

“COKETOWN”

CHARLES DICKENS

Hard Times (1854)
Book I, Chapter 5

The text I am going to analyze, “Coketown”, is an extract from the utilitarian novel *Hard Times*. It was written by Charles Dickens, the great Victorian novelists.

Charles Dickens understood that the Industrial Revolution produced benefits didn't linked with wealth. By this information the reader may aspect the extract talks about this fact and put in light with concrete demonstrations what the novelist said.

Starting from the title the reader notices that it is made of two words: “coke” and “town”. The first one, especially, is a key word. From history knowledge, the reader know that “coke” was the most important power source during the first Industrial Revolution. So it's possible to understand that the center of the extract is about the description of an Industrial town.

The narrator is a third person omniscient.

Starting from the first line it's important the primary and synthetic description of “Coketown” by the narrator who says it is a *triumph of fact*.

If the reader goes on with the reading he or she can notices that the word “fact” is repeated many times, exactly 12 times. So he or she can understand it is a key word.

Dickens describes the city with a materialistic point of view by using sense impression.

The first sense he appeals is the sight. The reader can imagine the city by the two colors: the red of the bricks and the black of the smoke that cover the red of the bracks. So the reader may think about Dante's Inferno, something really bad.

Another refer is to religion: the similarity of the smoke of the chimneys like a serpent who goes up interminably send again to devil.

The black is also the color of the canal the unnatural purple of the river make the reader understands the about the false nature of the town.

The second sense the narrator uses is the smell. Indeed the river grant an ill-smelling dye.

But why is it a key word and why is “Coketown” just fact?

“Fact” is the center of this extract but in general the center of the Industrial society and the way of thinking that came to light during the period of the industrial Revolution. People's mind were suffocated by fact. This explain the affirmation of the narrator when he says: “Fact, fact, fact everywhere in the material aspect of the town....everywhere in the immaterial.”

There were no fancy, just fact, fact, fact.

By this aspect the reader can notices that the repetition of the word, not only make the reader know about the central point of the passage, but also make the reader understand about the monotonous way of live who characterized that period.

There were no fancy, just fact, fact, fact, it hears in the reader's mind like an overload sound.

So the reader understand that the narrator uses frequently the rhetoric future of repetition to explain the monotonous and sadness Industrial society especially saying ever, for ever, never... Also this system of life is reported by the narrator with concrete demonstrations. From line 12 to line 18 the narrator says that “Coketown”, the prototype of an Industrial city, was made of identical streets, inhabited by the same people who did all day, every day the same things. It express the concept with the repetition of “like one another”.

Another aspect put in light by the narrator is that all the buildings were made with the same materials and had the same aspects. This means that the library could be the bank who could be also the school and so on. Moreover, towns were built just to contain workers, so there was no need for creativity in its architectures.

This, especially, is set from line 31 to line 33, where the narrator uses the repetition subject plus verb with the addition of a chiasm.

Also as Dickens goes on, the atmosphere becomes more real. The detailed description of the city on a Sunday morning, from line 44 to line 48, it's nothing more than sad. He uses the repetition of the word "own". Days were all the same, even Sunday, despite of some more drunken people.

This makes the reader feel a sense of oppression. The word "fact", especially, remains something artificial, unnatural and Dickens uses this technique to inform the reader there is no hope, things are so and there is no change. People have lost their personality, there is no idea of identity.

The end of the extract is strictly connected with the beginning by the inserting of two men who were walking through Coketown. Dickens criticizes their way to be in front of all the poor people suffocated by the system. They saw all their common rights being taken away, they worked long periods during the day, they lived in bad conditions. Despite of this the two "gentlemen" were never thankful and eternally dissatisfied.

By this extract the reader knows the thinking of Dickens and also his dedication on criticizing the brutal system of life that characterized in negative the period of the Industrial Revolution.

Also in the "Nice Work" by David Lodge, became on light is thought in the quote of the third chapter in which he says: "*People must be ambushed. They can't be always a learning, nor yet they can't be always a working. They aren't made for it.*"