



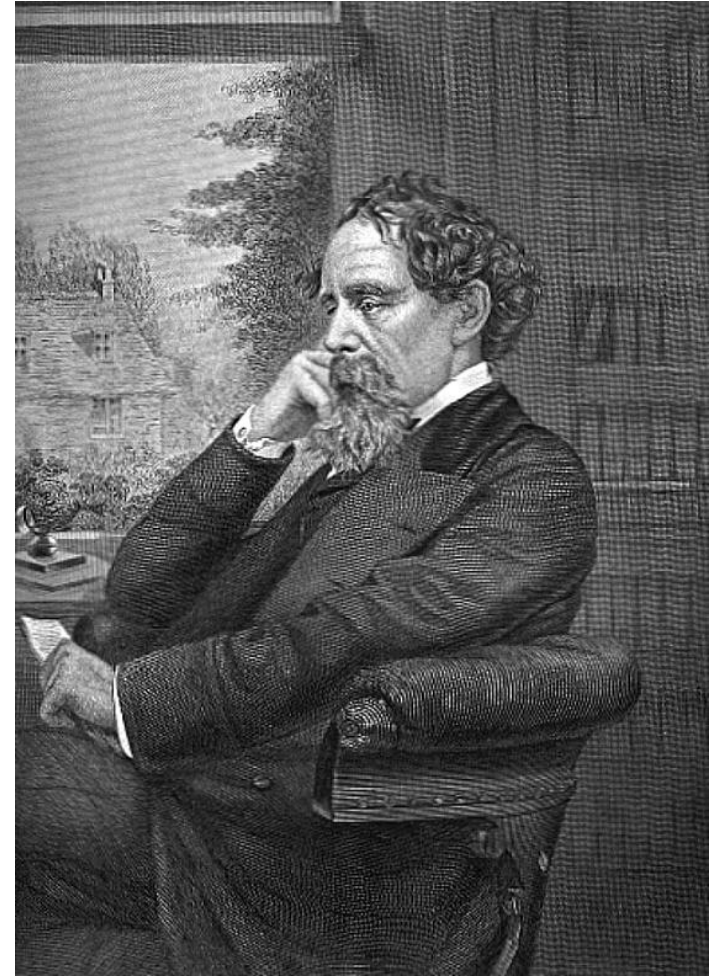
Charles Dickens

William Powell Frith, *Portrait of Charles Dickens*, London Victoria and Albert Museum.

A great denouncer but not a social reformer

Dickens's life

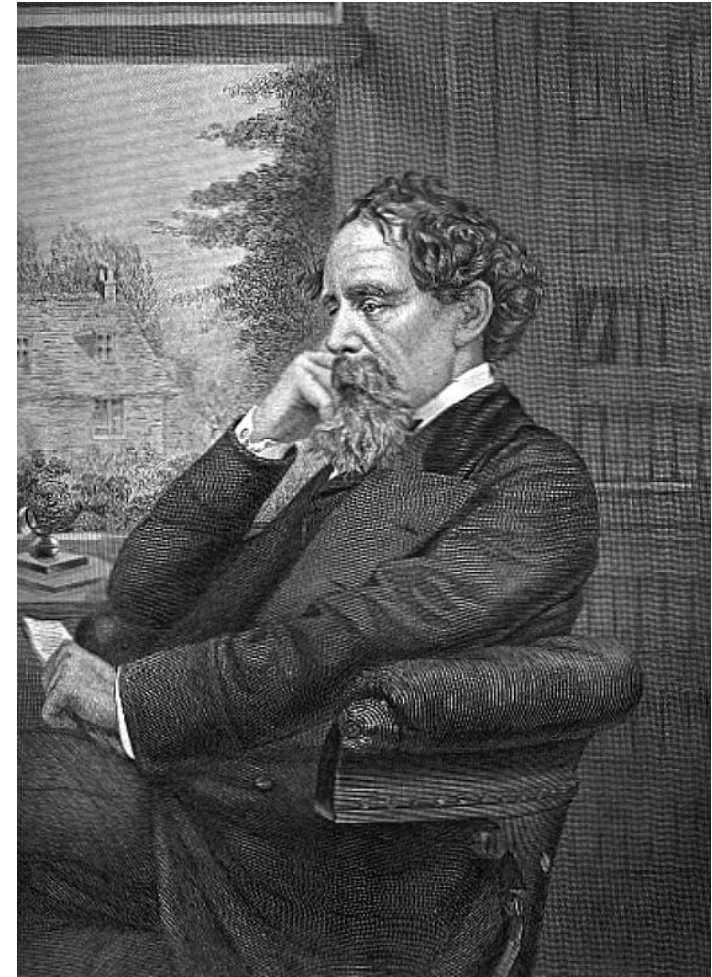
- Charles John Huffam Dickens was born in Portsmouth in 1812.
- Unhappy childhood: he had to work in a factory to stuck labels on bottles of shoe-polish at the age of 12 (his father went to prison for debts).
- At 14he worked as a clerk in a legal office
- He became a newspaper reporter with the pen name Boz. In 1836 Sketches by Boz, articles about London people and scenes, were published in instalments.



