; and Gradgrind realises that Louisa is 'Quite a young woman'. Tom, who is as usual intent upon his own interest, reminds his sister that she can be useful to him and show that she really loves him. He does not explain in so many words how she can do this, but he clearly means by marrying Bounderby.

Commentary:

We see Louisa moving towards a marriage that will certainly be loveless and may turn out to be disastrous, impelled by her brother's emotional blackmail combined with her own indifference as to her fate. Dickens is here gathering up threads of interest that have been apparent from as early as Chapter 4, and this chapter leads straight into the two that follow, which bring the development of this phase of the plot to a climax.

Brief summary of Ch. 15, bk. 1 (Father and daughter)

- **Gradgrind gains Louisa's impassive consent to be married to Bounderby.**
- **An interview takes place between Gradgrind and his daughter, in which she is informed that he has received an offer of marriage for her from Bounderby. From the worldly point of view it is a good match, but the disparity in years and temperament, and especially Louisa's manifest indifference towards (if not indeed dislike for)her prospective husband, do not promise much happiness. When Louisa asks her father three questions - 'do you think I love Mr Bounderby?'; 'do you ask me to love Mr Bounderby?'; 'does Mr Bounderby ask me to love him?'- he prevaricates. At last, without any enthusiasm, she agrees to marry him. Mrs Gradgrind is told the news; and when Sissy hears it she looks at Louisa with 'wonder', 'pity' and 'sorrow', whereupon Louisa's manner to her becomes suddenly cold and distant.**

Commentary:

- Here the father-daughter plot is discovered. **Anne Humpherys** deals with issues of the novel from a feminist perspective. She sets up an interesting panorama of the theme of mismatched marriages and divorces with the connection to the father-daughter plot. 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. So the father frequently tries to convince his daughter that it would be a rational desire for her to marry a special man, the daughter's story is the conflict between her social needs and her desire to redeem or please her father.

Commentary:

- This important scene is paralleled by another crucial interview between Louisa and her father thirteen chapters later, near the end of Book II (11,12). Although Gradgrind is not a bad father, he is a misguided one, and he is guilty of moral dishonesty in not facing up to the truth about Louisa's lack of feeling or respect for Bounderby. Alongside the dramatic dialogue is a pattern of imagery relating to smoke and fire. The smoke from the chimneys of Coketown - literal and visible smoke that is a sign of the intense fires needed to provide power for the steam-driven engines - is prominent in the description of the town at the beginning of Book1, 5. In book 1, 8 there is a whole sequence of references to fire: Louisa and Tom sit by the fireside of their home, Louisa 'looking at the bright sparks as they dropped upon the hearth'; later she tells Tom she is 'looking at the fire'; and there is a reference to the children's shadows 'defined upon the wall' and overhung by other shadows as if 'by a dark cavern'. It seems clear that this is not just a literal fire but the symbol of something more intangible; and before the end of the chapter Dickens enables us to interpret the symbol.

Commetary:

- Near the beginning of the chapter, Louisa looks through the window at the high chimneys of Coketown with their 'long tracts of smoke'; later we are reminded that the distant smoke is 'very black and heavy'; and later still, Louisa tells her father, with apparent irrelevance, 'Yet when the night comes, Fire bursts out, father!' The black smoke, gloomy and funereal, seems to match Louisa's mood; and the observation that fire sometimes bursts forth foreshadows her own subsequent rebellion against the role of submission and passivity into which she is being cast: it is as if the fires of her heart, now banked up and showing no flame, will at some future date 'burst out'.

Brief summary of Ch. 16, bk. 1 (husband and wife)

Mrs Sparsit complies too readily with Bounderby's desire to wed Louisa. After a very brief courtship, the pair are married leave for a honeymoon at Lyons.

Bounderby breaks the news of his impending marriage to Mrs Sparsit, who agrees to move out of his home and live at the bank, where she will serve as a caretaker. Eight weeks after Louisa has agreed to marry Bounderby, the wedding takes place and the couple go to France for their honeymoon - not for any romantic reason, but because Bounderby wants to study the factory system in Lyons. The chapter ends with Tom's pleasure that his sister now occupies a situation in which she can be very useful to him, and with Louisa showing signs of awareness that she has taken a disastrously wrong step ('a little shaken in her reserved composure for the first time').

Commentary:

Lyons: second only to Paris as the major city in France, Lyons has been for centuries an important commercial centre, perhaps most famously in the production of silk.
Generally speaking, during Victorian Era, a woman's job was to confine her attentions to domestic tasks about the house, looking after the welfare of her family. But in case of Louisa the matter is different: arguably, Gradgrind's philosophy of fact turns her into machine and the home into a veritable factory.
Through the scenes of this chapter we learned that there is a lack of Bounderby-Louisa relationship since Bounderby wants to observe the operations of some factories there. So through this mismatched couple, Dickens suggests that a happy marriage must be founded upon mutual love and respect.

Commentary:

A result of their imagination and sense of beauty being starved throughout childhood, Tom and Louisa grow up to be bored and discontented, and in different ways their lives come to disaster. Tom robs the bank at which he works and has to flee the country; Louisa makes an unhappy marriage with Josiah Bounderby, a prosperous local businessman, and after almost succumbing to the temptation offered by a would-be seducer, the upper-class politician James Harthouse, she' leaves her husband and returns home. Bitzer also illustrates the unfortunate influence of the system of education he receives, and proves to be thoroughly selfish and ungrateful; Sissy, on the other hand, has been brought up in a circus and remains untouched by the influence of her schooling, her natural goodness and instinctive wisdom enabling her to help Louisa in her difficulties. By the end of the novel, Mr Gradgrind, whose wife has died, whose son is disgraced and exiled, and whose daughter's life is in ruins, has been brought to see the error of his ways and is a much sadder but also a much wiser man.

Commentary:

The marriage forms the conclusion and climax of the first 'Book' of the novel; its results will be explored in the second 'Book'. We may deduce that Mrs Sparsit has herself had matrimonial designs upon Bounderby, and is therefore not a little put out when she learns he is to marry Louisa. This provides Mrs Sparsit with a motive for her behaviour in the ensuing chapters: she has a grudge against Louisa and devotes herself to trying to detect and expose her in some misbehaviour, as a balm for her own jealousy and resentment.

Victorian Novels
Year 3
2021-2022
Week 6
Dr Saad Al-Maliky

Brief summary of Ch. 10, bk. 1 (Stephan Blackpool)

- Stephan Blackpool is introduced, a simple and poor man whose job is a power-loom operator in Bounderby's factory. Arriving at his lodging, a temporary place to stay, after escorting home his friend Rachael, the pure, honest woman he loves, Stephen surprised to encounter his drunken, immoral, slatternly wife lying in his bed.

Summary:

- A new area of interest at a different social level is now opened up. The factory-worker Stephen Blackpool, forty years old but looking older on account of his life of toil and anxiety, is introduced, as is his friend Rachael, a neat, quiet woman of thirty-five who is also a factory hand. He speaks to her with obvious affection, but is obviously depressed, and his recurring phrase 'awlus a muddle' appears.

