**ANALYSIS OF THE EXTRACT “COKETOWN” BY CHARLES DICKENS’ HARD TIMES**

Hard Times is a novel by Charles Dickens, first published in 1854. The book appraises English society and highlights the social and economic pressures of the times.

In this short excerpt Dickens uses the city of Coketown as a metaphor to describe the negative aspects of industrialization. Just from the title the reader immediately understands it alludes to the material on which the whole of the nineteenth century industrial civilization is based: coal. Dickens specifies that Coketown was recognizable from a distance for the pall of smoke and smog that hung over without interruption. Another feature of this model-city of the industrial revolution is uniformity: roads, houses, factories, everything is reproduced identically. As Dickens wrote: “The jail might have been the infirmary, the infirmary might have been the jail, the town-hall might have been either, or both, or anything else, for anything that appeared to the contrary in the graces of their constructions.” The streets “inhabited by people equally like one another, who all went in and out at the same hours, with the same sound upon the same pavements, to do the same work”. And finally, even the weather is essentially uniform, “everyday was the same as yesterday and tomorrow, and every year the counterpart of the last and the next.”

At first it is mentioned "The keynote". The metaphor, taken from the musical theory of the chords, shows the dimension of sound (unstoppable noise of machinery) of the industrial city and at the same time the fact that the city is the background that surrounds and somehow explains the events of the narrative. Dickens uses the language of senses, he appeals to the sense of sight (with the colors of the bricks, the purple river…), to the sense of hearing and the sense of smell (with the example of the river ill-smelling). The colors the narrator describes are widely used during the Victorian Age.

Coketown is produced by the same logic that lies at the base school education criticized by Dickens, for which the decisive factor is the objectivity of scientifically measurable and technically verifiable facts. Psychologically, however, the consequence of this approach is the "melancholy madness" alluded to by comparing the movement of the pistons to that of the head of an elephant (a huge sick animal); simile is a rhetorical device often used in the text, like metonymies. Dickens then becomes spokesman imagination as a right and a need of human nature. Coketown, towards which directed their steps Gradgrind and Bounderby, was a triumph of facts; there was not the slightest trace of fantasy there. It was a red-brick town, or rather, the brick that would have been red if the smoke and ash made this possible. Just as things were, it was a city of a red and black as an unnatural painted face of a savage; a city full of machinery and tall chimneys from which emerged, winding continuously, "interminable serpents of smoke.” This simile shows the phallocentric analysis of Dickens, in a period in which people avoided to express themselves on these subjects. There was a black canal in and there was a river for smelly purple dye that poured in; there were vast agglomerations of buildings full of windows rattling and shaking all day; the pistons of the steam engine were going up and down with regular and unceasing motion. These Coketown attributes were largely inseparable from industry that gave a living to the city. Also the church looks exactly like one another. The chapels are built like “pious warehouses” and this comparison well anticipates the expression according to which the town was “sacred to fact”. Such materialistic attitude is parodied by hyperbole and irony (“A town sacred to fact, and so triumphant in its assertion, of course got on well? Why no, not quite well. No? Dear me!”).

The image the narrator creates, the constant repetitions and the materialistic vision tend to make the reader perceive a feeling of suffocation; it is a situation from which there is no exit.