

# Hard Times



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## INTRODUCTION

### *The Genesis of the Novel within a Periodical Format*

On 25 October 1853, Dickens wrote to Angela Burdett Coutts from Milan describing his travels via the Simplon Pass into Italy. He was pleased to be in Italy again, and to hear and speak the 'delicate' language once more:

So beautiful too to see the delightful sky again, and all the picturesque wonders of the country. And yet I am so restless to be doing – and always shall be, I think, so long as I have any portion in Time – that if I were to stay more than a week in any one City here, I believe I should be half desperate to begin some new story!!! (*Letters* 7.171)

This extract appears in both the first and second Norton editions of *Hard Times*, under the section 'Dickens' Comments on the Composition of *Hard Times*'. Its inclusion is an erroneous one, since the 'new story' eventually became *Little Dorrit*, within which Dickens drew upon his Alpine and Italian travels of the 1840s and 1853. The distinction has a hitherto unnoticed bearing on our understanding of the creation of *Hard Times* because it supports the notion that the novel was initially an unwanted child which in all probability would not have existed, and certainly not in its present form, had it not been for the flagging circulation of *Household Words*. The unpropitious circumstances of its conception, however, produced a work which challenged Dickens's skills as a novelist and journalist. His illuminating comment in 1852 about the birth of his last child, 'Plorn' (Edward Bulwer Lytton Dickens), could reasonably be applied to *Hard Times*: 'I am not quite clear that I particularly wanted the latter, but I have no doubt that he is good for me in some point of view or other'. A year later Dickens proudly announced that 'there cannot possibly be another baby anywhere, to come into competition with him' (*Letters* 6.629, 7.87). *Hard Times*, the unintentional novel, became, like Plorn, a blessing in disguise.

Dickens's plans after completing *Bleak House* in August 1853 had been 'to be as lazy as [he] could be all through summer' and 'do nothing in that way for a year' (*Letters* 7.288, 453). However, by the time he returned to England from Italy on 11 December 1853, the weekly sales of *Household Words* – usually averaging 40,000 copies – had dropped dramatically. (Apart from *A Child's History of England*, Dickens's last contribution to *Household Words* had appeared on 8 October 1853, two days before he left for Switzerland and Italy.) Some time between mid-December and 28 December it was agreed that Dickens should write a novel for the periodical: 'there is such a fixed idea on the part of my printers and copartners in *Household Words*, that a story by me . . . would make some unheard-of-effect with it, that I am going to write one' (*Letters* 7.256). The Agreement, drawn up by his partners, Bradbury & Evans, John Forster and W. H. Wills, dated 28 December 1853, consented to pay Dickens £1,000 in two instalments and clearly states that the weekly serialization of Dickens's

new tale was 'the personal venture of the four partners . . . with a view to the enlargement of the circulation of *Household Words* and the consequent enhancement of the value of their several shares' (*Letters* 7.911).

With the first page written on 23 January 1854, Dickens admitted that his 'purpose [was] among the mighty secrets of the world'. Although he had at that date 'the main idea' for the new work, and although he stated after the novel's completion that 'the idea laid hold of me by the throat in a very violent manner' (*Letters* 7.256, 453), the inspiration did not initially come voluntarily. The 'vague thoughts . . . rife within' Dickens months before he had written *Dombey and Son*, or 'the first shadows' and '[v]iolent restlessness, and vague ideas' that had existed long before he put pen to paper for *Bleak House* (*Letters* 4.510, 6.463), were absent when he came to compose *Hard Times*. Seeking ideas for the new novel, Dickens turned to *Household Words*, within whose covers articles by nearly 400 contributors were ingrained with his inimitable watermark.