Commentary:

- Dickens's portrait of Stephen as a dignified, patient, industrious workingman is somewhat idealised; at the same time the novelist has attempted to give authenticity to the portrait by making Stephen speak in a broad northern dialect. Stephen is the victim of a double tragedy: not only is he exploited in his working life by Bounderby, the owner of the mill, who grows rich while his workers can hardly keep body and soul together, but his private life is poisoned by the marriage in which he is trapped. This second point will be developed in later chapters. There is an obvious dramatic contrast between the two women in Stephen's life, and pathos in the fact that he cannot marry the one who loves him and would undoubtedly make him a good wife.

Commentary:

- Stephen is typical of his class. Stephen is not only a victim of the factory system but has domestic problems that complicate and embitter his life. He is therefore not necessarily representative of the class to which he belongs: in his wish to make Stephen a more dramatically interesting character, Dickens has made him untypical. As it turns out, we see almost nothing of Stephen in his capacity as a worker: we see him leaving the factory, calling on Bounderby, at home in his lodgings.

- The sub-plot concerns a Coketown mill-worker, Stephen Blackpool, who is unable to obtain a divorce from a drunken wife who causes him much misery and to marry a good woman, Rachael, whom he loves. Stephen is first ostracised by his fellow-workmen because he refuses to join a trade union, then accused of the bank robbery of which Tom is guilty. His name is eventually cleared, but only after he has met his death by falling down a disused mine-shaft.

Old Stephen: Stephen Blackpool: the name has clear associations of martyrdom in that St Stephen was the first Christian martyr. He was accused of blaspheming (to use words which show no respect for God) against Judaism and his speech in his own defence so outraged (to cause someone to feel very upset) his accusers that he was stoned to death. Blackpool a town in the north-west of England; the name also has the symbolic relation to Stephen's ultimate fate.

Dickens frequently uses synecdoche, that he uses a part to represent the whole, an example of this is that Stephen Blackpool is referred to working class or to represent the plight of the poor. Hands are parts of the body but they represent the factory workers. In this regard, the reduction of human complexity to a single function implies in the phrase 'factory hand'.

‘**Yet I don’t see Rachael, still**!’: Stephen says this phrase and he is still thinking of Rachael to be his legal wife. The idea of this phrase depends on the story in the Bible that the prophet Jacob worked for seven years to earn Rachel as his wife, but was tricked by her father into marring her older sister, Leah. He laboured another seven years was eventually able to marry her.

‘**Come awa! from ‘t. ‘Tis mine, and I've a right to ‘t**!’: Stephen talks to his wife when the former finds the latter laying on his bed. This statement reveals that the implication of claim on the marriage bed is clearly that of conjugal rights. And these rights are connected with marriage or the relationship between husband especially their sexual relationship.

Brief summary of Ch. 11, bk. 1 (no way out)

‘No way out’ . . . is the verdict Bounderby gives Stephen, when the latter consults his employer as to the possibility of a divorce. During the dinnerhour Stephen visits Bounderby to ask advice on how he can 'be ridded' of his wife. Bounderby tells him that it is impossible: divorce costs 'a mint of money' and is a luxury reserved for the rich. So Stephen would be better off accepting his miserable situation.

Commentary:

- In this chapter, the narrator tries to point out how upper classes ignore the working classes. This can be clearly appeared when Dickens makes smart simile between factories and 'Fairy palaces': the notion that factories were like palaces reveals the effort to accommodate a new strange and disturbing or distressing experience to a familiar and economical conceptual structure. We have seen, in this chapter, ironic image that as fires are lit inside the factories. Although the Fair palaces are filled with smoke, grime, and noise, the fancy can make Coketown beautiful and magical since one of the implications of fire is imagination.
- The word 'muddle' has been repeated many times in this chapter. One of its implications might be that through Stephen, Dickens suggests that industrialization threatens to compromise both the employee's and employer's moral integrity, thereby creating a social muddle to which there is no easy solution.
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Stephen's hopes that he might be able to divorce his wife. This has the effect of intensifying his tragic predicament sketched in the previous chapter. Bounderby's undisguised contempt for his workers and his cynicism concerning Stephen's motives reveal the gulf that exists between the rich and the poor: in practice if not in theory, there are plainly different laws for these two classes of citizens, and Dickens's choice of divorce to illustrate this disparity is an effective one.

Brief summary of Ch. 12, bk. 1 (the old woman)

Leaving Bounderby's, Stephen encounters a mysterious old woman who interrogates him the health and general welfare of his employer: she has evidently come to Coketown from the country asks him how Bounderby is and tells Stephen that she comes to town once a year. Working at his machine once again, Stephen reflects on the failure of his visit to Bounderby and is melancholy at the thought that he and Rachael cannot find happiness in marriage.

The old woman adds to the plot-interest and is a figure of mystery whose full identity will only be revealed nineteen chapters later - though the shrewd reader may have his suspicions long before this point.

‘**He did not go so far as to say, for her pleasure, that there was a sort of Divine Right there; but, I have heard claims almost as magnificent of late years**’: this means that in earlier times it was thought that monarchs (a king or queen) reigned by ‘Divine Right’, that is the divine intervention of God was experienced at the moment in the coronation ceremony when the ruler was anointed with oil so that the monarch became thereafter, like modern popes, infallible.

‘**Towers of Babel**’: at the beginning of the Biblical story the whole earth was of one language, and one speech, but as evil spread the Lord scattered them abroad upon the face of the earth and the left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth.

Victorian Novels
Year 3
2021-2022
Week 5

Dr Saad Al-Maliky

Brief summary of Ch. 7, bk. 1 (Mrs Sparsit)

- The scene now moves to Bounderby's house. Mrs Sparsit is introduced, as the genteel housekeeper to Bounderby, with whom, Bounderby discusses the issue of Louisa. Mrs Sparsit is an elderly and 'highly connected' widow. Sissy is told that she will be employed in the Gradgrind household to attend on Mrs Gradgrind, who is 'rather an invalid'. Sissy mentions that she used to read to her father; and when asked what she read, she replies: '"About the Fairies, sir, and the Dwarf, and the Hunchback, and the Genies"'- a species of literature that Gradgrind dismisses as 'destructive nonsense'.

- Bounderby reveals his plan to employ Tom at his bank, and his fears that fanciful Sissy's presence might somehow defile Louisa. However, after falling on hard times, the aristocratic Mrs Sparsit has accepted employment with Mr Bounderby, but she constantly remind him of her family connections, 'a Powler'. Mr Gradgrind informs Sissy that she may continue to attend his school and she will care Mrs Gradgrind in her free time.

Commentary:

- Dickens was a great entertainer, but he was also a passionate critic of his times. His journalistic training, combined with his extraordinary powers of observation enabled him to create in detail a panoramic picture of the age in which he lived. In his later work Dickens offers a more fundamental, and often more pessimistic, diagnosis of the ills of society
- In this chapter, Bounderby is seen as Roman emperor or general riding in triumph in his chariot with Mrs Sparsit as accompanying slave of former high rank. Mrs Sparsit lives as a decorative-parasite upon the vulgarly brutal exploiter, Bounderby whereas James Harthouse is a parasite upon the Bounderby-Gradgrind class. It also has been seen that Bounderby plays with Mrs Sparsit the game of rich and poor.

