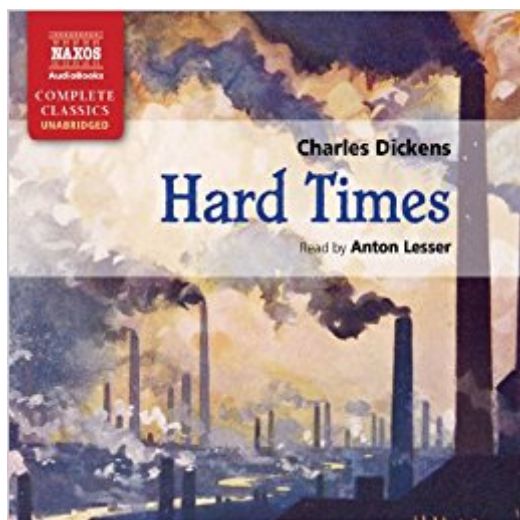


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Hard Times (Naxos Complete Classics)



Synopsis

'NOW, what I want is, Facts.' One of Dickens's most famous opening lines sets the scene for this powerful novel which questions the harsh, rational attitudes predominating in a world of fierce industrial growth. Dickens vividly presents industrial Coketown - a quintessential northern English mill town in the 19th century - and the overbearing figure of Mr Thomas Gradgrind with his utilitarianist philosophy; and contrast it with the right of every person to enjoy life regardless of social class. Particularly praised by renowned English critic John Ruskin (1819-1900), this moral fable is arguably Dickens's most significant work.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Anton Lesser finds the emotive force behind Dickens's bleak social commentary, *Hard Times*, and gives it a unique reading. Dickens's stock characters are fleshed out by Lesser's quavering voice and given outward emotions, making these Victorian-era personas more accessible to contemporary listeners. Atypical for a Dickens story, *Hard Times* lacks any comic relief and reads like a case study of the industrial and utilitarian culture and how the inhabitants of a town built around those ideals are beaten down by it. By reading with a voice more suited to a period romance, Lesser places the emphasis on the feelings of the characters, effectively softening the edges of *Hard Times*. --F.T., *AudioFile Magazine*"*Hard Times*" is Dickens's most political novel. Taking place in the industrial burg of Coketown, the drama among the characters illustrates the author's view of the dehumanizing effects of industrialization and utilitarianism on the lives of all involved and is essentially a "moral fable" illustrating the principle that one reaps what one sows.

VERDICT Anton Lesser, a classical actor and an award-winning audiobook reader, gives a spirited reading, bringing out the character of each persona--the dictatorial Gradgrind, the pompous Bounderby, and the meek Sissy--with skill and verve. An entertaining and captivating listening experience; all libraries should consider. --Michael T. Fein, Central Virginia Community Coll. Lib., Lynchburg Library Journal Copyright 2012

This is perhaps my favourite Dickens novel, especially in the inimitable way the great Anton Lesser reads it. His incredible sense of recreating the characters which Dickens imbues with so much life is part and parcel of proceedings and to my mind no reader has been more successful in this. Lesser describes Coketown with a marvellous sense of tragicomedy all around and with an incredible sense of death and desolation throughout. He also imbues the words describing Mr Gradgrind and Louisa with a poignant touch, especially when the former espouses on his inimitable description of 'facts'. I had already enjoyed the abridged version of this great work on tape but now that it is back in an unabridged reincarnation as a digital download, [there] is surely cause for rejoicing. Hugely recommended. --Gerald Fenech, Malta News Online

Hard Times is Dickens's most political novel. Taking place in the industrial burg of Coketown, the drama among the characters illustrates the author's view of the dehumanizing effects of industrialization and utilitarianism on the lives of all involved and is essentially a 'moral fable' illustrating the principle that one reaps what one sows.

VERDICT: Anton Lesser, a classical actor and an award-winning audiobook reader, gives a spirited reading, bringing out the character of each persona - the dictatorial Gradgrind, the pompous Bounderby, and the meek Sissy - with skill and verve. An entertaining and captivating listening experience; all libraries should consider.

--Michael Rogers, Library Journal

Fans of Naxos AudioBooks' acclaimed recordings will recognize Lesser's distinctive British voice in his exceptional reading of Dickens's classic. What sets the audio apart is Lesser's skill in establishing the novel's tone and characters, both key elements in the impact of the story. The setting is Coketown, an English industrial town where pollution fills the air with grime, and the working-class inhabitants with despair. From the opening passages, Lesser sets the stage for conflict in his portrayal of capitalist Gradgrind in arrogant and plummy tones. His reading captures the broadly drawn characters, from greasy, money-grabbing Bounderby and gentle agitator Stephen Blackpool, who seeks a better life, to disdained Sissy, who brings a warming presence to smoggy Coketown. Lesser savors the descriptive passages, darkening his tones to reflect the dirty, industrialized north region and painting a dire picture of dying humanity. He employs both humor and drama into briskly rendered conversations in north country accents, affording listeners an intimate glimpse of the players and their actions. Lesser's masterful depiction of colorful prose enlivens the author's incisive social commentary and heartwarming melodrama. A

wonderful introduction to the pleasures of Victorian novels and Dickens' powerful story. --Joyce Saricks, Booklist

Charles Dickens's early childhood was happy until his father was imprisoned for debt. The 12-year-old Dickens then began working ten-hour days in a boot-blackening factory pasting labels on the jars of thick polish. The shocking conditions of the factory made a profound impression on him. His anger at his situation and at the conditions endured by working-class people became major themes in his fiction.

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