Analysis of Mr. Bounderby

The present text is an extract taken from Dickens’ Hard Times Chapter 4. It presents the character of Mr. Bounderby. The text is arranged into three sequences and it is featured by a third person omniscient narrator who resorts to the use of telling. The first sequence starts with a rhetorical question. The narrator makes a comparison between Mr. Bounderby and his best friend in order to introduce his characterisation. The first element he exploits is that Mr. Bounderby was a very cold man without feelings or sentiments. He uses repetition of the word “order” to reinforce the idea of the absence of sentiments. In order to create a grotesque character, the tone of the language is ironical. The second sequence reports a description of Mr. Bounderby’s personality: the narrator tells he is a rich man. The reader can understand that the character belongs to the upper class of the Victorian society and therefore the character represents a class which is criticised by Charles Dickens through his novel. In addition the physical description reinforce the idea of grotesque using expressions like “swelled veins in his temples” or “strained skin to his face that it seemed to hold his eyes open”. The second sequence creates the setting of the story which consists of a formal drawing-room of Stone Lodge. It signs the arrival of another character: Mrs. Gradgrind. In this passage the narrator directly allude to the role of women in the Victorian society using the expression “he thus took up a commanding position, from which to subdue Mrs. Gradgrind”. So the reader can understand the submission of Mrs. Gradgrind through the language of body: Mr. Bounderby’s position in the room underlines his superiority in the hierarchy of the Victorian society. This aspect conveys the idea of another contradiction of the Victorian reign: even if the head of the United Kingdom of Great Britain is a woman who tries to be an example for the society, women don’t occupy a relevant position in the society and they are only expected to keep children and the house. The last sequence focuses on the new character Mrs. Gradgrind through the technique of showing. The sequence creates a contrast between her and Mr. Bounderby because the narrator tells she is “a little, thin, white, pink-eyed bundle of shawls, of surpassing feebleness, mental and bodily”.