

Progressive Social Reform in Transatlantic Context

This week our major primary text will be Dickens's *Hard Times* novel. We'll also be reading several shorter pieces grounded in the settlement house movement, which was launched in London by Canon Samuel Barnett and his wife Henrietta through their founding of Toynbee Hall, and which was adapted to US contexts by social reform leaders such as Jane Addams.

In addition, to help spark your thinking about the upcoming assignment asking you to generate some pedagogical materials for teaching about transatlantic culture yourself in the future, we'll have guest presentations by graduate students Carrie Tippen and Kassia Waggoner. They will share some work they've been doing to envision bringing Jane Addams into undergraduate classrooms as a transatlantic figure.

Charles Dickens's *Hard Times*

Charles Dickens, *Hard Times* (Oxford UP, 2008). [serialized in weekly installments in *Household Words* (Britain), April 1-Aug 12, 1854; serialized in (pirated) monthly installments, *Home Magazine* (US), July-October 1854]

The introduction to *Hard Times* by Paul Schlicke usefully contextualizes the novel in terms of British studies and two key reference points: utilitarianism and political economy. We encourage you to read this because the overview is a useful one.

However, if we turn to *Hard Times* in a transatlantic context, the perspective can perceptibly shift; and we want to re-introduce the novel in terms of the cross-cultural exchange it has had with the US in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Indeed, as is the case with the Addams-Barnett materials below, you are likely to find issues of continuing relevance today as you read, especially contemporary debates about education, e.g., the need of a national curriculum and the role of STEM and humanities in relation to that curriculum and US economic development.

In some ways we can see an American impact on the representation of labor and labor movements in *Hard Times*. As Schlicke notes, commentators have long questioned the starkly negative representation of the labor organizer (and agitator) Slackbridge. You may recall that Michael Slater commented that Dickens arrived in the US as more of a political radical than he was when he left. Amanda Claybaugh, in *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2007), comments that after hostile American reviews of *American Notes*, "Dickens began to withdraw from the very Anglo-American networks that his tour and travel had exemplified....He abandoned his commitment to suffrage and became even more hostile to Chartism [the workers' movement in Britain that campaigned for such basic rights as universal suffrage, private ballots, payment for members of Parliament, and decent wages and working hours]. And he became quite skeptical of the antislavery campaign as well, so much so that he failed to support the Union during the U.S. Civil War" (80).

Drawing upon the work of Mary Poovey in *Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830-1864* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995), who argues that "national thinking" is

“the most common cognitive mode for managing a potentially global responsibility” (Poovey 8, cited in Claybaugh 58), Claybaugh suggests that Dickens himself “learned” the social reform lesson that all Britons should care about “everyone within and no one beyond the borders of the nation” (58).

Nonetheless, Dickens had a discernible transatlantic impact as a reform writer. Shortly after completing the novel he wrote to Henry Carey on 24 Aug 1854,

To interest and affect the general mind in behalf of anything that is clearly wrong – to stimulate and rouse the public soul to a compassionate or indignant feeling that it must not be – without obtruding any pet theory of cause or cure, and so throwing off allies as they spring up – I believe to be one of Fiction’s highest uses. And this is the use to which I try to turn it. (Qtd. in Slater 363)

His success with at least a swath of American readers is evident in “The Genius of Charles Dickens” in *Putnam’s Magazine* 5 (March 1855): 263-73. Comparing Dickens’s powers of representation to those of Shakespeare and his humor to that of Cervantes, the magazine asserted that if American factories were different from the British ones Dickens represented in *Hard Times* (since British factories had single owners whereas American ones had corporate owners), Dickens still had an impact on Anglo-American reform:

He never takes the side of the oppressor against the oppressed, with the moneyed employer against the laborer, with the powerful against the outcast and poor. His principles are thoroughly and practically benevolent and humanitarian....It may not be easy to discover how far the social revolution, progressing as yet peacefully, and destined to effect the redemption of the people from beggary, ignorance and crime, may be due to the sentiments and feeling electrically communicated from his pen.... [but] he has turned the minds of his millions of readers to the grave problems that underlie the structure of modern society. (272)

The very fact that his serialization of *Hard Times* was so quickly picked up and recirculated in *Home Magazine* in the US also attests to the impact his work had “across the pond.”

