**COKETOWN – TEXTUAL ANALYSIS**

Coketown is an extract taken from Hard Times Chapter 5 by Charles Dickens. The extract deals with the characterisation of the town where the plot of the novel develops itself. The place Dickens exploits , as in any other novel of him, is imaginative, and becomes a way to denounce upper class people’s behaviour and the process of industrialisation carried out during that age.

The narrator is a third person omniscient narrator who mostly exploits the technique of telling to convey the town’s characterisation, even if he seems to take part emotively to the place’s description and arranges it into three big sequences.

The first sequence mainly deals with the introduction of the situation, carried out by the two protagonists – Mr. Gradgrind and Mr. Bounderby – who are walking down the town. The place is said to be ‘ a triumph of fact’, an expression that seems contradictory when juxtapose to what written later “it had no greater taint fancy in it than Mrs. Gradgrind herself”. The intelligent reader can understand that while reading he approaches a cold town.

After that, the description of the town goes on. The narrator exploits the category of colour to convey the idea of a town made of bricks – as most of English towns –, but that it is so covered by smoke that it looks of an unnatural colour. The similarity exploited is between the town and the painted face of a savage.

Later, the town is described within the use of what causes that smoke: “a town of machinery and chimneys”, which witness the strong impact of the Industrial Revolution on English towns. The personification of smoke into ‘serpents’ and the repetitive and redundant use of ‘ever’ and ‘never’ underlines that that smoke continues to go out of industries without any end. The characterisation goes on with the use of phonetic figure of speech like assonance “rattling and trembling”, as well as through images connected to sense of smell “ill-smelling dye”. Once again, the use of personification is used to compare the monotonous work of steam-engines to the head of a melancholic elephant. The concept of monotony is the main topic of the sequence, indeed it is conveyed by the description of streets which seem to be similar to each other; people who live in the same houses, go out and in everyday at the same time, and do the same tasks and jobs. The repetition is conveyed by the use of the word ‘same’ and expression like ‘yesterday and tomorrow’. The narrator expresses therefore a negative idea of the town, which seems to be compared to a machine, boring and mechanized.

The second sequence deals with the relationship between the town and the concept of work. The town appears to be like a Swiss clock, everything contained in it has got its precise function and works perfectly. Ironically, it is said that if there is a chapel, it would soon become a pious warehouse. So every building has a pragmatic function, except for the church, whose characterisation recalls of a squared and ordered building, in line with the other edifices in town.

The similarity of edifices is once again conveyed by inscriptions, which are said to be alike and might bring anyone to make confusion between them. The example of the jail which might be the infirmary and vice versa confirms that aspect. The repetition of the word ‘fact’ recalls the idea of something concrete, objective and material, as the town proves to be. The material aspect brought by the Industrial Revolution is the topic of the second sequence, since it is told that anything which cannot be deciphered in figures or sold in the cheapest market cannot exist. This is significant since it is one of the main aspect of Industrial Revolution: the new rules of market, competition, concurrence, material aspects are all at the basis of the new era.

Through a religious invocation and a rhetorical question “of course got on well? No!”, the narrator seems to take part actively to the town’s description giving a personal and negative opinion.

The third sequence focuses on some particular inhabitants, who belong to the “eighteen denominations”, who prove important contradictions which feature the town as well as Victorian atmosphere in general.

At first, the characterisation of some people walking down the streets on Sunday morning with their “barbarous jangling” and gazing at all the church and the chapel, recalls the idea of strange religious sects with strange and unusual behaviour. Moreover, the “Teetotal society” made of people always getting drunk; the chemist and the druggist taking opium; the chaplain of the jail taking part in “low singing and low dancing”; a 18-month imprisoned man proud to be moral specimen are all examples of people who adapt strange behaviour in order to escape from the difficult and monotonous life style they are compelled to live.

In the last part of the sequence, the two protagonists (Mr. Gradgrind and Mr. Bounderby) come actively into the scene and the narrator conveys once more a negative characterisation of the two. The importance of those “tabular statements” reports once again that everything –also one’s character– should be translated into figures. The narrator conveys to the reader the image of bad, restless, insatiable, unmanageable gentlemen, thus making a contradiction to the word ‘gentleman’ itself.

In definitive, Coketown is a place where everything, according to the Puritan code of values, seems to function perfectly but that inevitable hides under itself many contradictions and negative aspects too, such as the monotonous life-style, the strange and bad behaviours of its inhabitants and once again as Dickens always does, the arrogance of upper class people who should represent an example for the poor ones.

Finally, Coketown is the clear example of a decayed society, owing that to the strong impact of the Industrial Revolution on English towns.