Commentary:

- In this chapter Dickens lays the ground for several later developments. Mrs Sparsit is to be important as a spy and plotter. Her apparent humility and stressing of her role as a servant does not conceal an absurd pride in her aristocratic connections and former social status; although, therefore, she is in some respect the opposite of her employer (he has come up in the world, she has gone down), she resembles him in the importance she attaches to external attributes rather than real worth. For his part, Bounderby, who constantly refers to Mrs Sparsit's former glory, uses her to draw attention to his own status and power - derived, of course, not from birth but from wealth acquired through business ventures. Tom's later employment in the bank, and the disaster it leads to, are also initiated here. Sissy's reference to the books she has read reminds us of her role as the representative of 'fancy' and again makes us wonder what effect she will have upon the Gradgrind household, from which that quality has been sternly banned.

- Here we have seen the word ‘Powler’ is to be something is supposedly an indication of a distinguished family, upper class. This is why Mrs Sparsit repeatedly reminds Bounderby with her family’s attribute.

Brief summary of Ch. 8, bk. 1 (never wonder)

- Dickens opens this chapter by striking the 'key-note' again (the reference is back to the opening paragraph of Chapter 5). Louisa has been told, as a child, 'never wonder'; and wonder is a quality that has been banished from the lives of the inhabitants of Coketown -not altogether successfully, however, for the factory-workers indicate a taste for fiction that is to Mr Gradgrind quite inexplicable. Tom tells Louisa that he is 'tired of my life' and will be glad to leave home when he enters Bounderby's employment. He also makes it clear that he will use Bounderby's evident feelings for Louisa to his own advantage.

Summary:

- A conversation between Tom and Louisa reveals the extent to which they realise their potential emotional and imaginative retardation, slow development, as being the likely result of Gradgrind's philosophy. Both Louisa and Tom are depressed by the colorless monotony of life at Stone Lodge, but Louisa, attempting to cheer up Tom, reminds him of her affection for him. She seems to feel that something is missing from her life, but when she wonders what it might be, Mrs. Gradgrind warns Louisa never to wonder—wondering contradicts the philosophy of fact.

Commentary:

- Like the earlier incident in Chapter 3, when Gradgrind found Tom and Louisa anxious to satisfy their curiosity with a glimpse of the circus, this chapter shows that the Gradgrind system of education has been a failure in human terms, having produced in Tom and Louisa a sense of weariness and discontent, as if they were conscious of something having been missed in life. Again, important later developments are hinted at: Tom's selfish determination to make use of his sister, regardless of her own feelings or interest, hints at the unhappiness that awaits them both.

Commentary:

- Through the symbolism of fire, the narrator evokes the importance of imagination as a force that can counteract the mechanization of human nature. In this chapter the potential energy of secret fancies in Louisa's heart has been revealed: a reference to the fire in the heart of Louisa and fire that keeps factories running

Brief summary of Ch. 9, bk. 1 (Sissy's progress)

- Sissy tells Louisa of her failures at school. She also talks to her about her father, whose sudden departure remains a mystery, but who she is still hoping will return. Tom demands that, when Bounderby visits the house, his sister should put in an appearance even against her own inclinations, since this may lead to some advantage for himself.
- Sissy is unhappy at the Gradgrind's, and only her faith in her father's imminent return persuades her to stay. Louisa convinces Sissy secretly to talk about life with her father. Louisa finds herself very moved by Sissy's deep feelings.

Commentary:

- As in the previous chapter, Tom's heartless selfishness is stressed, he is quite prepared to use the sister who loves him as a pawn, and even a sacrifice, if it will further his own ends. Although Tom and Louisa have received an identical upbringing, there is an important difference between them, since Louisa's interest in and sympathy for Sissy show that she is not wholly motivated by self-interest. As in the earlier scene in the schoolroom (Chapter 2), there is an effective irony in Sissy's failure to satisfy her teachers, since she is actually wiser than they - with a wisdom that is of the heart rather than the head, and that derives from her intuitions and spontaneous impulses rather than from logic or calculation. For instance, she ventures to question Mr M'Choakumchild's optimistic assumption that an increase in national wealth means an increase in well-being for all: as Sissy points out, this only follows if the wealth is distributed equally, which is certainly not the case in Coketown. Mr M'Choakumchild has complete faith in statistics, as relating, for example, to fatal accidents. but Sissy sees the human realities that lie behind the figures- as she points out, it is no consolation to a bereaved person to know that the loved one who has been killed is part of a small percentage.

- '**To do unto others as I would that they should do unto me**': This a moral lesson Dickens gave to the political-economists (Gradgrind and Bounderby). This is based on a saying from the Bible, 'whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you even so to them'. There was an idea of the day which supports this saying that it should be that there was iron law of wages based on supply and demand.
- In this regard John Ruskin, very great critic, thus sets up 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: The affections only become a true motive power when they ignore every other motive and condition of political economy. Treat the servant kindly, with the idea of turning his gratitude to account, you will get, as you deserve, no gratitude, or any value for your kindness; but treat him kindly without any economical purpose.

Commentary:

- In this chapter there is a story based on the story of the Arabian Nights which is Scheherazade's skill in story-telling, which enables to tell her tales from 1001 nights, thus avoiding the usual fate of the Sultan's wives, of being beheaded immediately after their wedding night: '**And often and often of a night, he used to forget all his troubles in wondering whether the Sultan would let the lady go on with the story . . .**'

Victorian Novels
Year 3
2021-2022

Week 4

Dr Saad Al-Maliky

Brief summary of Ch. 4, bk. 1 (Mr Bounderby)

- Mr Bounderby is introduced to the reader as 'a rich man: banker, merchant, manufacturer, and what not'. He is a boastful, overbearing, self-made man who frequently refers to his humble origins and early disadvantages in a manner that makes them a source of pride. (He claims to have been ill treated and cast upon the world at a young age, and to have made his way by his own unaided efforts.) Mrs Gradgrind, a timid and feeble woman, crushed by the strength of her husband's convictions, is also introduced.

Summary:

- Boundreby reminds Mrs Gradgrind that he was born in a ditch, abandoned by his mother, and raised by a cruel and alcoholic grandmother. At this point, Gradgrind enters and tells Bounderby about his children's misbehaviour. Bounderby and Gradgrind decide that Sissy is bad influence on the Gradgrind Children, and set off to inform her father that she must stop attending the school. Bounderby demands a kiss from Louisa before they leave.

Commentary:

- Although there are some superficial similarities between Gradgrind and Bounderby- the former is an M.P., the latter is a successful man of business, hence both are powerful in their influence upon society, and both are self-confident and emphatic in manner- the difference between them is already apparent. Gradgrind's convictions, though sadly misguided, are perfectly sincere: he honestly believes that his doctrines are for the good of society and the individuals that compose it. Bounderby, on the other hand, is egocentric, indifferent to the feelings of others and, for all his harping on his humble origins, a proud and self-important man. The relationship of Bounderby and Louisa to be presented later in the novel is already foreshadowed in this early chapter, and even its outcome is hinted at in Louisa's passionate gesture.

Brief summary of Ch. 5, bk. 1 (the key-note)

Dickens's famous description of Coketown: 'It was a town of red bricks, . . . etc. On their way to find Sissy's father, Gradgrind and Bounderby encounter Sissy who has been out buying oils for her father's pains. However, Sissy agrees to take Bounderby and Gradgrind to her father.

