Analysis from Mr. Bounderby from Hard Times

It is an extract from chapter 4 from Charles Dickens “Hard Times”. It is a third person omniscient narrator. It is arranged into five sequences: the first four sequences of showing and the other sequence of telling. In the first sequence the narrator explains his point of view and he creates Mr. Bounderby characterisation toward the use of irony in the comparison with Mr. Gradgrind “as a man perfectly devoid of sentiment (ll. 2-3)” because the freeze and material aspect of Mr. Bounderby personality is reinforced by the adverb “perfectly” but it creates a contradiction because it refer to something well but this time it is used to underline something that seems positive but it reveals to be negative. In the next quotation the narrator insist in the irony to portrays Mr. Bounderby as an extraordinary man who have done all prestigious jobs but it makes Mr. Bounderby ridiculous. Also the adjectives like: big, loud and metallic make Mr. Bounderby ridiculous indeed he seems and sounds like a machine. The narrator upends the middle class materialistic ideas using adjectives that usually refer to machines to convey the idea that the middle class loses his humanity.

The narrator wants to convey to the reader a ridiculous idea of Mr. Bounderby’ s personality and so the narrator exaggerates Mr. Bounderby’s phisical description, and thus the narrator compares Mr. Bounderby to a balloon “ready to start (l.10)”. But to say the true the most important aspect of Mr. Bounderby’s personality that the narrator wants to convey is his fear to be a common man: Mr. Bounderby wants constantly be at the center of the attention indeed he always underlines the features of his personality that distinguishes himself from the other men “self-made man, old ignorance and old poverty”. But the narrator extremes this features and makes him ridiculous “Bully of humility (l. 13)”.

Mr. Bounderby belongs to the middle class and so it is on the one hand a criticism to the middle class, whenever the narrator exaggerates Mr. Bounderby’s personality thus giving the reader the possibility not to recognise his own image through the distorting mirror of the novel. Therefore, according to the Victorian Compromise, the character makes the reader laugh and shiver.

In the next sequence the narrator shifts the point of view and focuses the attention on Mr. Bounderby’s age and hair, and again the narrator ridicule his character’s vanity and his sense of superiority because he highlights his negative qualities and creates a contrast between the previous description.

The next sequence is a narrative one, it introduces the dialogue between Mr. Bounderby and Mrs. Gradgrind, it conveys the idea of asymmetric relation between man and women “subdue Mrs. Gradgrind”.

In the last sequence of showing comes to the surface Mr. Bounderby’s behaviour to convey the ideas: of the self-made man “nobody to thank for my being here, but myself (l.42)”, of the difficulties he had to face in his childhood and his achievement in his adulthood. These aspects are the values of the middle class and becomes the values of the society, indeed Mr. Bounderby’s history is similar to Oliver Twist’s history. But pathos emerges in the sequence of showing, differently from Oliver Twist where it emerges in the sequence of telling. The reason may be that in Hard Times the pathos becomes irony because Mr. Bounderby’s history increase his vanity and his false sense of superiority. The sequence is in coherence with the previous ones indeed in the first quotation he asserts again toward the synecdoche “'I hadn't a shoe to my foot” their old poverty; it immediately creates a pathetic feeling, on the one hand for the child but on the other hand a criticism toward the adult that constantly puts himself at the center of the attention, increasing excessively him situation indeed it seems impossible for a child to survive and so he appears again ridiculous. In the next quotations he reinforces that idea shifting the attention from the place where he spends the nights to his health to increase the sense of pathetic. But he never tries to change the society according to the logic of Utilitarianism; despite the pathetic history of his childhood seems suggest to the reader. Indeed Mr. Bounderby belongs to the middle class thus he represents one of the guilty that aggravates his childhood.

In the last quotation Mr. Bounderby try to give an answers to the question “How did you survive?”, but the justification is only a word “determination” and so he increase his sense of superiority but also he conveys the idea that the reason of the poverty is not social injustices and the exploitation of labours, in order to justify actions that allow him to raise in the society.

The asymmetric relation between men and women is well represented by Mrs Gradgrind because she haven’t any characterisation and she is a pretext to introduce Mr. Bounderby’s dialogue.

asymmetric relation No words Mrs. Gradgrind