But the novel has also continued to have an impact on North America in the 20th century. In “Don’t Let the Bastards Grind You Down’: Echoes of *Hard Times* in *The Handmaid’s Tale*,” *Dickens Quarterly* 25.2 (2008): 90-97, Deborah A. Thomas begins her article thus: “[R]ight now I’m halfway through *Hard Times*, by Charles Dickens,” says Offred, the protagonist of *The Handmaid’s Tale* [by Canadian writer Margaret Atwood], as she describes her illegal reading in the study of her Commander” (90; Thomas quotes from chapter 29). Thomas goes on to point out that both novels begin with a school scene and an indoctrination of a main character into its values (91). And she points out that Atwood first trained as a Victorianist (she is ABD from Harvard) and has listed Dickens as one of her favorite authors.

Hard Times is also the novel that philosopher Martha Nussbaum reads in depth in arguing that the novel makes a profound intervention both in argument and form (especially through imaginative rhetoric) in means-ends, rationalistic, aggregative thinking that has continued to define one strand of political economy into the 20th century. Nussbaum makes the argument both in “The Literary Imagination in Public Life” (*New Literary History* 22.4 [Autumn 1991]: 877-910) and in *Poetic Justice: The Literary Imagination and Public Life* (Boston: Beacon Press,

1995) after having worked five years with the World Institute for Development Economics Research, “a research institute,” she explains, “connected with the United Nations University, whose aim is to explore broader interdisciplinary approaches to the economic problems of the developing world” (“Literary” 904).

As she argues, “The simple utilitarian idea of what rational choice consists in dominates not only economic thought and practice, but also—given the prestige of economics within the social sciences—a great deal of writing in other social sciences as well, where ‘rational choice theory’ is taken to be equivalent to utilitarian rational choice theory as practiced in neoclassical economics” (882). And she sees in the opening scene of the novel an exemplification of such an approach to knowing:

we see four aspects of the economic-utilitarian mind, neatly encapsulated. First, it reduces qualitative differences to quantitative differences. Instead of Louisa, Tom, Stephen, Rachael, in all of their complex qualitative diversity, their historical particularity, we have simply so and so many quantifiable “parcels of human nature.” This effacement of qualitative difference is accomplished, we see, by a process of abstraction from all in people that is not easily funneled into mathematical formulae; so this mind, in order to measure what it measures, attends only to an abstract and highly general version of the human being, rather than to the diverse concreteness with which the novel confronts us....

Second, the Gradgrind mind, bent on calculation, is determined to aggregate the data gained about and from individual lives, arriving at a picture of total or average utility that effaces personal separateness as well as qualitative difference....

[W]e see in it a third feature of the political-economical mind: its determination to find a clear and precise solution for any human problem.

And this brings us directly to the fourth characteristic of economic rationality with which the novel acquaints us. Seeing human beings as counters in a mathematical game, and refusing to see their mysterious inner world, the Gradgrind philosophy is able to adopt a theory of human motivation that is elegant and simple, well suited for the game of calculation, but whose relation to the more complicated laws that govern the inner world of a human being should be viewed with skepticism....

Human beings, this unsentimental view teaches, are all motivated by self-interest in all of their actions. (Nussbaum “Literary” 883-87)

She argues that in contrast, the extreme metaphoricity of Dickens’s language and descriptions actively engage the reader in a counter movement of imagining how one thing is like another, and of caring deeply about individuals as individuals, including the specific details of their everyday lives.

The continuing impact of Dickens on North American thinkers and writers is sustained in Paulette Kidder’s recent essay, “Martha Nussbaum on Dickens’s *Hard Times*,” in *Philosophy and Literature* 33.2 (Oct2009): 417-26, who points out Nussbaum’s ignoring of all biblical references in the novel, despite religion’s historical role as a means of seeking transcendence of the merely measurable and material. Kidder suggests that this omission is in part traceable to the influence of John Rawls’s thought on Nussbaum, specifically his notion of “an ‘overlapping

consensus’—a set of ethical arguments that can be agreed to by any rational and reasonable person despite differences in their ‘comprehensive’ views of human nature. Religious systems, by this account, fall outside the realm of what every reasonable person can agree to. By avoiding discussion of the religious dimension of the novel, Nussbaum has restricted herself to those aspects of its argument that both religious and nonreligious readers can resonate with” (424).

Regenia Gagnier, finally, has recently argued that Dickens must be seen in a global, not just Anglo-American context, on the following grounds: “the Unesco Index Translationum – World Bibliography of Translation 1978-present, [lists] Dickens [as] the 25th most translated author in the world, the ninth most translated author in China, for example, and the fourth in Egypt...” She also points to the extensive list of world authors who have acknowledged Dickens’s impact on their own writing: Dostoevsky, Galdós, Joyce, Kafka, Faulkner, Nabokov, Beckett, Lao She, Anand, Kumar, Naipaul, Ngugi, Soyinka, Dabydeen, Carey, Mistry, and Rushdie. (Regenia Gagnier, “The Global Circulation of Charles Dickens’s Novels,” *Literature Compass* 10.1 [2013]: 82-95).