Summary:

- Why did Dickens create this town?
- The setting is Coketown, an industrial community in the north of England, and the main plot concerns one of its leading Citizens, Mr Thomas Gradgrind, and his family. Gradgrind is a convinced advocate of the utilitarian philosophy of 'fact', and has brought up his children on this principle as well as spreading it more widely through a school that he has established. The story concerns the fates of his two eldest children, Tom and Louisa, and, to a lesser extent, of two of the pupils at the school: Sissy Jupe and Bitzer.

Commentary: Nomenclature

- Dickens creates a fictitious town, 'Coketown', which places emphasis on Dickens's technique, as 'Coke' is a type of coal that gas has been taken out of, therefore we can say it is coal with the life taken out of it. This is satirical as 'Coketown' represents filled with people who have had the life taken out of them. The only life one has in this town is to be educated with facts and then to go on working to keep the industry running. The same as name of Gradgrind evokes the monotonous grind of his children's lives as well as the grind of the factory machines.

Commentary:

- Dickens's description of Coketown brings together and stresses some of the points made in earlier chapters. It is a town wholly given up to the factory system - that is, to the making of money for the masters and the exploitation of the workers. This 'town of machinery' is mechanical in the monotony of its layout and architecture: the streets and houses have no individuality but seem to repeat each other endlessly, and even the people seem like parts of a machine in their regular movements and repeated operations (compare the attempt in the school to turn the individual children into parts of a smoothly-functioning machine: 'Girl number twenty').

Commentary:

- Thus not only the different buildings with different functions (church, jail, hospital, school) are rendered indistinguishable, but the inhabitants are denied their uniqueness as human souls and turned into units in a system that allows them no freedom or spontaneity of behaviour, but imposes on them a strict pattern of monotonously repeated actions. As Dickens sums up: 'Fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the material aspect of-the town; fact, fact, fact, everywhere in the immaterial.'

Brief summary of Ch. 6, bk. 1 (Sleary's Horsemanship)

Sissy discovered that her father has lost his ability as circus performer and has abandoned her in shame. Gradgrind offers to take her in and to provide her with an education. Sissy complies and feels sorry to leave the circus entertainers because they have been like a family to Sissy during her childhood.

Commentary:

Sissy's introduction into the Gradgrind household will allow Dickens to exploit more fully and dramatically the contrast- between her and Louisa and the two educational philosophies they represent. The reader's curiosity is stimulated: will Sissy be changed by her new environment, or will her early upbringing retain its strength and perhaps even bring about change in the Gradgrind family?

Commentary:

- The new characters in this chapter are introduce: Kidderminster, Childers (circus employees) and Mr Sleary, proprietor of the circus. However, we find in this chapter a desire to make the circus a particular feature of the novel. Mr Sleary's circus entertainers represent a world of fantasy and beauty from which the young Gradgrind children are excluded. In this regard, it might reveal that opposition between the imagination and joyful world of circus entertainers and Gradgind's philosophy in importance of fact. The entertainers have the ability to transform the magic and excitement simply by using their imagination. Therefore, in doing so it is distasteful for Gradgrind. We have noticed that the entertainers win the spectators' hearts because they bring pleasure to other. The narrator implies that fancy is at least as important as fact in a balanced, fulfilling existence. Chapters 5 through 8 thus serve to reinforce the relationship between fact and fancy.
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Victorian Novels
Year 3
2021-2022

Dr Saad Al-Maliky

General Notes on the Text

- Each of the thirty-seven chapters of Hard Times is examined below from two points of view: (1) the content of the chapter (i.e. a brief summary of the main incidents and conversations that it contains and of its contribution to the development of the action); and (2) matters of interest in relation to interpretation and criticism, the most important of these being discussed more thoroughly in the next two chapters.

- As it is already indicated that Hard Times appeared originally as a weekly serial. When Dickens prepared it for volume-publication, he divided it into three sections, to each of which he gave a title: 'Book the First: Sowing' (sixteen chapters), 'Book the Second: Reaping' (twelve chapters), 'Book the Third: Garnering' (nine chapters).

Brief summary of Ch. 1, bk. 1 (one thing needful)

- This very short chapter sets the opening scene, 'a plain, bare, monotonous vault of a schoolroom', An unidentified speaker, omniscient narrator, addresses a large schoolroom on the overwhelming importance and desirability of an education consisting solely of ‘fact’.

Commentary:

- By using the classroom setting, Dickens immediately launches into one of the main themes of his novel: what kind of education is best? 'Facts', which appears in the opening sentence, will turn out to be one of the key-words of the novel; and the speaker's statement in the opening paragraph that 'This is the principle on which I bring up my own children' makes the reader wonder how this system will work out and thus points forward to one of the major areas of plot-interest, the fate of Louisa and Tom. In all these ways, Dickens gets his novel off to a very brisk start - perhaps because he is mindful of the strictly limited space available in a weekly serial.

Brief summary of Ch. 2, bk. 1 (murdering the innocents)

- The speaker is revealed as one Thomas Gradgrind. He questions two of the pupils: Sissy (short for Cecilia) Jupe, whose father works with horses in a circus, is unable to provide a definition of a horse when it is asked for; but Bitzer, who is clearly a model pupil, obliges with a prompt definition crammed with 'facts'. The class is also questioned by a government official concerned with education. The third adult present, the schoolmaster Mr M'Choakumchild, is also introduced and the training he has received is ironically described.
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Commentary:

‘murdering the innocents’: The questioning of the children embodies Dickens's satire on the Victorian enthusiasm for 'useful knowledge', and the introduction in the last sentence of the chapter of the word 'Fancy' provides an antithesis to 'Facts' that will recur throughout the novel. This antithesis is dramatised in the characters of the two pupils, Sissy and Bitzer. Whereas Sissy (referred to by Mr Gradgrind as 'Girl number twenty') is 'dark-eyed and dark-haired' and seems to have her natural colouring enriched by the sunbeam that strikes her, Bitzer is 'light-eyed and light-haired' and seems drained and almost rendered bloodless by the sunlight. His eyes are described as 'cold', and the contrast between his coldness and Sissy's warmth is developed later. Note the irony and absurdity of the system that brands Sissy, who has grown up among horses, a failure for not being ready with an uninteresting verbal definition of a horse, whereas Bitzer, whose knowledge is merely verbal and not backed by any felt experience, comes off best. In this chapter we have seen that a simple contrast emerges between Mr Gradgrind’s philosophy of fact and Sissy’s frequent indulgence in romantic, imaginative fancy. The philosophy of fact is continually shown to be at the heart of the problems of the poor whereas imagination can enhance one’s sense of sympathy.

‘Fact, fact, fact!’ . . . ‘Fact, fact, fact!’

