Analysis of “Coketown”

The present text is an extract taken from Dickens’ Hard Times Book I Chapter 5. The text is characterised by the use of telling, it has a third person omniscient narrator. It is arranged into three sequences. The first sequence introduces the setting, which represents the main element of the text. It consists of an industrial city called “Coketown”: its role in industry is underlined by the sentence “It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled”. The word “sentence” may have a negative meaning, because it reminds the reader the idea of poison connected to the pollution of the chimneys. In the sequent lines the narrator continues the description of the city that can represent all Victorian cities through its features. The narrator conveys the reader an idea of filth using expressions like “ill-smelling dye” which characterise the river of the city. The narrator creates a sense of irony comparing the movement of the piston of the steam-engine to the movement of a crazy elephant. Then the narrator introduces the theme of the alienation of workers which is one of the main points of the political debates of the time. The theme is introduced through the description of the people’s routine, featured by the monotony of their work that is one of the aspects the socialist current is going to fight. The city is totally devoted to labour, the narrator ridicules this aspect of the city telling that “If the members of a religious persuasion – as the members of eighteen religious persuasions had done- they made it a pious warehouse of red brick”. The narrator describes prison and the hospital as the same building: it underlines again and again the double face of the Victorian Age. Indeed it conveys the idea of the negligence of the British government in respect of the necessities and conditions of people. The first sequence ends with a “Amen” which is a religious reference. The second sequence starts with the question “Who belongs to the eighteen denominations?”. No worker would belong, because they can’t exercise any influence on the other people, they haven’t power. Then the narrator makes a list of professional characters connected with the religious associations, after that two characters arrive: Mr. Bounderby and Mr. Gradgrind. They narrator finishes the text portraying the two characters: they are pictured as a “bad lot altogether”. Each other sentence which describes the behaviour of the characters ends with the expression “gentlemen”. The expression directly connects the narrator and the reader, as he wants to involve the reader and to catch his faith.