Dickens's experience of writing a novel in weekly parts began in 1840–1, when *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge* appeared in his weekly periodical, *Master Humphrey's Clock*. He had yet to find an original format for a periodical, and his insistence on using as models the eighteenth-century favourites of his childhood – such as Addison and Steele's *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*, and Goldsmith's *The Bee* – resulted in falling sales of *Master Humphrey's Clock*. His initial intention of writing 'amusing essays on the various foibles of the day' and '[taking] advantage of all passing events' which he would form into 'sketches, essays, tales, adventures [and] letters' was quickly abandoned, and *The Old Curiosity Shop*, started as a short story in the *Clock*, became the sole contents of the periodical. *Master Humphrey's Clock* continued as a vehicle for the weekly serialization of *Barnaby Rudge*, after which it folded. Despite the number of weekly parts for each novel – 40 for *The Old Curiosity Shop* and 42 for *Barnaby Rudge* (compared to 20 for *Hard Times*) – Dickens found the weekly plan constraining and frustrating. While writing an early number of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, he complained to Forster: 'I was obliged to cramp most dreadfully what I thought a pretty idea in the last chapter. I hadn't room to turn'. With *Barnaby Rudge*, he also found himself 'sadly cramped . . . for room' (*Letters* 2.80, 238). It is therefore not surprising, after the expansiveness of *Bleak House*, that when Dickens found himself in his former literary claustrophobia of a weekly serial problems of space and time were his overriding complaints. In February 1854 – several weeks into writing *Hard Times* – he complained:

The difficulty of space is CRUSHING. Nobody can have any idea of it who has not had an experience of patient fiction-writing with some elbow-room always, and open places in perspective. In this form, with any kind of regard to the current number, there is absolutely no such thing. (*Letters* 7.282)

By April, Dickens was 'in a dreary state, planning and planning the story of *Hard Times* (out of materials for I don't know how long a story)', and three days before he finished he was 'three parts mad, and the fourth delirious, with perpetual rushing at *Hard Times*'. He had not changed his views when he wrote in November 1854: 'the compression and close condensation necessary for that disjointed form of publica-

tion, gave me perpetual trouble' (*Letters* 7.317, 369, 453). Part of the difficulty lay in his insistence on planning *Hard Times* around a monthly format (see his work plan for the first number), even though the novel was never intended for monthly publication. The decision was understandable, since he had up until this time produced all his novels in monthly parts (the weekly parts of *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge* in *Master Humphrey's Clock* were also issued monthly). The imposition of a monthly framework on a weekly instalment which itself is constrained within a miscellany of articles was to be Dickens's greatest challenge to his creative powers. *Hard Times* appeared for twenty weeks in *Household Words* from 1 April to 12 August 1854. Over the period, circulation was four or five times greater than before the novel's serialization (around 70,000–80,000 copies), greatly outstripping the journal's best figures to date (60,000 copies) (*Letters* 6.64; Buckler, 1950, 200 and note 6).

The common factors of financial exigency and artistic confinement which link *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge* to *Hard Times* are outmatched by the unusual genesis and journalistic environment of the later novel. Unlike *Hard Times*, the two earlier works were already conceived before readership fell in *Master Humphrey's Clock*. Moreover, both *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge* (with the exception of the first two instalments of *The Old Curiosity Shop*) in essence became the periodical. *Hard Times*, with half the amount of instalments, had to be created swiftly and imaginatively by a maturer hand. Its incremental construction within the established journalistic format of *Household Words* shaped the novel's form and content.

#### 'Household Words' and Dickens's Literary and Social Vision

The special nature of *Hard Times* lies in its relationship to *Household Words* and in the journal's vital role in Dickens's literary and social vision. The journal was the culmination of his dream to edit his own magazine, and he saw it both as 'a good property' (*Letters* 6.83) and as an embodiment of his personality and artistic vision that had been shaped by his childhood reading. His aims for the journal are declared in 'A Preliminary Word', the now famous manifesto which opened the first number on 30 March 1850. The journal promised to nurture the 'light of Fancy which is inherent in the human breast' (1.1), and it had no place for a hard, utilitarian mentality. For Dickens, the fanciful, imaginative treatment of all material for *Household Words* was imperative not only as a stylistic rule but also as a perspective on life itself. Consequently, he frequently insisted that contributions which he felt were 'wanting [in] elegance of fancy' be brightened and lightened: 'KEEP "HOUSEHOLD WORDS" IMAGINATIVE! is the solemn and continual Conductorial Injunction' (*Letters* 6.522, 7.200). Dickens's subeditor, W. H. Wills, was more realistic about some contributions to the journal: 'No one, not even yourself (as you said the other day) can sparkle to order, especially writers who have only an occasional sparkle in them' (*Letters* 6.850).

