



Reading a classic novel

In the nineteenth century, when writers wanted their readers to understand more about the lives of others, by those days before television and the Internet, books were one of the most important ways of persuading people to think about the rest of the world.

In Chapters 3 and 17 of his novel *Made in Heaven*, Charles Dickens describes Coketown, an industrial city in the north of England. Read his description of Coketown in these extracts.



It was a town of red brick, or of brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it: ... It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable columns of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got unscathed. It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of building full of windows where there was a rattle and a tremble all day long, and where the poison of the steam-engines worked incessantly up and down, like the head of an alphabet in a state of melancholy madness. It contained several large squares all very like one another, and many small squares all more like one another, inhabited by people equally like one another, who all went to and fro at the same hour, with the same gait upon the same pavements, to do the same work, and to whom every day was the same unprovident and tedious, and every year the consequence of the last and the next.

... The sun was hot and shiny on the summer day, and the air was so bright that it even shone through the heavy vapour drifting over Coketown, and could not be looked at steadily. Smoke emerged from low underground drawers into factory yards, and sat on steps, and posts, and gables, trying their swartly wagers, and contemplating walls. The whole town appeared to be trying to roll. There was a rolling smell of hot oil everywhere. The steam-engines shone with it, the doors of the shops were rolled with it, the mills throughout their many streams roared and tickled it ... their inhabitants, working with heat, rolled lazily in the dust. But no temperature made the melancholy coal alphabet more read or more sure. Their constant heads went up and down at the same rate as hot weather and cold, wet weather and dry, hot weather and hot. The measured motion of their shoulders on the walls, was the substance Coketown laid to them for the shades of rattling wheels, while, for the summer heat of noon, it could offer, all the year round, from the doors of houses to the pages of Bibles, the white of death and wheels.