- ‘**Fact, fact, fact!**’ . . . ‘**Fact, fact, fact!**’: It sounds to me that Dickens tries to say that the philosophy of fact only is False, false, false since this idea will prove late in this novel. Furthermore the students, arguably, are usually familiar with the two letters T and F. So that Dickens uses F instead of T for the statement that says ‘in this life, we want nothing but fact, . . . nothing but fact’.
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Brief summary of Ch. 3, bk. 1 (a loophole)

- The chapter opens with an account of the upbringing that has been bestowed on Mr Gradgrind's five children and a description of his house. Gradgrind discovers two of his children, Tom and Louisa peeking at the travelling circus, which has come to town, through a peephole in the fence. He marches the two home since he brings up his children according to his philosophy of fact and having permitted them no imaginative entertainment. Louisa admits that curiosity drew her to the circus and tries to defend her brother by saying she dragged him there.

Commentary:

Mr Gradgrind has been consistent in subjecting his own children to the same system of education as is implemented at his school. They have never been allowed to hear nursery rhymes or fairy stories, which represent 'fancy' or nourishment for the imagination, but have been given a diet of hard facts. But this has had the effect of leaving the older children unsatisfied and discontented. This chapter reveals the connection between Gradgrind’s philosophy of fact and mechanization of human nature especially when Tom did not look at his father, ‘but gave himself up to be taken home like a machine’.

Commentary:

Dickens's pattern of contrasts between the circus and all that Gradgrind stands for is now beginning to emerge. As for the Gradgrind home, it symbolises the Gradgrind philosophy: its strict symmetry is like a calculation in arithmetic, and even the lawn and garden, where some signs of natural growth might be expected, are 'ruled straight like a botanical account-book'. The chapter-title, 'A Loophole', is deliberately ambiguous, not only referring to the gap in the fence through which Louisa and Tom glimpse a world of magic that has been denied to them, but also hinting at something missing in the upbringing they have received. The reference to Mr Bounderby at the end of the chapter arouses a curiosity on the reader's part that is satisfied in the next chapter (though the original readers had to wait a whole week before the new instalment, beginning at Chapter 4, came into their hands).

Victorian Novels
Year 3
2021-2022

Dr Saad Al-Maliky

Victorian Novels - Year 3 (2021-2022)

- **What is a novel?**
- A novel is a genre that restrictedly defined as a ‘piece of prose fiction of a reasonable length’. The difficulty of the study of a novel can be clearly appeared in the light of the concept that a novel cannibalizes other literary modes and mixes the bits and pieces promiscuously together.

- You can find ‘poetry and dramatic dialogue in the novel, along with epic, pastoral, satire, history, elegy, tragedy, and any number of other literary modes’. In so doing, privately, no doubts when you are going to study a novel, you will study unintentionally poetry and drama. It sounds that how important the study of novel is.

How to study a Novel?

- Studying a novel on your own requires self-discipline and a carefully thought-out work plan in order to be effective.
- ♦ You will need to read the novel more than once. Start by reading it quickly for pleasure, then read it slowly and thoroughly.
- ♦ On your second reading make detailed notes on the plot, characters and themes of the novel. Further readings will generate new ideas and help you to memorise the details of the story.
- ♦ Some of the characters will develop as the plot unfolds. How do your responses towards them change during the course of the novel?
- ♦ Think about how the novel is narrated. From whose point of view are events described?

- ♦ A novel may or may not present chronologically: the time-scheme may be a key to its structure and organisation.
- ♦ What part do the settings play in the novel?
- ♦ Are words, images or incidents repeated so as to give the work a pattern? Do such patterns help you to understand the novel's themes?
- ♦ Identify what styles of language are used in the novel.

- ♦ What is the effect of the novel's ending? Is the action completed and closed, or left incomplete and open?
- ♦ Does the novel present a moral and just world?
- ♦ Cite exact sources for all quotations, whether from the text itself or from critical commentaries. Wherever possible find your own examples from the novel to back up your opinions.
- ♦ Always express your ideas in your own words.

However, one of the core subjects of a study of the English Literature Programme is a novel. Arguably, if you want to know seriously how to study a novel, you should be a deep and attentive reader. This means reading, then re-reading. This means making an active engagement with the book. And it means making notes. Probably, in so doing, this formula of the study will help students develop a better appreciation for literature, increase their vocabulary and their overall comprehension skills.

- Actually, it is whole-hearted that you have to bear in mind that there are some common expressions used when talking about novels:
- ♦ Suspense is a tense feeling in the reader, caused by wondering what may happen.
- ♦ Surprise is the feeling in the reader caused by something unexpected happening.
- ♦ Plot is the set of connected events on which a story is based.
- ♦ Character(s) is (are) person (or people) in a novel.
- ♦ Setting is the place and time at which the events of a novel take place.
- ♦ Climax is the most intense part of a novel, generally towards the end.
- ♦ Theme is what the novel is about, rather than what happens in the novel.
- ♦ Style is the manner of writing used in the story.

Social and Industrial Background of Victorian Era

- The British queen, Victoria, has given her name to the era between 1837 and 1901, the years of her reign, the longest of any British ruler. The Victorian era was a period of world as well as British history, for the queen ruled at a time when Britain had a vast global empire, including a quarter of the planet's population. It was a time of massive social change. Railroads were built across America and Europe, where many new industries developed. Britain led the way in manufacturing, earning the nickname the "workshop of the world." The growth of British industries drew vast numbers of people from the countryside to rapidly growing towns and cities. Between 1837 and 1901, the population doubled, from 18.5 to 37 million. By 1901, three quarters of British people lived in towns and cities.
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- Industrialisation was fast growing in the Victorian era where it also saw a second comprehensive phase of the massive upheaval known as the Industrial Revolution. It involved the manufacturing of raw cotton and when this began there was a remarkable decline in death-rate and a substantial increase in birth-rate, as Britain needed more industrial workers. The Industrial Revolution then progressed and began to manufacture not only cotton, but metal, steel and coal as well. When industrialization first began Britain was not the wealthiest country in Western Europe, but it was a society which boasted a hard working, inventive, risk-taking privative sector that received strong support from the government.

Victorian Novels
Year 3
2021-2022

Dr Saad Al-Maliky

An Introduction to *Hard Times*: its structure

- The novel is divided into three sections, “Sowing,” “Reaping,” and “Garnering”— are a reference to the Biblical saying: ‘for whatsoever a man sowth [sowed], that shall he also reap’. Besides, these agricultural titles are ironic alongside the industrial focus of the novel. In the first section, the seeds are planted for the rest of the novel—Sissy comes to live with the Gradgrinds, Louisa is married to Bounderby, and Tom is apprenticed at the bank.

- In the second section, the characters reap the results of those seeds—Louisa's collapse, Tom's robbery, and Stephen's exile. In the third section, whose title, "Garnering," literally means collecting or picking up the pieces of the harvest that were missed, the characters attempt to restore equilibrium (a state of balance) to their lives, and they face their futures with new emotional resources at their disposal. The titles of the sections, however, refer not only to the harvesting of events, but also to the harvesting of ideas. In the first chapter of Hard Times, Gradgrind declares his intention to "plant" only facts in his children's minds, and to "root out everything else," such as feelings and fancies.

- This metaphor returns to haunt him when, just before her collapse, Louisa points to the place where her heart should be and asks her father, “[W]hat have you done with the garden that should have bloomed once, in this great wilderness here?” Louisa implies that by concentrating all his efforts on planting facts in his children’s minds, Gradgrind has neglected to plant any sentiments in their hearts, leaving her emotionally barren.