The absence of by-lines, together with Dickens's editorial control, ensured that *Household Words* spoke with only one voice. Readers were reminded of this fact in the running headline of each opening: '[Conducted by Charles Dickens]'. It is interesting to note that one of his proposed titles for the journal in 1850 was 'The House-

hold Voice' (Letters 6.26). The anonymity of articles in *Household Words* (and in *All the Year Round*), and Dickens's desire for balance and consistency of opinion within the periodical, demanded editorial scrutiny and dedication. He commissioned, revised, overhauled and positioned articles within the weekly numbers, always conscious of the danger of contradiction which not only might compromise his opinions but also suggest to his readers that 'the journal itself [was] blowing hot and cold and playing fast and loose, in a ridiculous way' (Letters 7.47). His frequent trips away – either on holiday or on his public reading tours – disrupted the daily editorial duties and the long Thursday-afternoon meetings at the *Household Words* office. Weekly parcels were sent to him by his subeditor, however – some 'in dimensions like a spare bed, containing "doubtful articles" for *Household Words*, on which decision was necessary to the peace of mind of the writers' (Letters 6.147). Yet, despite his strict control and meticulous revisions, articles contrary to his central beliefs about human existence in an industrialized society did occasionally manage to slip through Dickens's 'inky fishing-net' of corrected proofs (Forster 3.19.453–4). For example, Harriet Martineau's pro-manufacturing stance evident in a series of *Household Words* articles published between 1851 and 1852 was antithetical to Dickens's disenchantment with politico-economic doctrine (see note, pp. 145–6).

The intimate relationship Dickens fostered between himself and his readers lay at the heart of the enormous public success of *Household Words*. Percy Fitzgerald, a contributor from 1856 to 1859, remembered with glowing affection both the journal and its 'magician, the gifted Editor himself':

Anything by Dickens, a letter, a paper, an opinion, was sought out, talked over and devoured, and people were eager to know what he thought on any and every subject. *Household Words*, a mere twopenny journal, was to be found on every table and in every room, in the palace and the cottage. (1913, 135)

That the journal should become disseminated throughout British households was one of the hopes Dickens expressed in 'A Preliminary Word': 'to be a comrade and friend of many thousands of people of both sexes, and of all ages and conditions' (1.1). Despite the many articles written especially for the working class, and notwithstanding the numerous discussions and reports about the conditions of the poor, the majority of *Household Words* readers were middle class (Lohrli, 1973, 15–16). This factor determined the nature of the social criticism in *Hard Times*.

#### The Interdependency of the 'Great Magazine of Facts' and 'Hard Times'

'In some sense', Sylvia Manning commented in 1984, 'all of *Household Words* bears upon *Hard Times*' (10). Although succinctly expressed, her view was not a new one, for previous critics had discussed the correspondence between the journalism and the fiction. K. J. Fielding, for example, suggested that Dickens 'thought of *Hard Times* almost as a work of journalism itself' (1958, 137). Joseph Butwin's extensive analysis proved that 'the original readers were encouraged to see the novel as a form of jour-

nalism to be read continuously with *Household Words*', and that in its one-volume form *Hard Times* 'was bound to appear incomplete' (1977, 167, 186). Malcolm Andrews called the process 'a kind of extended "lateral" reading' (1980, 245). In an article about Dickens's journalistic involvement in the campaign for factory safety legislation and his decision to cancel a related passage and footnote on the corrected proofs of *Hard Times* (pp. 143–6), Peter W. J. Bartrip noted that 'the accident articles, dealing with what was basically a northern textile problem, began to appear just before serialization of *Hard Times*' (1979, 19).

The structure, contents and style of *Hard Times* were determined by Dickens's first publishing it within the covers of what John Forster described as 'a great magazine of facts'. Forster discussed this interdependence when he reviewed the novel for the *Examiner* in 1854; and, although he maintained that the concerns of *Hard Times* are more clearly perceptible in the one-volume edition than in the serialized parts, his preference can be used as effectively to argue the reverse (as Butwin and Andrews do): the journalism and the fiction nourished each other.

The countless citations from *Household Words* included in the annotations show that the topics most common to the journalism and the fiction are industrialism, trade unions, political economy, education, divorce and the circus. Throughout the serialization of the novel, Dickens repeatedly echoed a handful of articles on these topics, using them to inspire and enrich the social criticism in his fiction. Often, he arranged for articles and chapters on the same topic to appear in the same issue. In this way, their common concern would be reinforced and, at the same time, he could counterbalance the 'difficulty of space' imposed by the short chapters with extra 'elbow-room' provided by the journalism (Letters 7.282). Indeed, the annotations show that for most issues of *Household Words* that contained *Hard Times* Dickens articulated the journal's contents as skilfully as Mr Venus in *Our Mutual Friend* articulates bones (see Appendix D, pp. 242–4).

