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**“Oliver wants some more”, C. Dickens**

The extract belongs to Charles Dickens’ “Oliver Twist” (1837-1839).

It is an example of Victorian novel.
It is organised in sequences and the main narrative technique is telling, but there is also showing. The speaking voice is a omniscient third person narrator. The extract begins with a long introduction: the writer sets the narration in a workhouse during the meal-time: C. Dickens portrays the Victorian Age, the condition of children and the role of men.

The setting contributes to create the atmosphere and conveys the misery and the condition of children and the asymmetric relationship between the children and the master. The extract is a criticism of the social condition during the Victorian Age.

In the first sequence the narrator focuses the attention on the master and characterises him with his clothes: “ dressed in a apron for the purpose”; and with the action he does: “ladled the gruel”. In addition the use of the passive form “ the boys were fed” underlines the passive role of children and their submission to the master, it conveys once again the asymmetric relationships between children and the master. The language the writer uses is an excess related with the situation he wants to describe: words as “purpose” sounds comic referred to an ordinary action like feeding children, this choice reflects the social condition of the time ( woman and children were considered inferior and men had the power) but also makes the master become a caricature. The writer uses irony and creates a comic effects thanks to hyperboles and exaggeration because he can’t criticise society straightforward. Besides irony the writer uses an important tone in order to criticise. The expression “at meal-time” refers to a routine and highlights the very poor condition of life. Going on reading the extract the reader find out another ironic expression: “ of this festive composition”,that is another indirect criticism to the children’s condition.

The overall effect of the introductory sequence is that all is standardised and children aren’t free under the master’s apparent supremacy. The sentence “The bowls never wanted washing” refers to the fact that children are very hungry and never leave anything in the bowls, in particular the narrator uses the verb “to polish” to underline the fact that children probably licked their bowls. It also underline this idea with the verb “to shine” that is usually referred to the sun. The exaggeration of the language and of the contents is a sort of defence mechanism: it creates entertainment (makes the reader laughs) but at the same time allows an indirect criticism (it suggests the idea of a very poor condition). The image of the spoon large as the bowl it’s grotesque: it’s ridiculous but makes the reader reflects on the children’s situation. This double effect remind to the double faced nature of the the Victorian Age where wealth and poverty coexisted and where the two faces of the same period. The sentence “They would staring at the copper...the very bricks of which it was composed” convey children’s situation: they were slowly starving. The writer uses similes to compare them to animals in order to underline that they are really hungry. Going on reading the reader understands that the writer uses once again irony: “employing themselves in sucking their fingers most assiduously”, once again the writer makes an indirect criticism to children’s life condition.

The onomatopoeia “splashes” sound strange in the reader’s mind: something “splashes” only when there’s too much, instead children don’t have nothing. It helps the reader understands the condition of the boys. Also the alliteration “suffered the tortures of slow starvation” contribute to creates the idea of the children’s miser condition.

The writer juxtaposes to the ironic sentence “he had another basin of gruel per diem” the ghastly scene conveyed by the assonance “wild hungry eye” and conveys to the reader children’s feeling and criticises the social condition of the time.

The master is once again characterized with his clothes, his actions and by the people who surround him: “the master in his cook’s uniform, stationed himself at the copper; his pauper assistants ranged themselves behind him”. And at the same time the boys are characterized by their language and body language: “the boys whispered to each other and winked at Oliver; while his next neighbours nudged him.” The reader could understand that they are afraid, but anyway the writer uses the verb “to rise” to tell the reader that Oliver stands up and goes to the master: it is generally used for the sun and it is in contrast to the feelings of the boy, indeed this contrast is underlined in the next sentence: “somewhat alarmed art his own temerity”.

Oliver tells the master: “Please, sir, I want some more”, the words “please” and “sir” convey the submitted position of the boys in front of the master.
The reactions of the masters and the assistants portray the society of the Victorian Age: there was determined role and position that couldn’t be ignored. The fact that the writer choose to tell the reader the “chaos” that Oliver’s request provoked underlines what I have already said: Mr Bumble “rushed in great excitement” and “horror was depicted on every countenance”. The scene might seems comic at a first reading but it reveals how society was in Victorian Age and makes the reader reflect on what was children’s reality and which was the role of men in this period.

When the gentleman in the white waistcoat said “That boy will be hung” might seems that the man understood the bad situation of the boys but he/her immediately understand that it didn’t happened: on the contrary Oliver is offered for five pounds to anyone who would pay for him. The conclusion of the extract makes the reader became definitely aware of the low position and role of children and how the Victorian Age society was organized.