One of the critics 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'. The same critic 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.

Fact versus Fancy:

Mr. Gradgrind's educational philosophy is based on the utilitarian idea that only facts and figures are important. This excludes all other values, especially "fancy." Everything in Gradgrind's world is based on facts, measurement, and strict order. Even his house, with its rigidly symmetrical design, reflects his principles, as do the grounds. Lawn, garden, and walkway are all "ruled straight like a botanical account-book."

Fancy, on the other hand, is embodied in the child's sense of wonder, which Gradgrind attempts to eradicate in his children. Tom and Louisa are not allowed to read poetry, learn nursery rhymes, or indulge in other childish amusements.

Utilitarianism

It is another important theme in Hard Times. Dickens' well known caricature of utilitarian ways of thinking in Hard Times found a ready and sympathetic audience. Utilitarianism began with the premise that all human behaviour was governed by a desire to seek pleasure and avoid pain, and that a recognition of this fundamental law could provide the foundation for a theory of morals. It was possible to calculate quantities of pleasure or pain produced by particular actions, and that such calculations could form an objective basis for a system of legislation. The aim of that legislation was to ensure a right or 'good' society where 'good' was defined in terms of the principle of utility or 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number'. So, pleasure is measurable, that any particular person's pleasure is as desirable as that of any other person, and that this equality of treatment allowed individuals to conform to the principle of utility – to accept that right or good actions at an individual level always correlate with the greatest happiness.

Josiah Bounderby of Coketown represents the utilitarian attitude and, as such, is the villain of the story and clearly the target of Dickens' political argument. Dickens characterizes Bounderby as a powerful individual, driven by greed and guided by a distorted view of human nature. He is the only wealthy industrialist introduced in Hard Times. Dickens clearly portrays Bounderby as a greedy and individualistic, self-serving capitalist; rather than an insightful, forward-looking crafter of a new industrial age. Dickens artfully weaves his political enemy into a pompous, arrogant image reinforced with traditional working-class themes that lead the reader to conclude that Bounderby, as a manifestation of Gradgrind's and Choakumchild's philosophy of "fact," represents all that is wrong with industrial society.

Utilitarianism's emphasis on the individual as the basic unit of analysis, and on individual behaviour as basically selfish or pleasure-seeking, appeared as a symptom, rather than the resolution, of current social conflict.

Same as Utilitarianism, political economy's emphasis on competition and private property. It was precisely a concern with the apparent social irresponsibility of political economy, together with an acute awareness of its limitations

Victorian Novels
Year 3
2019-2020

Dr Saad Al-Maliky

Brief summary of Ch. 7, bk. 3 (whelp-hunting)

- Tom escapes by joining Sleary's circus. Before he can board ship at Liverpool, and thereby flee the country, he is arrested by Bistzer.

Commentary:

- The satire Dickens made in this chapter is that at the beginning of the novel, Grdgrind reviles the circus troupe and accuses it of corrupting his children. At the end, he is forced to depend on the troupe to save one of his children.
- Dickens's alternative to utilitarianism in *Hard Times* is best expressed by the circus clown, Mr Sleary. Mr Sleary has the greatest impact on Gradgrind, who explains to Gradgrind that there is something else in the world besides self-interest and mere fact. Sleary generously helps Gradgrind's son to safety. Here, Dickens insists through Sleary that amusement and entertainment are necessary in the humbler form of the circus, or in the higher, aesthetic form of literature and poetry. Playfulness, fancy, creativity, and imagination are essential human needs that are not addressed by utilitarian emphasis on profit, advantage, regimentation, and control.

Brief summary of Ch. 8, bk. 3 (Philosophical)

- Sleary dupes Bitzer, and again Tom is able to escape. Sleary has one more surprise in store: he confides to Gradgrind that Sissy's father's dog has unexpectedly returned alone to the circus, this means that her father is almost always dead.

Commentary:

Allen Samuels considers the novel more fruitful to focus on the figure of Bitzer as a key to unlocking the novel's riches, rather than Stephen Blackpool. {**Did you agree or disagree with him**}. His reading of Book III, Chapter 8 is particularly helpful, where he considers it the resolution of the plot whose subject-matter is Bitzer. In this chapter there is serious dramatic discussion of the relation between 'language (or creation) and selfishness'. Bitzer is not only the representative of self-interest in the novel but he is used, finally, to 'bring the satire's concerns into unity of interconnection'. Finally, *Hard Times* is important because it offers 'a humane critique of a society obsessed by ideology', one with no 'practical solutions to its problems'.

Brief summary of Ch. 9, bk. 3 (the final)

- Dickens sketches the future biographies of the novel's protagonists.

Commentary:

- Finally, probably, we have seen that each character in the novel received what he or she deserves: Bounderby sends Mrs. Sparsit away to live with her unpleasant relative, Lady Scadgers; after five years Bounderby dies; Gradgrind will cease serving fact and will instead devote his skills and money to faith, hope, and charity; Louisa will never marry again; Tom dies; Rachael will go on working and continue in her sweetness and good faith; Sissy will have a large and happy family.

At the end the novel is addressing the reader and it considers him or her as a very important aspect in the world in which it created: ‘Dear reader! It rests with you and me,’. . . So in this regard, Dickens might dedicate the novel to the reader and he supposedly arguably says: Dear reader! Pay close attention to the novel because the grasp of it depends on your experience of the text. Dear Reader! If you are going to read this novel and you found some of its characters acting as caricatures, cartoons on newspapers, I deliberately used this technique to satirise government to look after the miserable lives of the poor. Dear Reader! If you are going to read this novel and it made you worried, it was written to make you worried but it will serve you right. Dear Reader! If you are going to read this novel and you might find it bitter and dark, it was a protest against bitterness and it was the darkness of the subject not the author.

John Holloway, Raymond Williams, and Terry Eagleton have all criticised Dickens for the apparent crudeness or inaccuracy of his depiction of ideologies. But we, as readers, consider their idea is incomplete as a very recent study of *Hard Times,* written by Berman, reassures that 'Readers [and some critics] have long blamed Dickens for getting his social facts wrong, but when we look further, we may discover our own error: Dickens's novel [*Hard Times*] reacts not to Victorian England's social ills *per se,* but to the available *representations* of them.' It should now finally be absolutely clear that *Hard Times* was a part of culture of the day or it represented the existed social ills of the day. Readers must be happy with the novel's purposeful donnèe, in order to reap the results of the sharply focused argumentation Dickens adopts.

We have seen a clear-cut aporiae emerging in so many the very critics' arguments or discussions per se: 'the very people who would blame Dickens for his sentimental hospitality are the very people who would also blame him for his narrow political conviction. The very people who would mock him for his narrow radicalism are those who would mock him for his broad fireside.' . As a result, a number of instances can also be found where critics not only contradict each other in their evaluation of Dickens's performance, but also — as in the case of Richard Simpson, Edwin P. Whipple, and David Sonstroem — themselves.

Victorian Novels
Year 3
2019-2020

Dr Saad Al-Maliky

Brief summary of Ch. 4, bk. 3 (lost)

- As a reward is offered for Stephen's capture, Rachael protests his innocence, and tells of Tom's duplicitous (dishonest) arrangement with the factory-worker. Bounderby demands corroborative (proved) testimony (spoken or written statements that something is true) from Tom and Louisa.

