

# [Presentation of conflict in hard times](https://assignbuster.com/presentation-of-conflict-in-hard-times/)

In “ Hard Times” by Charles Dickens, conflict is presented as the outcome of industrialisation, material prosperity and a strict utilitarian way of life. In the 1850’s when the novel was written in instalments in ‘ Household Words’, Victorian England was in the age of reform, which was creating new tensions between social classes, and creating a new type of ‘ master’ represented by characters such as Mr. Gradgrind and more particularly Mr. Bounderby. Conflict is shown between nature and the increasing rise of industrialisation.

In Chapter 3 ‘ The Key Note’ Dickens describes the setting of industrial Coketown, which is partially based upon 19th century Preston, which Dickens had visited. As Hard Times was Dickens only ‘ social problem’ novel, Dickens uses imagery to increase awareness to his audience of the alarming rate of which industrialisation has taken over Nature. ‘ Nature was as strongly bricked out. ’ The dynamic verb ‘ bricked’ is associated with man made labour suggesting the dominance of man over nature, further emphasized by the pre modified comparative ‘ strongly’.

Dickens use of complex sentences drag on like an endless nightmare, to make the audience aware of the appalling and on-going issues of Victorian society. Moreover the simile ‘ unnatural red brick like the painted face of a savage’ is ironic as Dickens uses the derogatory noun ‘ savage’ to satirise how even though economically and industrially Victorian England was at the height of it’s power, society had in fact gone backwards and lost sight of responsibility and humanity. ‘ Ground in the Mill’ by Henry Morly appeared beside the Hard Times serialisation in ‘ Household Words’.

The articled described the events of a young factory girl who was malled by a machine, Dickens felt strongly against the immoral ethos of the self-serving factory owners who refused to protect their workers from industrial machinery, due to their own greed. Due to this Dickens briefly mentions Rachael’s little sister who is murdered by machinery. ‘ The rich get richer and the poor get poorer’ this quote sums up Dickens view on the conflict between the social classes in Victorian society. Dickens uses Mr. Slackbridge and Mr. Bounderby as the caricatures of the ‘ self made men’ in Dickens society who used wealth and power irresponsibly.

Dickens uses the third person narrative to exploit these characters. As Mr. Slackbridge gives his speech to the workers, Dickens is ‘ Judging him by Nature’s evidence’ ‘ Nature’ is used as a proper noun showing how Nature is truly the ruler over man. It’s importance is shown as it exploit’s the lies and true character of Mr Slackbridge ‘ an ill made man’. Dickens uses the juxtaposition of slack and bridge to make it clear, the danger that Slackbridge presents as a leader for the working class. Like a bridge, he is necessary and essential to the cause.

But he is ‘ slack’, undependable, untrustworthy and dangerous and is really only self interested in his own profits from the Trade Union. Nature allows the reader to see the truth behind his lies, in comparison to the industrial workers who ‘ through their delusions’ put their trust into their orator Mr Slackbridge. The syntactic parallelism of third person declarative ‘ he was not’ shows Dickens anger towards the hypocrisy of these ‘ self made men’, the contrast of ‘ Men and brothers’ represents the ideal relationship between workers and the factory owners, and the harsh reality of ‘ Men and Masters’ where the characters who have wealth i. . Mr. Bounderby, Mr. Slackbridge are able to assert and exploit their power. In the chapter ‘ Men and Masters’ Stephen is called to ‘ the red brick castle of the giant Bounderby’ Again the reference to the man made ‘ brick’ symbolises how Mr. Bounderby is a caricature of the wealthy industrialists of the northern manufacturing towns in Victorian England. Mr. Bounderby controls the turn taking of the conversation using the declaratives ‘ Speak up and come in’ to assert his power over poor Stephen.