Evert A. Duyckinick, *Charles Dickens*

Dickens's life

- Success with **autobiographical** novels, *Oliver Twist* (1838), *David Copperfield* (1849-50), *Little Dorrit* (1857).
- *Bleak House* (1853), *Hard Times* (1854), *Great Expectations* (1860-61) set against the background of **social issues**.
- Busy **editor** of magazines.
- Died in **1870**.



Evert A. Duyckinck, *Charles Dickens*

The setting of Dickens's novels

- Dickens was the **great novelist of cities**
- London is depicted at **three different social levels**:
 1. **the parochial world** of the workhouses → its inhabitants belong to the lower middle class.
 2. **the criminal world** → murderers, pickpockets living in squalid slums.
 3. **the Victorian middle class** → respectable people believing in human dignity.





River Irwell in Manchester flowing under Regent Road. The scum on the water is the consequence of the rivers being used as sewers,



Jacob's Island: This was the place which Dickens called 'the filthiest, the strangest, the most extraordinary of the many localities that are hidden in London'. He spoke of the 'maze of close, narrow, and muddy streets, thronged by the roughest and poorest of waterside people. *Oliver Twist*.

the 18th-century realistic **upper middle-class world** was replaced by **Victorian society** in all its **variety**, its **richness** and its **squalor**.



An unfinished painting by R.W. Buss (1804-75) variously known as *A Souvenir of Dickens* and *Dickens's Dream*. Painted 1875. Charles Dickens Museum, London.



**ST.JAMES TURNING ST.GILES
OUT OF HIS PARKS**

Dickens's themes

- Love is the most important thing, the absence of it is the reason of the world's ills
- God in the humble and their simple virtue
- Family, childhood and poverty → the subjects to which he returned again and again.
- Dickens's children are either **innocent** or **corrupted by adults**.



A scene from Roman Polanski's *Oliver Twist* (2005)

Most of these children begin in negative circumstances and rise to happy endings which resolve the **contradictions** in their life created by the **adult world**.

Dickens's aim

His books highlight all the great **Victorian controversies**:

- **the faults of the legal system** (*Oliver Twist*)
- **the horrors of factory employment** (*David Copperfield, Hard Times*)
- **scandals in private schools** (*David Copperfield, Hard Times*)

- the miseries of prostitution
- the Utilitarian Philosophy (**Hard Times**)
- alienation of the factory system (**Hard Times**)
- exploitation of women and children
- the appalling living conditions in slums (*Bleak House*)
- corruption in government (*Bleak House*)

Dickens's style

- Realism he is a keen observer, full of details .
- Sentimentalism :He shows sympathy towards his characters and this gave an emotional quality to his writings. His prose is poetic in its emotions, its lyrical rhythm , its Romanticism and the appreciation of beauty even in humble places
- Morality, he reflects the moral attitudes of the British people. Crime must always be punished and virtue must always be rewarded
- Reporter's style, actions, vivid descriptions, violent actions, dramatic situations, picaresque details, simple similes and metaphors.
- Dramatist, he is a dramatist in the sense that he explores his characters through their actions and their speech, his analysis is much more external than internal