Commentary:

- This chapter reveals that Stephen suffers not only for what he believes in but also for another person's crime.

Brief summary of Ch. 5, bk. 3 (found)

- The old woman is revealed as Bounderby's mother. The truth of Bounderby's origins is discovered: his mother confesses that she did not abandon him in the ditch, as he had claimed. Rather, she raised, educated, and loved him. He abandoned her, refusing to allow her to visit him now that he has become wealthy and successful. The myth of Bounderby, the self-made man, is exploded, and he refuses to offer an explanation for his former lies about his past.
- .

Brief summary of Ch. 6, bk. 3 (the starlight)

Stephen is discovered to have fallen down an old mining pit called Old Hell Shaft. After a lengthy rescue operation, he entreats Gradgrind to establish his innocence. Stephen dies.

Commentary:

- To begin with, in this chapter, we have to bear in mind that Dickens's *Hard Times* deals with enormous changes in British society caused by the industrial Revolution. During this time, society was constantly being shaped and reshaped by the profound changes the revolution brought. Among such changes, one of the most fundamental was the exodus of workers from the rural communities to the cities, which were centralized around factories.

- During his painful and hard existence Stephen observes a bright star in the sky as if it watches him and gives him light and heat. Besides, in Blackpool's dying moments we see him transform Rachael, whom he loves with an almost sisterly affection, into an image of a guiding star. Stephen and Rachael, thwarted working-class lovers, are automatons compounded of such Victorian middle-class virtues as industry, honesty, self-denial, chastity, and deference. While Stephen seems to look forward to death as a release from his miserable existence, and perhaps a part of Dickens's intent to rouse sympathy for the poor.

Dickens creates in Stephen Blackpool a character who almost alone in *Hard Times* embodies the struggle of an individual against a dehumanizing society and then can find nothing to do with him but kill him. Stephen's two major conflicts — with his wife and with Bounderby — are but two sides of the same coin, and his failure to solve either suggests the powerlessness of love in modern civilization. Dickens's recognition is that only death could end Stephen's problems.

Through the pathetic scene of Stephen's death, Dickens suggests that there is no easy solution between the employer and employee. But we have seen this scene as plea for reconciliation at the end of *Hard Times*: Dickens 'believes that into the relations between employers and the employed, as into all the relations of the life, there must enter something of feeling and sentiment; something of mutual explanation, forbearance (patience and forgiveness), and consideration. Dickens always says, imagination is a *sine qua non* /ˌsɪn.eɪ.kwɑːˈnəʊn/ (a necessary condition without which something is not possible) for survival. Political economy is mere skeleton unless it has a little human covering and filling out, a little human bloom upon it, and a little human warmth in it'.

Victorian Novels
Year 3
2021-2022
Lectures Week 12

Dr Saad Al-Maliky

Brief summary of Ch. 8, bk. 2 (explosion)

- The chapter begins by summing up the development of Harthouse's relationship with Louisa up to this point in the action .The narrator comments that Harthouse has no premeditated 'wickedness of purpose'- in plain English, he has not set out deliberately to seduce Louisa - but is merely 'indifferent and purposeless', giving no thought to the implications or possible results of his conduct. Bounderby tells him that the bank has been robbed of a relatively small sum taken from the safe that is in Tom's keeping, and also mentions that Louisa fainted when she heard the news. Bounderby suspects Stephen Blackpool, who has been observed lurking about the bank; an old woman has also been seen in suspicious circumstances. Louisa asks Tom whether he has anything to tell her; he refuses to take the opportunity to confide in her, but after she has left him he shows signs of great distress. Mr Bounderby moves Mrs Sparsit temporarily into his home.

Commentary:

- The 'gunpowder' that has now 'exploded', so we now know the reason behind Tom's plan in Ch. 6, bk.II is to implicate Stephen as the robbery's prime suspect. Presumably, Louisa's reaction to the news, on the other hand, suggests that she suspects the truth, and her attempt to encourage Tom to confide in her points in the same direction.The references to Harthouse in the early part of this chapter remind us that, at this stage of the action, Dickens is simultaneously pursuing several narrative lines - not only Tom's crime and Stephen's unwitting involvement in it, but also Harthouse's act of sabotage (to pursue the 'gunpowder' image) directed at Louisa's marriage.Throughout the events of the novel so far, the climax is nearly approaching: Louisa's engagement with Harthouse, Stephen's exile, Bank's robbery, Stephen's implication of Bank's robbery, and Tom's sulky silence of Louisa's questions.

- **‘Mr Bounderby, like an oriental dancer, put his tambourine** (ˌtæm.bəˈriːn) **on his head’**: Dickens’s business in life has become too serious for troubling over the small change of verisimilitude, the quality of seeming true or of having the appearance of reality, and denying himself and his reader the indulgence of his human in inessentials. In this regard, Bounderby is continually portrayed in one scene as drumming hard upon his hat, and this is Dickens’s final outlandish simile. It must be admitted that it is not only not entertaining, but sometimes hardly bearable when it does not make us laugh. It is not for kidding or laughing when Dickens mentioned this phrase or statement: he does not need you as reader to laugh when you are going to read this phrase. Perhaps in doing so Dickens tried to detect the weakness of the craftsmen and indirectly he addressed the government to look at their models what they did. As in the passing round of the hat, the tambourine was also used to collect money in street shows..

Brief summary of Ch. 9, bk. 2 (hearing the last of it)

The Bounderby marriage deteriorates (to become worse), owing partly to the machinations, complicated and secret plans to get power or control, of Mrs Sparsit. Louisa returns home to attend the death of her mother. Mrs Sparsit, aware of the growing intimacy between Louisa and Harthouse, ingratiates herself with Bounder by, flattering him and bestowing upon him special acts of attention that emphasise his wife's indifference. As a result, Louisa's 'dangerous alienation from her husband' increases as relations between them become more openly hostile. News arrives that Mrs Gradgrind is dying, and Louisa arrives in time to witness her death.

Commentary:

- **Mrs Sparsit's role as spy and plotter against Louisa and Harthouse is to be prominent from this point onwards; her motives have been made clear much earlier, in her chagrin at being disappointed of securing Gradgrind as a husband herself. Exactly why Dickens kills off Mrs Gradgrind at this point is not immediately clear; but a clue can be found in her deathbed speech to Louisa, which shows more eloquence and understanding (even if only a half-formed understanding) than she has ever shown in her lifetime. She tells Louisa that 'there is something ... that your father has missed, or forgotten'; and this reminds us that the results of Mr Gradgrind's experiment in education is now before our eyes in the shape of Tom's crime and Louisa's unhappy marriage and entanglement with Harthouse. Mrs Gradgrind thus evinces the truth-telling traditionally associated with the dying; and although she has been a figure of fun during her lifetime, the reference to her passing at the end of the chapter has an impressive and moving solemnity reinforced by the allusion to the form of service for the burial of the dead in the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England.**

- **‘I have never heard of it’**: Before her death, Mrs Gradgrind calls Louisa to her, explaining that she feels like she has missed or forgotten something in her life and that she wants to write a letter to Mr. Gradgrind asking him to find out what it is. Privately, we think that this thing is 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. A critic says that Dickens uses imagination as the only force that can change individual self-interest into common self-interest.
-

Brief summary of Ch. 10, bk. 2 (Mrs Sparsit's staircase)

- Harthouse tries to convince Louisa of Stephen Blackpool's guilt. Mrs Sparsit continues her clandestine activities as a spy upon Louisa and Harthouse. The bank robbery remains unsolved, Louisa tells Harthouse that she cannot believe that Stephen is guilty, but he attempts to persuade her that it is likely.

