



## Hard Times

*Charles Dickens (1812 - 1870)*

Read by:	Multiple readers	Format:	MP3 CD in DVD case
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Genre:	Fiction		

*Hard Times*, Charles Dickens' tenth novel, published in 1854, having been serialized that same year in Dickens' weekly periodical *Household Words*, is an unusual novel in at least two respects. First, it is one of Dickens' shortest works, its length being less than one quarter of those novels immediately preceding and succeeding it. And second, it does not take place in and around London but in Coketown, a generic mill town in the north of England. *Hard Times* is a work that distills the essence of Dickens' concerns: the rights of the undervalued worker, the inequities of the capitalist system attendant to the industrial revolution, the coarseness of the then modern era, the failure of the institutions ostensibly in place to protect the rights and lives of the vulnerable poor and lower classes. Like others who've suffered at the machinations and relentless grind of blind and deaf bureaucracies, Dickens' bias for the under-

dog, the underprivileged was as real as the impact his father's financial ruin had on his childhood. Dickens wrote what he knew, and although his extraordinary industry, famous work ethic, prolific output and unparalleled success lifted him into the upper realms of the wealthy, he never lost sight of or feelings for the vulnerable, who too often suffered in a society more concerned with status, wealth and profit than the people who were exploited to make the whole thing work. (*Summary by Michael Hogan*)

**Charles John Huffam Dickens** (February 7, 1812 – June 9, 1870) was an English novelist in the mid-19th Century who was one of the most prolific, popular and politically radical in the English language. He worked as a journalist as a young man before turning to fiction. His first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*, was a great success and was followed by one blockbuster after another. He wrote at a torrid pace; most of his books first appeared as serialized chapters in weekly and monthly periodicals before being published as novels. He had a genius for uncanny caricatures of "personality types", which he tagged with catchy names and mannerisms that are still part of the cultural lexicon. to this day.

He was born into a family of moderate means that went bankrupt during his early childhood, forcing Dickens to go to work at age twelve pasting labels on jars of bootblack for six shillings a week. His exposure to the lives of those oppressed by the cruelty and injustice of the industrializing world drove him to depict aspects of society that had been shunted aside with an unprecedented level of detail and candor. His insight into human nature was well-rounded, however, and his tales are equally beloved for their qualities of generosity, faith, compassion, and triumph of good over evil.

Dickens married Catherine Thompson Hogarth in 1838, who bore him ten children. He separated from her in 1858 but did not divorce, maintaining her in a separate residence until her death. He narrowly escaped death in a railroad crash in 1865 when all the first class carriages save Dickens' plunged off a bridge under repair. After the incident his writing trailed off, and he went on tour giving readings of his bestsellers, which were immensely popular and notable for their passion and for his ability to portray the characters in unique voices.