

NOTHING BUT FACTS

The extract is taken from the Chapter I of the novel "Hard Times". The focus of this extract is on the figure of Thomas Gradgrind, a strict teacher with utilitarian ideas of the Victorian age. The Teacher expresses to the ^{school} headmaster and to another man his desire for children to be taught nothing but facts: he has the idea that nothing but facts will be of any service to them. He indeed calls his pupils "vessels", he considers them little containers to be filled with notions. It is clear that the figure of Gradgrind is exaggerated as it is used by Dickens to criticize utilitarianism and Victorian society. The author describes the physical aspect of the man respecting his ideas: his forefinger, shoulders, trousers and coat are square (shape used to highlight rationality and to transmit the sense of order). We can see how the body represents also the soul of the man. Then Dickens goes on with others ideas about education of the Teacher: he doesn't believe that children should be actively involved in the education process, on the contrary he thinks that they should remain passive spectators of that, they are not implicit to have and develop analytical thinking; they just have to apply school rules and listen to Teacher to learn facts.

Dickens criticizes the materialistic principles of Utilitarianism developed by Mill and Bentham in that years. He is convinced that life without imagination would be unbearable, instead Utilitarianism believed more in facts and statistics. The figure of Thomas Gradgrind reveals the antagonism towards a rational view of life.

KEYNOTE

This extract is taken from Chapter II of "Hard Times". ~~Dickens~~ ^{The} ~~central~~ ^{central} theme is the description of Coketown, a fictional city that just by its name makes its aspect clear. Dickens uses the city to criticize the negative consequences of industrialization and utilitarianism. In Coketown the air is almost unbreathable because of pollution, beauty is considered useless (because of utilitarian ideas) and all buildings are built in the same way, moreover people live a miserable life.

Dickens makes use of unusual terms for the description of the city: savage linked to the idea of inanimability (used to describe native people by colonisers), the serpent in Christianity is the symbol of sin and evil and the elephant is sacred in Hinduism but the author describes it as reduced in a state of melancholic madness. All these symbolic meanings help Dickens to convey a message of harmful power industrialization. In the second part, to emphasise the sameness of every building, Dickens ~~writes~~ points out that the jail might have been the infirmary as well as the town hall.

Dickens suggests also that wealthy people were the only ^{ones} to benefit from the higher living standards offered by industrial development.

OLIVER TWIST

The extract is taken from Chapter II of "Oliver Twist". Oliver lives with the other orphans in a workhouse run by Bumble the Beadle. Workhouses were institutions where people (especially children) unable to support financially by themselves were offered accommodation and employment, though instead people were exploited and abused in those places.

The tradition in the workhouse was that every boy had only one bowl of gruel a day and they had to work all day. The consequences of that situation were severe diseases and starvation. It is interesting to notice that this situation is described by Dickens in a unique way: he writes that "The bowls never wanted washing" and "Boys have generally excellent appetites" using a bitterly ironic tone in order to ~~emphasise the sensation of~~ ~~to~~ give a better description of the suffering lived in the workhouse.

The meal is accompanied by a religious ceremony introduced in the text through the ~~long~~ figure of Mr Bumble the Beadle and also by certain actions: "The boys tidore their places... his pauper assistant ranged themselves behind him... a long grace was said." After the ceremony the act of eating is described but in very short sentences; Dickens emphasise the shortness of the "pleasure of eating" and the long duration of the hunger. Then Dickens ~~present~~ introduces the character of Mr Bumble describing him as a healthy fat person: The description is exaggerated in order to show the enormous gap between him and the children.

The author makes a harsh criticism to the system of workhouses and describes in an innovative way the appalling conditions in which children had to live. Besides the injustice and the hypocrisy of Victorian age, the author writes also about some hope: Oliver will be adopted.

In all the novel Dickens uses a third person omniscient narrator and a first one, he makes use of different tones and the descriptions are always detailed and long.