Commentary

- Again, Dickens is keeping two main interests going in this chapter; the progress of Louisa's liaison with Harthouse, and the mystery of who robbed the bank. The chapter-title is 'Mrs Sparsit's Staircase', and the image of the staircase which Louisa is metaphorically descending, to meet ruin and disaster at the bottom, is reiterated in the titles of the next two chapters ('Lower and Lower' and 'Down'). The appropriateness of the image consists in the idea it conveys of a steady, relentless progression towards the 'dark pit of shame and ruin at the bottom' - that is, Louisa's apparently inevitable elopement and adultery. Louisa's sympathy for Stephen, and her true reading of his character, are contrasted with Harthouse's negligent cynicism.

Commentary

- Privately, the main concern of symbolism of the staircase in Mid-Victorian Era is to reveal the theme of the fallen woman who is taken from the lowliest of places and lifted to a higher state of being: If a woman spent time alone with a man who was not her relative, her behavior was considered morally suspect, or a sign of her possible mental, if not physical, wrong. Mrs Sparsit imagines that Louisa is running down a long staircase into a "dark pit of shame and ruin at the bottom." This imaginary staircase represents her belief that Louisa is going to elope with Harthouse and consequently ruin her reputation forever. Through the staircase, Dickens reveals the manipulative, describes someone who tries to control people to his or her advantage, and censorious, severely critical, side of Mrs. Sparsit's character. He also suggests that Mrs. Sparsit's self-interest causes her to misinterpret the situation. Rather than ending up in a pit of shame by having an affair with Harthouse, Louisa actually returns home to her father.
- .

Brief summary of Ch. 11, bk. 2 (lower and lower)

- Mrs Sparsit learns from Tom that Harthouse, who has been absent for a short time 'shooting in Yorkshire', is due to arrive back in Coketown during Bounderby's absence in London and has asked Tom to meet him at the station. She installs herself at the station as a spy; but when Harthouse fails to arrive she realises that this is a trick on Harthouse's part, designed to keep Tom out of the way, and she dashes to Bounderby's house some way out of Coketown. There she finds Harthouse has already joined Louisa, and she spies on them both in a wood. Although Louisa asks Harthouse to leave her, he declares his love for her; they arrange to meet again 'that night', presumably to go away together, and Harthouse rides off in a terrific thunderstorm that drenches the unfortunate Mrs Sparsit to the skin. Notwithstanding her acute (and highly comical) discomfort, she follows Louisa to Coketown; but when the train on which they are both travelling reaches the station, she loses her.
- The jealous Mrs Sparsit continues to spy on Louisa and Harthouse, following the former on the train to Coketown.

Commentary

- This chapter is the middle one of the three that form the climax of the second 'Book' of the novel and are linked by the image of the staircase as well as by the developing action. It ends, so to speak, on a question mark: where has Louisa gone? The obvious assumption is that she has eluded Mrs Sparsit, wittingly or unwittingly, and has gone to meet Harthouse, who has evidently been doing some plotting on his own account, since his device to keep Tom out of the way is part of a premeditated scheme. Mrs Sparsit is cast in the role of a comic detective, motivated by spite and envy; and she too has been carrying out a plot of her own devising. There is thus a wealth of plotting in both senses of the term.

Commentary

- Mr Gragdgrind learns through Louisa's collapse that his philosophy has deprived his family of the happiness that only imagination and love can create: 'How could you give me life, and take me all the inappreciable things . . .
- The novel is fully integrated into national debates about practical ways of avoiding mutually damaging industrial battles between masters and men – must be persuasive. It does not simply collapse the political problem into a personal relationship susceptible to romantic urges.

Commentary

- Throughout the novel the narrative voice is always assuming the character of one or another of the story's reprehensible organizers. One of these, for example, is Mrs. Sparsit, a nice match for Slackbridge. Mrs. Sparsit organizes her hatred of Louisa in terms of a rhetorical figure: she sees Louisa's attraction to Harthouse as a staircase down which the young married woman is descending to sexual and social ruin. The narrator of the novel borrows this metaphor from Mrs. Sparsit to continue the story of Louisa, so that we come to trust the figure, and to assume its fidelity, honest support, to what is happening. But we are surprised to find that the narrator leads us astray with the metaphor, uses the staircase to cover up and to misstate, to express a fact that is not correct, what is going on in Louisa's mind and heart.

Brief summary of Ch. 12, bk. 2 (down)

- Mr Gradgrind is shown at home. His daughter Louisa arrives unexpectedly, tells him how unhappy she has been in her marriage, confesses to him that Harthouse has made a declaration of love to her, assures him that 'I have not disgraced you', and ends by falling unconscious at his feet.

Commentary

- Louisa's action in returning to her old home and telling her father the truth represents a 'reversal' of the action: the reader who has expected her to run away with Harthouse finds that - contrary to the assumptions of both Harthouse and Mrs Sparsit - she is not prepared to take soch an irrevocable step, but, for all her unhappiness and desperation, retains a sense of right behaviour. This is the climax of Louisa's role in the novel; it also represents the failure of Harthouse's irresponsible schemings and a humiliating disappointment for him; and, most important of all, it brings home to Mr Gradgrind the utter failure of his system of education. This is the note on which the chapter emphatically ends, with Gradgrind observing 'the pride of his heart and the triumph of his system, lying, an insensible heap, at his feet'. But it is not, of course, the end of the novel, since the fate of that other important victim of the Gradgrind system, Tom, is still undetermined, and the bank robbery remains unsolved, Stephen Blackpool still lying under the cloud of suspicion. These matters remain to be cleared up in the third and shortest 'Book' of the novel. In the present chapter, the dialogue between Louisa and her father carries most of the burden of meaning; or, to put it another way, Dickens has conceived and written the scene very much in terms of the stage. Louisa's dialogue in particular is distinctly stagey (e.g. 'I curse the hour in which I was born to such a destiny'). The scene forms a parallel or complement to that which occurred near the end of the first 'Book' (I,15) and showed the interview between father and daughter in which she agreed, far from enthusiastically, to marry Bounderby.

Commentary

- The pit: Old Hell Shaft, into which Stephen falls; the ditch out of which Bounderby describes himself as arising; the well into which Mrs. Gradgrind seems to have sunk as she approaches death; and the ‘dark pit of shame and ruin’ that lies at the bottom of the staircase erected by Mrs. Sparsit for Louisa's expected moral lapse, a temporary failure. All the pits owe their existence to Fact and all that the word entails: In effecting his rise in the world, Bounderby has thoughtlessly dug the pit for Stephen. Just as thoughtlessly, Gradgrind has prepared the ‘dark pit’ for his daughter.