While reading the serialized text of *Hard Times*, Dickens's contemporaries were constantly invited to adopt a perspective recurrent throughout his fiction: the blurring of the boundaries between the imaginative world and Dickens's view of the real world reflected in the journalism and channelled into *Hard Times*. This perspective is now lost to modern readers, but it can be recalled through the quotation of parallel extracts from *Household Words*. In addition, such citations sensitize the modern reader to the topicality of the fiction.

#### 1. Industrialism: 'Fire and Snow' and 'Sharpening the Scythe'

Informing a variety of the industrial images in *Hard Times* is Dickens's account of the railway journey he made to Birmingham and Wolverhampton in December 1853, a month before he began writing the novel. His observations of the landscape of the 'Black Country', described in 'Fire and Snow' (8.481–3), are often echoed or reworked in *Hard Times*. For example, the references to the express train whirling over the railway arches (book 1, chapter 12), the long line of arches over a landscape of deserted pits near Bounderby's country retreat (book 2, chapter 9), and the 'dismal stories . . . of the old pits' that portend Stephen's fall into Old Hell Shaft (book 3,



chapter 6), all owe their inspiration to a single passage from the *Household Words* article (see notes, pp. 78, 139, 191–2, 220). Reminiscences of other ‘Fire and Snow’ passages appear in Louisa’s imaginative response to the fires of Coketown (book 1, chapter 15), in Mrs Sparsit’s own railway journey while stalking Louisa (book 2, chapter 11), and in the image of the ‘clanking serpents . . . writhing above coal pits’ in the introductory depiction of Coketown (book 1, chapter 5). The serpent and savage imagery in this last example also seems indebted to other sources: Dickens’s dislike of African ‘natives’, his knowledge of circus acts which often featured American Indians, elephants and smoke serpents, and the *Household Words* article ‘The Northern Wizard’, which describes the manufacture of industrial chemicals (8.225–8). (See notes, pp. 150, 207–8, 79.) The blend of fact and fancy in all these images, together with their anthropocentric emphasis on sullenness, darkness, violence, cold, monstrosity and death, provides a clue to Dickens’s personal responses to day-to-day life in an industrial environment.

The significance of James Payn’s ‘Sharpening the Scythe’ (9 [1 April 1854] 150–2) to the events of Stephen’s fall and rescue has up until now been overlooked. The article, published in the same number as the first three serialized chapters of *Hard Times*, contains many similar features of the scene around the Old Hell Shaft. The concerted speedy efforts of the men, the surgeon, the restorative alcohol, the make-shift litter, and the funeral procession can all be found in the *Household Words* story of scythe-stone cutters and their perilous excavations (see note, pp. 223–4).

## 2. Trade Unions and Political Economy: ‘On Strike’

Many commentators have noticed the correlation between ‘On Strike’ (8.553–9), Dickens’s *Household Words* article on the Preston strike of 1853–4, and the scenes of industrial unrest in *Hard Times*. But some of the novel’s subtle but important echoes of the article have not been noticed hitherto, even though it seems likely that they would have been recognized by Dickens’s contemporary readers.

Placards and bills were a crucial propaganda tool used by both workers and masters during the Preston strike, and for ‘On Strike’ Dickens transcribed ‘the worst [he] could find’ (554). Apparently expecting to confront a crowd of unruly workers, he seems to have been disappointed at their orderliness and at the uneventful scenes he encountered in Preston. A touch of regret at the absence of drama is suggested in ‘On Strike’ and in his letter to Forster (see note, pp. 217–18).

He found scenes that were more useful to him at Preston’s Old Cockpit when he attended a Sunday weavers’ delegate meeting there on 29 January 1854. This occasion inspired the description of the ‘densely crowded and suffocatingly close Hall’ into which Stephen is brought before the members of the United Aggregate Tribunal in book 2, chapter 4 (see note, pp. 174).

Another incident involving bills and the trade union agitator Mortimer Grimshaw was reworked first in ‘On Strike’ and then in *Hard Times*. It would appear that Dickens loosely based the placard scenes in the novel on both his general observations of the Preston strikers’ eagerness to read the varied bills posted throughout the town and on a specific incident he had witnessed concerning an aggrieved Warrington delegate

and ‘offensive’ bills allegedly posted by Grimshaw (see notes, pp. 217–18).

