**MR. BOUNDERBY – TEXTUAL ANALYSIS**

Mr. Bounderby is an extract taken from Chapter 4 *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens.

The novel was written in 1854 and concerns a sort of critique made by the novelist against those social classes of the time who subjected the poor ones. The novel takes place in an imaginative place (Coketown) and his main characters are Thomas Gradgrind and Josiah Bounderby, who seems to be at the center of Dickens’ denunciation and focus. Indeed, the extract mainly concerns the character’s description through different categories of characterization, which more or less correspond to the sequences into which the text is arranged.

The first sequence has an introductory function and differently from the reader’s expectation, it begins with an indirect unusual description of the character, made up by a negation of a name (“Not being Mrs. Grandy, who was Mr. Bounderby?”) and his relationship with another character (Mr. Gradgrind): indeed it is said that those characters were friends, but that it was a contradictory friendship since there was a spiritual relationship between two people lacking of any sentiment.

The second sequence starts with Mr. Bounderby’s physical description and role in society: these are other categories exploited by Dickens. He uses a list of adjectives, nouns and expression to convey the idea of a man who is at the same time many things (“a banker, a manufacturer, a merchant,…”) and is “big, loud, made out of course material”. Dickens exploits exaggeration and hyperbole to characterize Mr. Bounderby: indeed, all the adjectives and expressions used recall the idea of someone big, fat, inflated “a man with great puffed head and forehead”, “strained skin”, “being inflated like a balloon”. As in Oliver Twist, Dickens exploits once again the techniques of grotesque and pathos to make the reader at first laugh after reading the description, but then reminding him of the negative aspect of the character.

Indeed, another category exploited is Mr. Bounderby vanish: “a man who could never sufficiently vaunt himself a self-made man”. Mr. Bounderby’s image is therefore of a person who according to the Puritan ethics and code of values had been formed himself starting in disadvantage: it is said he had been poor and ill during his youth.

The second sequence goes on with Mr. Bounderby’s appearance: it is said that he looked older than his friend even if he was younger. So once again Dickens gives to the perspective reader an ironical and negative image of the character who is constantly ridiculed and denounced. His physical appearance seems indeed connected to his way of behaving: his lack and disorder of hair seemed to be in a way or another his boastfulness’s punishment.

The third sequence sets the atmosphere of the extract, so it has a narrative function in the economy of the text. The setting is a formal drawing-room of Stone Lodge in which he and his friend discussed about his birthday. Once again, irony is used to convey the idea of a contradictory man, who had to be on one hand virtuous but in reality was mean and miserable. Dickens underlines once again the position of advantage of men towards women “he thus took up a commanding position from which to subdue Mrs. Gradgrind”.

The third sequence sees the passing from telling to showing in which Mr. Bounderby with a sort of flashback tells about his situation during his youth, completely opposite to the actual one “I hadn’t a shoe to my foot. I passed a day in a ditch,…” All these descriptions want at first make the reader feel a bit of empathy towards the character, but then make him reflect about how he had changed so much and think about his speech’s truth.

The fourth sequence reports the characterization of another character (Mr. Gradgrind’s wife Mrs. Gradgrind) who was “little, thin, white,” completely opposite to Mr. Bounderby’s situation of health, prosperity and according to Victorian age code of values, women were considered inferior in importance to men. After a short description of the woman, there is another part of showing consisting of a dialogue between a two about the ditch where Mr. Bounderby has been compelled to live for one day. Mr. Bounderby reports his brutal situation: indeed he “had inflammation on the lungs,” was “little miserable, sickly, ragged and dirty”. All the adjectives have the aim to touch the reader’s heart at first, but then to show Mr. Bounderby’s sense of superiority towards the woman, described as “imbecile”. The text ends with Mr. Bounderby saying that what he had been using to fight this situation was his determination and strenght.

This will be denied in the end of the novel: indeed all what Bounderby has said is completely false, as his family still belonged to the middle class. So instead of giving value to the people who starting with a difficult situation had managed to raise up to middle and upper class profiting for richness and stability, Dickens strongly wants to denounce rich people’s hypocrisy and lack of respect towards all the people who during the Victorian age were compelled to suffer from terrible life conditions.