

***Aspects of Poverty and Poor People in Selected Novels of the Hungry
Forties in the 19th Century***

Presented by Mounira Nawaf Koujah

Supervised by Prof. Taher Badinjki

Abstract

This dissertation investigates the portrayal and treatment of poverty, the miserable conditions of workers, child exploitation, class struggles, women issues and their habitations and other important themes in selected works of three major novelists of the 1840s and early fifties. The novels under investigation are *Oliver Twist* (1837), *Mary Barton* (1848), *Alton Locke* (1850), *Hard times* (1854) and *North and South* (1854). In *Oliver Twist* and *Alton Locke*, Dickens and Kingsley focus the camera on the social ills and the miserable life of the poor in the early decades of the Victorian age in general, and the eighteenth forties and early fifties in particular. I present an authentic description of the workhouses, slums, unhygienic crowded dwellings of the poor, spread of crime and gangs, pickpockets and thieves, absence of schools, and the failure of both church and government to provide proper and decent public education to young people. In *Mary Barton*, *Hard Times*, and *North and South*, Elizabeth Gaskell and Dickens deal with industrialism and its evil results on society. They show how it split society into two nations, the nation of the poor and that of the rich, and describe the depressing and gloomy life of the working class. Most of the labour force comprised women and children working under dreadful conditions with little wages. The factory owners' desire was to get richer through the exploitation of women and children. Long hours of work were paid with minimum wages which resulted in malnutrition, disease, starvation and to spread of prostitution as an extra source of

income. Put together, the novels offer the reader a panoramic picture of squalid miserable life in what came to be known as the hungry forties.