The theory of Political Economy which influenced middle-class Victorian attitudes to trade union policy on wage bargaining was a favourite campaigning issue throughout the Preston strike, and was widely discussed in the local and national press, in letters and editorials. Dickens was aware that there were few supporters among these sources and made it clear in ‘On Strike’: ‘I read, even in liberal pages, the hardest Political Economy . . . as the only touchstone of this strike’ (554). He himself was unequivocal about Political Economy, describing it as ‘great and useful . . . in its own way and its own place’. However, he ‘did not transplant [his] definition of it from the Common Prayer Book, and make it a great king above all gods’ (553). Dickens’s coupling of Christianity and economics in ‘On Strike’ is not merely reinforced frequently in *Hard Times* – it is central to the novel’s critique of industrialized society. Examples of social criticism which appear in the Gradgrindian principle that ‘everything was to be paid for’ could prove that the ‘Good Samaritan was a Bad Economist’, and ‘if we didn’t get to Heaven that way, it was not a politico-economical place, and we had no business there’ (book 2, chapter 12; book 3, chapter 8). Elsewhere, the narrator alludes ironically to a popular religious manual, *The Whole Duty of Man*, in his depiction of Bitzer’s lack of Christian charity in shutting up his mother in the workhouse (book 2, chapter 1), and Sissy’s confusion over her lesson on political economy evokes a biblical response: ‘“To do unto others as I would that they should do unto me” ’ (book 1, chapter 9). (See notes, pp. 117–18, 163; for a similar echo of ‘On Strike’, see also note to book 1, chapter 5, pp. 83–4.)

## 3. Education: ‘Rational Schools’ and ‘Brother Mieth and his Brothers’

The criticism of the misapplication of Political Economy expressed in ‘On Strike’ influenced how Dickens treated the subject in relation to the educational themes in the novel. For instance, Bitzer’s unchristian selfishness about feeding only himself (book 2, chapter 1) reflects Malthusian population theory. The theory formed the basis of a question-and-answer lesson on social economy given by the Utilitarian educationalist William Ellis, and reported in a *Household Words* leading article by Henry Morley and W. H. Wills in 1852, ‘Rational Schools’ (6.337–42) (see p. 164). The catechistic format of Ellis’s lessons was not lost on Dickens, as Sissy’s response – ‘“To do unto others as I would that they should do unto me” ’ (book 1, chapter 9) – reveals. Another educational method used by Ellis to communicate the principles of Political Economy, the object lesson, is mocked in what is perhaps the novel’s most memorable scene – Gradgrind’s asking Bitzer for his definition of a horse (book 1, chapter 2). Some of Ellis’s ‘progressive lessons’ are reported in detail in ‘Rational Schools’, and there is no doubt that, in both the criticism of social engineering in *Hard Times* and the characterization of Bitzer, Dickens was influenced by Morley’s account.

The article, however, is qualified by the conclusion that the ‘imaginative faculty in all these children . . . we assume to be cultivated elsewhere. Such cultivation . . . is no less important to their own happiness and that of society than their knowledge of things and reasons’ (341–2). Similarly, at the heart of Dickens’s attack on education

in *Hard Times* is the recurrent metaphor of cultivation and growth inherent in the book titles 'Sowing', 'Reaping' and 'Garnering'. For instance, Gradgrind's first utterance in book 1, chapter 1, is "Plant nothing else [but facts] and root out everything else"; Tom destroys the roses and 'scatter[s] the buds about by dozens' (book 2, chapter 7); and Louisa exclaims to her father in book 2, chapter 12: "what have you done, with the garden that should have bloomed once, in this great wilderness [my heart]". A number of *Household Words* articles deployed the planting image to criticize the inadequacies of the educational system in the 1850s (see, for example, 'The Two Guides of the Child', 1.560–1; 'Received, a Blank Child', 7.49–53). And during the serialization of *Hard Times* another *Household Words* article by Morley appeared which contains a favourable account of Morley's boyhood education at a Moravian school where 'the heart was stirred, the soul was roused, the affections were satisfied [and] no check was set upon the fancy' ('Brother Mieth and his Brothers', 9 [27 May 1854] 346). Morley's gratitude is couched in terms of good husbandry:

