

## Charles Dickens

He was born in 1812 at Landport near Portsmouth in the South of England. He had a difficult youth because his family was large and poor. At the age of twelve he had to work in a shoe-blackening factory in London to pay his father's debts. Then he studied law, but he actually became a reporter in the courts of law.

This experience helped him in creating his characters. He wrote fourteen novels and his first ones were published in instalments. "Oliver Twist" (1837-38) is an example of novel published in this way. The publication in instalments required the presence of new characters in each instalment and the happy ending because the readers wanted it. So Dickens' first novels have something of the fairy tale and the characters in them are "flat" or "just hinted at". "Hard Times" was written when the author

had already earned money and didn't need to earn more (1854). The description of poverty and the class struggle is here ~~auder~~ and has nothing of the fairy.

Even if there are stylistic differences among the novels, the themes are recurrent: the exploitation of child labour, their ill-treatment in hideous schools, unsafe factory conditions, the hypocrisy and respectability of middle-class people.

In his novels, Dickens is influenced by the "picaresque" tradition for the plot, by Walter Scott's descriptions and by the theatre for the dramatic scenes in which the characters move.

Charles Dickens died in 1870 for strain and exhaustion.

## Charles Dickens' style and criticism in his works

Luca Palazzo class 5<sup>th</sup> B

Charles Dickens usually presents social criticism throughout the realism of his works. But there are other characteristics we have to underline in two of his masterpieces, "Oliver Twist" and "Hard Times".

"Oliver Twist" (1837-38)

"Oliver Twist" is the story of an orphan that runs away from the workhouse in which he lived, but then he is forced to steal by the villainous Fagin. He is arrested on suspicion of stealing from an old gentlemen, but finally he discovers that the old man is his grandfather.

The story well portrays the English society of the underworld and shows a deep critic to middle-class people's hypocrisy. In fact Oliver is the metaphor for poor people who have to live and work without being paid in workhouses. Respectable and honest middle-class people considered poverty a crime and eliminated the problem by making people starving in horrible life conditions in the workhouses.

The passage from "Oliver Twist" we have read is the initial part of the novel. The orphans are eating and Oliver is cast to ask for some more food to the master. The rations are too small. Dickens is incredibly good at creating the situation and the characters who act in it. We can see the small underfed orphan that asks to the healthy master ( a remarkable contraposition between the physical aspects of the twos), the adults' horror in front of the question and their exaggerated conclusion that Oliver is a bad boy and will be hung. Ironical and at the same time tragic tone is evident in the passage. The sufferings of poor people are represented by Oliver's hunger, but irony colors them in a pleasant way to read.

The characters aren't properly flat or round. Dickens portrays the most important characteristics of everyone to let the reader understand their importance in the general economy of the novel. He is an unobtrusive narrator,

but the way in which he tells the story and the only fact that he decides to treat that social matter let us understand that he stands for the poor people's side.

"Hard Times" (1854)

In "Hard Times" we can find a sharper criticism towards Victorian society. The analysis of the effect of Industrial Revolution is even deeper and cruder. The main themes of the novel are the exploitation of the working class and the brutishness given by the emphasis of factual knowledge.

The extract we have read is a description of the places in which the novel is set. The setting is the fictional "Coketown". There aren't any characters, but the ability of the author can be discovered in the description itself. At the beginning the general characteristics of the town are described, with the monotonous rhythm of its machines and of its life. The law of the jungle rules in it, without possibility of escape. Man is crushed by the gears of a society that reminds in all his aspects the importance of factual life. And in the second part this concept is even more evident: the buildings of the town are all exactly like red brick warehouses. The church is identical to the jail, to the infirmary and to the town all. The repetition of "fact" exasperate the monotony of the town.

The narrator is first-person and omniscient. He also interferes twice in the story, when he introduces it and when he compares hard life in Coketown to some ladies' comfortable life. The use of metaphors and similes show the author's criticism towards industrialization.

Conclusions

Even if Dickens criticizes Victorian society, he's not a revolutionary. He sees in hard work, family life and romantic love the secrets of happiness and shares the basic values of his time. He believes in peaceful changes that will bring to a social rebirth and equality among social classes. His works are an attempt to improve society, not just a blame of it.