Given all the above, what do YOU see in Dickens’s novel that had or has an impact on social reform and that helps to give his fiction both a very specific, national resonance (and relevance) in Britain while also enabling his work to travel across time and distance to North America and beyond?

Here, too, are some specific questions to consider:

1. What principles of education does the novel seem to endorse? And to what degree is the novel itself “educating” readers and the public?
2. How does the novel conceive and approach epistemology, i.e., the grounds on which we know what we know? What orders of deriving/constructing knowledge does it endorse?
3. To what degree does the novel rely on or complicate binary oppositions, whether in terms of class, age, gender, or belief systems?
4. At one point Dickens states that Stephen Blackpool is not “particularly intelligent” or “remarkable” (chp. 10). Why does Dickens opt for this choice? Why might an especially talented worker run counter to Dickens’s purpose or alter the effect of his fiction?

Jane Addams, Henrietta Barnett, and the Transatlantic Settlement Movement



As you're reading the primary texts by and about two of the settlement movement's woman leaders, you may want to be considering ways that this writing from the turn into the twentieth century resonates with many of the social issues of today, as well as with rhetoric and civic engagement enterprises linked to university culture now. In that context, Addams and/or Barnett could be intriguing figures to introduce in undergraduate composition courses that are aligned with community/public scholarship activities, which are on the rise at numerous institutions now.

We'll begin by recovering the role of Henrietta Barnett in the development of the settlement model at Toynbee in London. If you're unfamiliar with Dame Henrietta, you're far from alone. Historian Seth Koven has speculated (in an essay entitled "Henrietta Barnett: The (Auto)biography of a Late-Victorian Marriage," in S. Pedersen and P. Mandler, eds., *After the Victorians* [Routledge, 1993]) that the tendency to down-play Dame Henrietta's leadership is traceable to a pivotal piece of her own writing—specifically, her biography of her husband, published in 1918, about five years after his death. Here's a link to a helpful biographical overview of Dame Henrietta and Samuel Barnett:

<http://infed.org/mobi/henrietta-barnett-social-reform-and-community-building/>

Of course, gender roles of the day—particularly those for married women—come into play here. Thus, it's interesting to consider how Jane Addams, who determinedly avoided a hetero-normative marriage, had different opportunities to claim a visible role of settlement leadership than did her close friend Henrietta Rowland Barnett. (In that context, more work certainly needs to be done on Addams' longstanding relationship with her life partner, Mary Rozet Smith, and other close women friends earlier on in her career, including at Rockford College.)

Despite their different “partner” circumstances, Henrietta Barnett and Jane Addams certainly had much in common, and they built a decades-long, mutually beneficial connection maintained by way of visits to each other in London and Chicago, as well as writing. Some of that writing was about each other (in both periodical essays on social reform and in book-length texts), and some took the form of more private correspondence. In the latter regard, Barnett's and Addams's private writing to each other built on a tradition of transatlantic epistolary friendships linking a number of major literary figures from the US and Britain across the nineteenth century, including Anna Barbauld and Catharine Maria Sedgwick, as well as Harriet Beecher Stowe and several different English correspondents (e.g., Harriet Martineau, George Eliot [Mary A. Evans] and Lady Byron). In that context, we might take note of Barnett's forceful efforts to paint Addams in heroic terms in periodical reports during the very years when she had fallen from iconic status as “Saint Jane” of the settlement movement to being excoriated far and wide for her involvement in the women's international peace movement. Barnett was far more subtle, adept, and, we might argue, effective in rhetorically rescuing Addams than Stowe was earlier in the century in her flamboyant and controversial “defense” of Lady Byron as a victim of her husband's abusive behaviors.

To build a preliminary framework for viewing the settlement movement and the Barnett/Addams relationship in transatlantic terms, you'll likely want to start with the brief excerpt from Dame Henrietta's biography of Canon Barnett (in doc-sharing on eCollege) and then read either the British periodical account she wrote about Toynbee Hall's early days or the American reprint (both of which have been sent to you over email and loaded to doc-sharing). *Henrietta Barnett on Toynbee Hall and her connections to Jane Addams—*

1) Excerpts from *Canon Barnett: His Life, Work, and Friends by His Wife*, volume 2. London: John Murray, 1918.—PDF on course website—sections with comments on Addams and the Barnett/Addams friendship [10pp]

2) Periodical story by Barnett on the work of Toynbee Hall:

Barnett, Henrietta O. "THE BEGINNING OF TOYNBEE HALL." *The Nineteenth Century and After: A Monthly Review* 53, no. 312 (1903): 306-314.

