

- *What are the three books of Hard Times?*

Hard Times by Charles Dickens is organized into three parts; Book the First: Sowing (planting), Book the Second: Reaping (gaining , earning), and Book the Third: Garnering (gathering , saving). One of the most interesting features of this novel is the separation between man's institution (organization) of time, and the seasonal procession of time found in nature. The three "books" that comprise (include) the novel are all named after seasonal agricultural operations. For instance, sowing involves planting the seeds of the crops, reaping involves the cutting or harvesting of the crops, and garnering (defined within this context) involves the storing of the crops after they have been harvested, for future use. Thus, the novel is structured by Charles Dickens under concepts of natural time, following seasonal changes and agricultural processes.

On the other hand, *Hard Times* also focuses on the ways in which the concept of time has been redefined through the period of industrialization. As mentioned earlier, the natural concept of time followed the seasons, and was largely dependent on nature. However, Dickens illustrates the transition away from this form of life, one which was heavily reliant (needful) on the Earth and the seasons, to one which is much more mechanized / industrialized, and separate from nature. As such, in the 19th century, man turned inside to the factories, as illustrated by Coketown in *Hard Times*. Life revolved around the clock, from minute to minute, hour to hour, and day to day, with considerable monotony.

The difference between these two formations of time is that in the first, man is actively aware of and involved with his surroundings, working in conjunction with the Earth. Oppositely, in the second, he has separated himself from nature, and acts more like an automated, unthinking machine than a human. Time, in this sense, is connected directly with one's salary, and the amount of money being earned. At one point in Book the First, Chapter VI titled "Sleary's Horsemanship," Dickens includes a dialogue between Mr Bounderby and Mr Childers which addresses this issue. It goes: "You see, my friend,' Mr Bounderby put in, 'we are the kind of people who know the value of time, and you are the kind of people who don't know the value of time". Mr Childers responds with: "if you mean that you can make more money of your time than I can of mine, I should judge from your appearance, that you are about right".

Plot Analysis

Initial Situation

Louisa and Tom are growing up in their father's Utilitarian educational system

From the very beginning, we can see how crazy the no-emotions no-morality system their father has been using to educate them is. The question at this point is just how messed up are these two?

Conflict

Tom is hired as Bounderby's bank clerk, Louisa marries Bounderby

Their ties to Bounderby and their hatred of him set up everything that will follow. Tom hates his job, starts gambling, and steals from Bounderby's bank. Louisa hates her husband, and starts paying attention to Harthouse.

Complication (problem)

Louisa falls for Harthouse, Tom frames Stephen Blackpool for bank robbery

Tom and Louisa both meet a person around whom a crime/potential crime will happen. However, in both cases, the idea initially is to interact with this person in some positive manner. With Harthouse, Louisa finally has someone to talk to about Tom and who promises to help set him straight. With Stephen Blackpool, Tom has an opportunity to help a man who is much less fortunate.

Climax

Louisa collapses at her father's house after confronting him about the way she and Tom were raised; the bank robbery is discovered and Stephen disappears

The crimes have been committed. Well, OK, the Victorians were kind of squeamish about the sex outside of marriage, so that crime is *almost* committed. Instead, Louisa has a drawn out rant at her father and his crazy theories. But the bank is definitely actually robbed.

Suspense (doubtfulness)

The search for Stephen intensifies

Stephen is the one man who can provide some evidence against Tom. When he leaves town and can't be found, suspicion for the bank robbery falls on him. If he can't be found, Tom will get away with his crime.

Denouement (ending)

Louisa and Bounderby permanently separate; Stephen dies and Tom escapes from justice

Louisa and Bounderby end up living apart, probably for the best, since she hates him and he looks down on her. Stephen is found half-dead and does testify against Tom. The Gradgrinds band together to help Tom escape rather than face justice. Tom ends up living in exile.

Conclusion

The bad are punished and the good rewarded; Louisa, Tom, and Gradgrind, learn from and make peace with their mistakes

Mostly the conclusion seems to be that everyone who has at all been contaminated by the Utilitarianists shouldn't reproduce (a.k.a. have children). Also, the reader should be totally energized to go out into the world and make some change!