When blight was gathering about the budding faculties, those true-hearted Moravians blew the blight away: and wretched indeed might have been the blossom but for them. You pedagogues, who cut and trim your children into shape, you know well enough that if you mend a rosebud with your pen-knives, you destroy that upon which you cut your mark. Water the roots, let the wind blow, and the sun shine, and the rains fall; remove all that is hurtful, enrich the soil by which the plant is fed, but let the laws of nature take their course. If you know well, that you must act so by a rosebud which you wish to rear into a healthy blossom, why do you act with less care in your treatment of the budding mind and soul? (349)

The dovetailing of Morley's article with two weekly parts of the novel (that is, between book 2, chapter 1, and book 2, chapters 2 and 3) demonstrating the blighted education of Bitzer, Harthouse and Tom functions as a supplement and complement to Dickens's condensed criticism within the confines of the serialized format (also see note, p. 209).

#### 4. Divorce: Eliza Lynn's Articles

What is most striking about the chapters on divorce as they appeared in *Household Words* is how Dickens reinforced his own attack on the marriage laws with articles on the same topic by Eliza Lynn – a regular and highly valued contributor.

'One of Our Legal Fictions', an article by Miss Lynn about Caroline Norton's unrelenting campaign to reform the laws relating to married women's property, appeared in the issue of 29 April 1854, which also contained chapters 9 and 10 of *Hard Times*. Chapter 10 introduces Stephen, Rachael and Stephen's drunken, adulterous wife, and Dickens's chapter plan starts with 'Open Law of Divorce'. Chapter 11, containing Stephen's interview with Bounderby about the impossibility of working people obtaining a divorce, opened the following week's number of *Household Words*.

It is interesting to notice that the serialized text includes some comments on

divorce that were omitted from the text of the one-volume edition (see pp. 133 and 135). The remarks, published only in *Household Words* (they are not in the manuscript or in the corrected proofs), are Stephen's criticism of the legal inequalities suffered by women seeking a divorce. His criticism was highly pertinent to Miss Lynn's centrally placed article in the same number, and his comments were also relevant to other articles on the topic that had appeared in the journal from October 1853 (see note, p. 134). Dickens's decision to omit the remarks from the one-volume text suggests an anxiety that they might lose some of their immediacy and topicality when not supported by the other *Household Words* material.

#### 5. The Circus: 'Phases of "Public" Life', 'Behind the Louvre', 'Tattyboys Rents', 'More Dumb Friends', 'Licensed to Juggle', 'Legs', 'Strollers at Dumbledowndeary'

That Dickens mined so many *Household Words* articles for details about the circus in *Hard Times* would seem to indicate not only his personal enjoyment of the circus but also his desire to make the circus a particularly prominent feature of the novel. His reliance on a variety of sources noticeably enriches the characterization in the circus scenes. The affecting and intelligent Merrylegs, for example, descends from an astounding number of 'originals': a performing dog in 'Phases of "Public" Life' (5.229); a dancing Parisian poodle in 'Behind the Louvre' (9.185–8); an abandoned and down-and-out performing poodle in 'Tattyboys Rents' (9.297–304); an article about animal communication, 'More Dumb Friends' (5.124–7); and, finally, from Dickens's having watched performing dogs at a public house in 1849 (*Letters* 7.895) (see notes, pp. 62–4, 232–3).

'Behind the Louvre', together with an article about a street acrobat in Paris, 'Licensed to Juggle' (7.593–4), describes circus acts similar to the strongman, balancing and juggling feats performed by Sleary's artistes in chapters 3 and 6 (see notes, pp. 64 and 98–100). G. A. Sala's witty article, 'Legs' (9 [15 April 1854] 209–12), which appeared in the same number as chapter 6, also mentions tight-rope performers, clowns and acrobats. The narrator's comment in chapter 6 about the lack of modesty exhibited by the mothers of the troupe ('none . . . were at all particular in respect of showing their legs') has parallels in Sala's article, and Sala's belief that character can be deciphered as much by legs as by faces (9.212) is relevant to the characterization of Childers (whose 'legs were very robust, but shorter than legs of good proportions should have been'), to the aptly named performing dog, Merrylegs, and to the description of the Pegasus's Arms (which should have been called the 'Pegasus's legs'). Moreover, chapter 7 of the novel, which opened *Household Words* for 22 April, made reference to Mrs Sparsit's great aunt, Lady Scadgers, who had 'a mysterious leg which had now refused to get out of bed for fourteen years', and to the late Mr Sparsit who was 'chiefly noticeable for a slender body, weakly supported on two long slim props' (see notes, pp. 97, 100). The intercalation of such articles with the chapters was not accidental, of course, but a device Dickens used to help his readers imaginatively merge the worlds of fiction and reality.