OR

Barnett, Henrietta O. "THE BEGINNING OF TOYNBEE HALL." *Eclectic Magazine of Foreign Literature (1901-1907)* 140, no. 6 (1903): 724ff. [reprint of the British periodical piece above]

Addams's public representations of her work's connection to Toynbee follow Dame Henrietta's lead, for the most part, in focusing on Canon Barnett more than on his wife, as you'll see in the "First Days at Hull House" chapter of Addams's most famous book, *Twenty Years at Hull-House*. Read "First Days at Hull House" on pages 89-101.

<http://books.google.com/books?id=BhugAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&dq=twenty+years+at+hull+house&cd=1#v=onepage&q=toynbee%20hall&f=false>

Or

<http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/addams/hullhouse/hullhouse.html>

To acquire more context on Addams' strong affiliation with British (and continental) high culture in the years before her engagement with settlement work, you might want to skim these early chapters from her autobiographical account: "Boarding School Ideals" (43-64) and "The Snare of Preparation" (65-71) and "First Days at Hull House" (89-101), available at the urls above. In the early years of the Hull-House community education program, critics have pointed out, Addams and co-founder Ellen Gates Starr could be faulted for pressing a rather Arnoldian "curriculum" of high culture reading and learning activities on their immigrant neighbors. It's equally important, though, to note how quite a number of those neighbors embraced that very approach, in turn bringing cultural capital from their own backgrounds into the ever-evolving settlement program (e.g., lively productions of drama in vernacular Greek for the playhouse, material culture artistry for the Labor Museum). This was, in the end, one way that the American settlement differed from its English forebear in London.

Thus, you should watch for conceptual and strategic overlaps in Addams's vision for settlement work and the approaches being absorbed from Toynbee, as well as rhetorical moves to cast the Hull-House settlement as distinctively American. Along those lines, a quote from another chapter in the *Twenty Years* book (an expansion on material previously published in a periodical as well as in an essay collection on philanthropy) can be instructive. In "The Subjective Necessity of Social Settlements," Addams argued that America's new generation of college graduates—particularly women college graduates—were in need of outlets for the idealism and the knowledge about social issues that they had gleaned through advanced education, but were then discouraged from acting upon after graduation by being summoned to what she dubbed the "family claim" of motherhood and/or dutiful daughter responsibilities. Thus, this generation of (overly?) educated women was as much in need of the settlement as the poor people in urban areas that the movement sought to serve through the young people's active engagement in the neighborhood:

This young life, so sincere in its emotion and good phrases and yet so undirected, seems to me as pitiful as the other great mass of destitute lives. One is

supplementary to the other, and some method of communication can surely be devised. Mr. Barnett, who urged the first Settlement,—Toynbee Hall, in East London,—recognized this need of outlet for the young men of Oxford and Cambridge, and hoped that the Settlement would supply the communication. It is easy to see why the Settlement movement originated in England, where the years of education are more constrained and definite than they are here, where class distinctions are more rigid. The necessity of it was greater there, but we are fast feeling the pressure of the need and meeting the necessity for Settlements in America. Our young people feel nervously the need of [page 122] putting theory into action, and respond quickly to the Settlement form of activity. [123].

If you'd like to read this chapter in its entirety, so as to get a fuller sense of Addams' argument about why young upper-middle-class Americans were being drawn to Progressive causes, and settlement work, in particular, go here for quick access: <http://www.infed.org/archives/e-texts/addams6.htm>. Like much of Addams' writing, this piece began as a speech.

While the passage above conveys Addams' awareness of how Hull-House both drew on and departed from the Toynbee model that originally inspired her, it's only one of many from her *Twenty Years* narrative. A search of terms such as "Toynbee Hall" and "Barnett" in the electronic copy of *Twenty Years* for which the link is provided below will suggest there's much more work to be done around these transatlantic connections: <http://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/addams/hullhouse/hullhouse.html>

Overall, then, one goal of our work on Barnett and Addams will be to ask what we gain by re-positioning settlement house writing AND these two key figures in a transatlantic context. And we'll also want to envision specific research methodologies and sub-topics that could be applied to address that larger goal.