Stephen is a representative for the working class, and his uneducated idiolect ‘ Wi’yor’ ‘ tis a muddle’ makes the reader sympathise with him, as he is dominated by Mr. Bounderby who is described as ‘ the Bully of Humility’. Stephen gives his impassioned speech ‘ Look how this ha’ growen an’ growen, sir, bigger an’ bigger, broader an’broader, harder an’ harder.. ’The asyndetic list impacts the audience as the conflict and tension builds up. Stephens use of plosives ‘ broader’ and the harsh consonants ‘ harder’ emote his anguish against the unjust society in which he and his fellow working class are uffering in. The commanding verb ‘ Look’ is not only Stephen’s but also Dickens plea for understanding between the upper and working class society in his own society. Dickens believed in ‘ mutual feeling’ and understanding between workers and their leaders to prevent the conflict between the two social classes. Louisa’s inner conflict is shown to be a cause of Mr. Gradgrind’s strict Utilitarian upbringing. Dickens portrays Louisa of having the gift of ‘ wondering’ as a child as she lets her imagination create stories as she gazes into the fire.

The fire imagery is used to symbolise the warmth of the creative spirit, in contrast to the cold and hard state of facts. However her father, Mr. Gradgrind who retorts ‘ Louisa, Never wonder’, the adverb ‘ never’, implies that she is to be completely restricted of all things fanciful and imaginative. This causes Louisa’s conflict as it is in her nature, and humans nature ‘ to wonder’. The consequences of this conflict are shown in Book 2 where Louisa finds herself in a loveless marriage to the ‘ boisterous Bounderby’, and is seduced by Mr. Harthouse however unable to understand her own emotions towards him.

She rushes to her father’s house to confront him ‘ I have almost repulsed and crushed my better angel into a demon. ” Her ‘ better angel’ is the fanciful, imaginative spirit that she has almost murdered on account of the ‘ demon’ facts. Dickens uses the religious reference to the ‘ demon’ to accuse and get his view across of Utilitarianism corrupting Victorian society. The stative verb ‘ repulsed’ followed by the harsh dynamic verb ‘ crushed’ further emphasizes the brutal and inhumane nature of a Utilitarian upbringing. Similarly in ‘ Jane Eyre’, Charlotte Bronte focuses on the inner conflict of the protagonist of the novel ‘ Jane Eyre’.

The novel is written as a fictional autobiography, but it is argued to be voicing Bronte herself in some aspects. The use of the first person narrative allows Bronte to communicate the thoughts and inner conflicts. Like Dickens, the book was written in the mid 18th century, and focused on the customs and ideals of Victorian Society. Jane struggles between ‘ reason’ and ‘ passion’, Jane who has a close relationship with God is in love with Mr. Rochester a married man, and to be his mistress would be to against Christian faith.

However in the end, Jane Eyre chooses passion claiming ‘ I would always rather be happy than dignified. The adverb ‘ always’ is used powerfully, showing the passion and independence in Jane which was shocking to a Victorian audience where women where oppressed by men. Jane is granted a happy ending, as she is able to marry Mr. Rochester due to the death of his past wife. ‘ We stood at God’s feet , equal – as we are! ’ The syntactic parallelism of ‘ we’ further emphasized by the subordinate clause show how Jane is in an happy marriage as an equal to Mr. Rochester. In Comparison to ‘ Hard Times’ Book 3, ‘ Garnering’ where Dickens gives each character what they deserve.

Louisa finds herself separated from Bounderby, never to have children or re marry. The cruelness of her fate is emphasized by Dickens use of rhetorical questions ‘ Did Louisa see this? ’ This is contrasted against Sissy Jupe the embodiment of ‘ fancy/imagination’ ‘ happy Sissy’s happy children loving her’ the repetition of the adjective ’happy’ create the image of her surrounded by life and love and rewarded by Dickens judgement. This is Dickens authorial intent, as he wants to provoke the reactions of his Victorian audience, of the possible and horrific outcomes of a Utilitarian Society if they are not to act now.