The test I am going to analyse is an extract from Charles Dickens’ novel “Oliver Twist”.

In this text, C. Dickens provides the reader an image of the Victorian society. In particular he describes children’s life condition and consideration.

The text can be divided into 4 sequences.

Right from the start, the narrator convey how children are hungry, wildly hungry. He conveys their condition describing his action. Indeed “the boys polished them […] till they shone again”, “they would sit staring at the copper”, “sucking their fingers most assiduously”. Thus, emerges an idea of ​​a child extremely hungry, that is about to starve (“suffered the tortures of slow starvation”) and who would be able to cannibalize one of his mates (“he might some night happen to eat the boy who slept next him”). That condition of starvation is also underlined by the quantity of food they daily receive (“each boy had one porringer, and no more”). In the first sequence, the boys are characterised as animals: they live in a “large stone hall”, they were “fed” (a word usually referred to animals). Also, they are “wild with hunger” and have a “wild, hungry eye”. Therefore, the first sequence has the function to reveal the reader the children’s starvation condition and how their starvation turns them into animals.

The second sequence has the function to show the terror of children against the master, who indeed draw who should go and ask him for more food. Oliver, the protagonist, is drawn. For this reason, the second sequence anticipates the events that occur in the third sequence.

The function of the third sequence is to show the reader the lower position of the child in society. Indeed, Oliver’s request makes the master petrified for his imprudence (“he turned very pale”, “in a faint voice”). The boy's impudence is amplified by Mr. Lambkin’s disbelief in knowing what has happened (“compose yourself and answer me distinctly”) and his reaction. The request of a child who is starving to have more food turns the child (from the point of view of the master) into an unruly rebel. This shows how the consideration of adults towards children is nothing.

If the child is unruly, it is necessary to punish him. This happens in the fourth and last sequence. Its function is once again to show that children in society have no value. In fact, a reward is offered to those who decide to "buy" Oliver. The action of "selling" a child places him at the same level as a slave, and this allows the intelligent reader to understand the complete lack of any children's rights.

All this is said through the use of irony. The irony is given by the exaggeration that leads the reader to sympathize with the children after the initial laugh. Irony is used in the first sequence when the narrator describes the accuracy with which the children cleaned the bowls. That use of irony amplifies the hungry of the children. In the third sequence it is present in Oliver’s walk to the master (“he rose from the table; and advancing to the master”) in order to convey something terrifying is going to happen and also in the master’s reaction (“he turned very pale”, “in a faint voice”) in order to emphasize the sacrilegious nature of the request.

In conclusion, some features of Victorian society emerge from the analysis of the text. These characteristics are: the centrality of man in the family, the one who holds power; the secondary role of the woman, the one who must assist the man; the idea of ​​a hungry child, considered as an animal, without any rights.