Humour

- Humour of exaggeration leading to caricatures
- humour of situation
- humour of personality,
- satire used for human hypocrisy
- His comic characters are endowed with common sense and with a certain philosophy of life , the writer looks at them with sympathy
- Often D's humour is mingled with pathos and he smiles "through his tears"

Dickens's style → very rich and original

The main stylistic features of his novels are:

1. long list of objects and people.
2. adjectives used in pairs or in group of three and four.
3. several details, not strictly necessary.
4. Pathos, sometimes too exaggerated

4. repetitions of the same word/s and/or sentence structure.

5. the same concept/s is/are expressed more than once, but with different words.

6. use of antithetical images in order to underline the characters' features.

7. exaggeration of the characters' faults.

8. suspense at the end of the episodes or introduction of a sensational event to keep the readers' interest.

7. *Oliver Twist* (1838)

- This *Bildungsroman* (an “education” novel) appeared in instalments in **1837**.
- It fictionalises the humiliations Dickens experienced during his childhood.



Etching by George Cruikshank of scene from *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens as Oliver asks for more food in workhouse.

Oliver Twist (1838)

- The protagonist, **Oliver Twist**, is always **innocent** and **pure** and remains **incorruptible** throughout the novel.
- At the end he is **saved** by a well-to-do family.
- The setting is **London**.



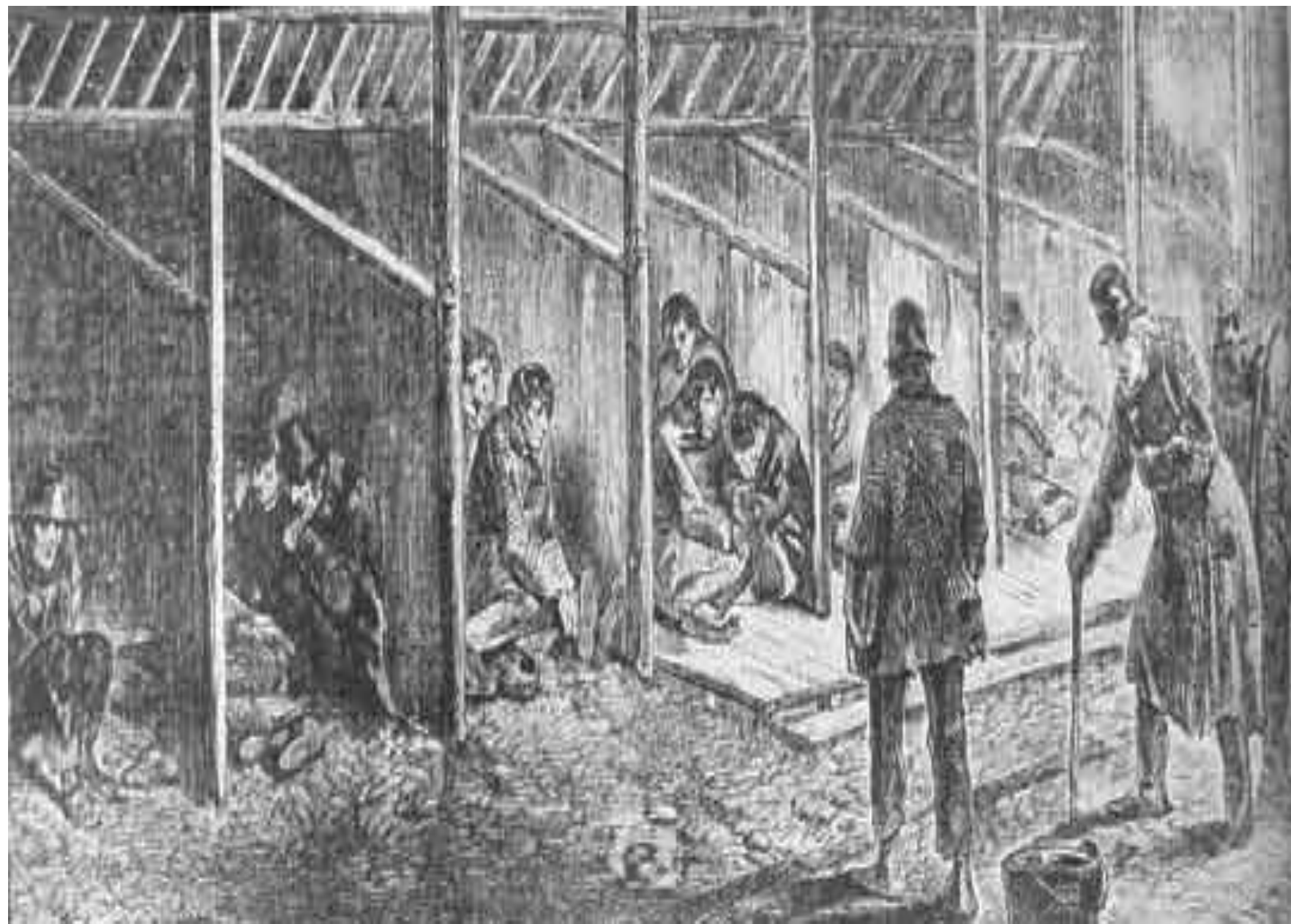
Etching by George Cruikshank of scene from *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens as Oliver asks for more food in workhouse.

