

CILIPS COVID-19 Book Reviews – Hard Times

Reviewer name: Scott Main

Book title: Hard Times

Author name: Charles Dickens

Genre: Classic Fiction

Overall Rating: Excellent

Brief summary: Meet school headmaster Mr. Thomas Gradgrind in his grim Northern mill town, Coketown (based on Preston). His mantra is strictly Utilitarian – 'In this life, we want nothing but Facts, sir; nothing but Facts!' Gradgrind approves of nothing but what is 'severely workful'. Predictably, this approach to life does not enrich or develop the lives of his daughter Louisa or his son Tom. This is Dickens' (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Dickens) searing indictment of Victorian industrial society, of its materialism and its reduction of human beings to machine part operatives. One of the more readable of the works by Dickens, this classic may prompt us to ask, in April 2020, whether we are enduring hard times in quite the same way as our forebears. This is a 'must read' from the canon of English Literature.

What you liked?: A classic evocation of a place and time that has had immeasurable influence on English fiction ever since publication

Who should read this book?: Lovers of classic English fiction

Any additional comments?: The secondary literature on Dickens is predictably vast. As an entry point try Mee, Jon (2010) 'The Cambridge Introduction to Charles Dickens' (http://www.amazon.co.uk/Cambridge-Introduction-Charles-IntroductionsLiterature/dp/052185914X/ref=tmm_hrd_title_0?ie=UTF8&qid=1389193522&sr=8-1)

Still useful is 'Charles Dickens: The Critical Heritage' (1995) edited by Philip Collins (http://www.amazon.co.uk/Charles-Dickens-The-CriticalHeritage/dp/0415134595/ref=tmm_hrd_title_0?ie=UTF8&qid=1389194405&sr=8-1)

With the appetite whetted move on to 'The Cambridge Companion to Charles Dickens' (2001) edited by John O. Jordan (http://www.amazon.co.uk/Cambridge-Companion-Charles-CompanionsLiterature/dp/0521660165/ref=tmm_hrd_title_0?ie=UTF8&qid=1389193653&sr=8-1)

Two monster sized biographies have been published in recent years. Firstly, at 1256 pages, 'Dickens: Public Life and Private Passion' (1990) by Peter Ackroyd (http://www.amazon.co.uk/DickensAbridged-Peter-Ackroyd/dp/0099437090/ref=tmm_pap_title_0?ie=UTF8&qid=1389193878&sr=8-1)

Secondly, Claire Tomalin's 'Charles Dickens: A Life' (2011) at 576 pages (http://www.amazon.co.uk/Charles-Dickens-Life-ClaireTomalin/dp/0670917672/ref=tmm_hrd_title_0?ie=UTF8&qid=1389194276&sr=8-1)

Delve further for a lifetime involvement with Dickens using the web portal page at <http://dickens.fi/dickens.html>

Brought to the screen in 1994 by Peter Barnes in a TV mini series (http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0109985/?ref=fn_al_tt_10) with Harriet Walter as Rachel, Bill

[Paterson as Stephen Blackpool, Alan Bates as Josiah Bounderby, Bob Peck as Thomas Gradgrind and Richard E. Grant as James Harthouse. Available on DVD at http://www.amazon.co.uk/Hard-Times-Richard-E-Grant/dp/B000SQWZUY/ref=sr_1_3?s=dvd&ie=UTF8&qid=1389538764&sr=1-3&keywords=hard+times](http://www.amazon.co.uk/Hard-Times-Richard-E-Grant/dp/B000SQWZUY/ref=sr_1_3?s=dvd&ie=UTF8&qid=1389538764&sr=1-3&keywords=hard+times)

368 pages in Penguin Classics paperback edition (http://www.amazon.co.uk/Times-Penguin-ClassicsCharles-Dickens/dp/014143967X/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1389539018&sr=1-1&keywords=hard+times)

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