Dickens had another skilful way of using *Household Words* articles to enhance the serialized text of the novel and, at the same time, integrate the contents of the weekly

numbers. He would include certain factual articles not apparently relevant to the chapters published in the same issue. For example, Sala's account of itinerant actors, 'Strollers at Dumbledowndeary' (9 [3 June 1854] 374–80), is placed between the tenth and eleventh instalments of the novel (where the characterization of Harthouse and Tom is further developed, and when Stephen is ostracized by his fellow-workers and Bounderby). At this point in the story, the circus has wholly disappeared – to return only in the last instalment. But, together with Sissy, who appears intermittently throughout the novel, 'Strollers at Dumbledowndeary' serves as a stand-in for the circus – like Sissy, its inclusion helps to remind readers during these hard-hearted instalments of the circus's vital, imaginative and benevolent influences.

It is a truism to suggest that *Hard Times* is a condensed analysis of the mid-Victorian milieu and that Dickens deftly encapsulated within the double-columned confines of *Household Words* a diversity of contemporary data. Yet even apparently minor details in *Hard Times* contain allusions to the novel's major issues. Three such details that have escaped previous notice concern Mr M'Choakumchild, Mrs Gradgrind, and Louisa and Tom. In book 1, chapter 2, the narrator observes that M'Choakumchild 'had been turned at the same time, in the same factory . . . like so many pianoforte legs'. My note on this image (pp. 49) describes the woodworking process, explains that mechanized turning in the furniture trade was a relatively recent invention, and comments that the image suggests that Dickens shares a contemporary belief that mechanization resulted in standardization, mass-production and poor quality.

The second apparently innocent simile is the comparison of Mrs Gradgrind to a 'feminine dormouse' in book 1, chapter 9. The note (p. 122) cites a *Household Words* article which explains that dormice were kept as domestic pets, and it quotes a French naturalist (whose work was reviewed in *Household Words*) who considered dormice to be 'the emblems of industrial parasites, who spend three-quarters of their time doing nothing, and who make up for their idleness by living upon the labours of others'. This information supports the earlier discussions (in the notes to book 1, chapters 3 and 4) about the Victorian ideology of womanhood and of Mrs Gradgrind as a fictional representation of how the ideology could cause women to become neurotic, idle prisoners in their own homes (pp. 69–70 and 74).

Finally, the note on the description of Louisa and Tom's study as having 'much of the genial aspect of a room devoted to hair-cutting' (book 1, chapter 4) not only hints at Dickens's own enjoyment of barbers' shops but also enriches the characterization of Louisa. The note (pp. 76–7) mentions Dickens's depiction of barbers elsewhere in his fiction – they are invariably sympathetic, lively and sentimental figures – and it quotes two contemporary sources which describe barbers' shops as neat, attractive and sociable places. Taken together, the information reveals the depths of meaning in the narrator's description of the children's study: underlying the atmosphere of study are attractiveness, vitality and affection.

*Hard Times* was Dickens's only serialized novel in *Household Words*. The journal's successor, *All the Year Round* – significantly more a literary and less a crusading periodical – serialized *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) and *Great Expectations* (1860–1). Although it can be disputed that these novels, like *Hard Times*, were used as a means to

boost weekly circulation figures (*A Tale of Two Cities* opened the inaugural issue of *All the Year Round*, and *Great Expectations* revived the journal's falling sales during the serialization of Charles Lever's lacklustre story, *A Day's Ride: A Life's Romance*), their creation, unlike that of *Hard Times*, was the result of ideas conceived several years before each appeared in *All the Year Round*. When Dickens added the subtitle 'For These Times' to the one-volume edition of *Hard Times*, he not only rooted the novel in its contemporary setting but also pointed to the immediacy of its material. *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Great Expectations* are novels of public and private histories. *Hard Times*, in its original journalistic environment of *Household Words*, was making its own history.