Oliver Twist (1838)

- Dickens attacked:
 - a. the **social evils** of his times such as **poor houses**, **unjust courts** and the **underworld**.
 - b. the world of **the workhouses** founded upon the idea that poverty was a consequence of laziness.
 - c. **the officials of the workhouses** because they **abused** the rights of the **poor** as individuals and caused them **further misery**.



Etching by George Cruikshank of scene from *Oliver Twist* by Charles Dickens as Oliver asks for more food in workhouse.



David Copperfield (1849-50)

This novel is the **most autobiographical** of all Dickens's novels.

In the preface the novelist wrote:
“... like many fond parents, I have in my heart a favourite child. And his name is **David Copperfield**”.



Advertisement for *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens, 1884.

8. *David Copperfield* (1849-50)

- **Narrative technique** → a “Bildungsroman”; the protagonist, David, functions also as narrator.
- **The characters** → both realistic and romantic, characterised by a particular psychological trait.
- **Atmosphere** → a combination of realism and enchantment.



Advertisement for *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens, 1884.

8. *David Copperfield* (1849-50)

- **Themes:**

1. the **struggle of the weak** in society.
2. the great importance given to **strict education**.
3. **cruelty to children**.
4. the **bad living conditions** of the poor.



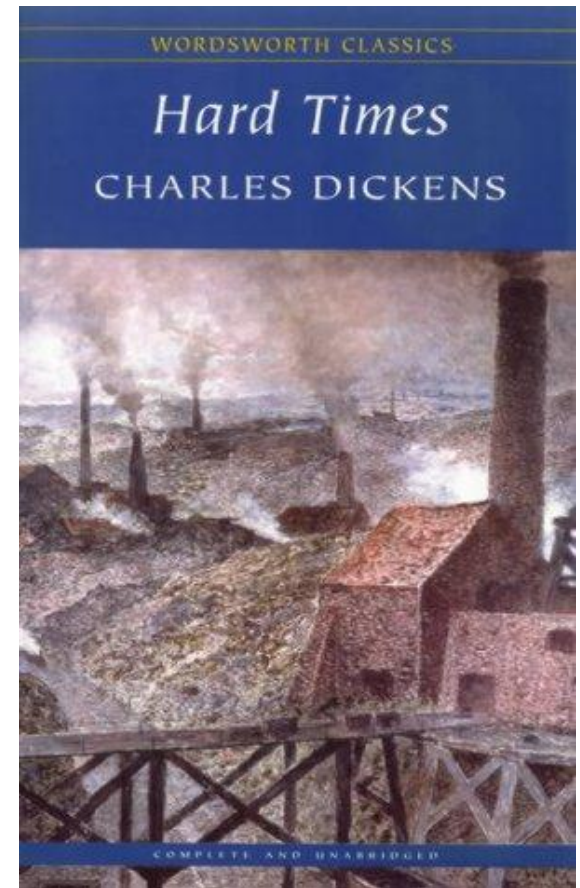
Advertisement for *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens, 1884.

Hard Times (1854)

It is a “**denunciation novel**” → a powerful **accusation** of some of the negative effects of industrial society.

The setting → **Coketown**, an imaginary industrialised town.

Characters → people living and working in Coketown, like the protagonist **Thomas Gradgrind**, an educator who believes in facts and statistics.



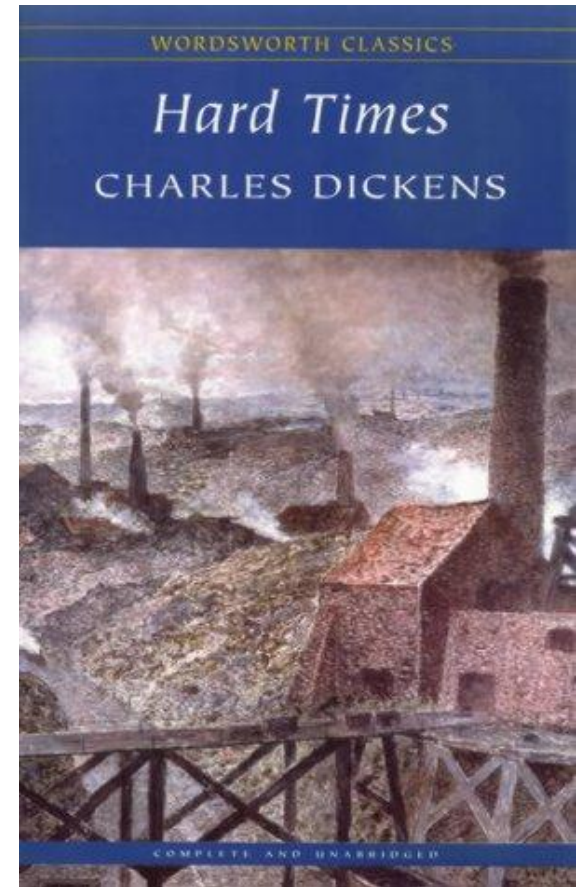
A contemporary edition of *Hard Times*

Hard Times (1854)

Themes:

1. a critic of **Materialism** and **Utilitarianism**.
2. “**Squareness**” represents the aridity of this materialistic philosophy.
3. The title of the first chapter is “**Murdering the innocents**”, this stresses Dickens ‘s feelings towards this doctrine. These men are destroying the real essence of a child: Imagination..
4. a **denunciation** of the **ugliness** and **squalor** of the **new industrial age**.
5. the **gap** between the **rich** and the **poor**.

Aim → to illustrate the **dangers** of allowing people to become **like machines**.



A contemporary edition of *Hard Times*



HARD TIMES.

BOOK THE FIRST. SOWING.

Thomas Gradgrind Apprehends His Children Louisa and Tom at the Circus



what Tom saw "through a hole in a deal board" of the equestrian Tyrolean flower-act



"It Would Be A Fine Thing To Be You, Miss Louisa!" said Sissy



"Louisa, My Dear, You Are the Subject Of A Proposal of Marriage That Has Been Made To Me."



"I Only Entreat You To Believe, My Favourite Child, That I Have Meant To Do Right"

DICKEN'S LIMITATIONS

- His plot lacks real organic unity and often too full of unlikely events
- His characters are often superficially portrayed, all good or all bad, he shows a lack of real psychological insight.
- His sentimentalism and pathos are often excessive
- His comic scene sometimes exaggerated so they become grotesque rather than really comic
- His tragic scenes too melodramatic, this diminishes the impact on the reader

MERITS

- A great Artist in dialogues, able to hold the interest in his stories
- Powerful imagination, a great number of incidents and situations
- His characters cover a large range of people
- His plots, in spite of their faulty organization, can hold the reader's attention till the end
- The style is fluent and effective
- His occasional use of symbolism is striking