

Bleak House -Charles Dickens-

Charles Dickens was born on February 7, 1812 at Lamport, Portsmouth, being the second of the eight children of John Dickens, a clerk in the Naval Pay Office. John Dickens' work took him from place to place, so that Charles spent his childhood in Portsmouth, London and Chatham. In 1823 the family moved to London, faced with financial disaster. To help his family, Charles began to work before he was twelve.

His first work, "Sketches by Boz", appeared in magazines soon after he was twenty-one, and in a volume after three years. In 1834 Dickens joined the reporting staff of the "Morning Chronicle".

All the years between 1837 ("The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club") and 1865 ("Our Mutual Friend") were intensely creative for the author of twelve of the best known novels in English literature: "The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club"(1837), "Oliver Twist"(1838), "Nicholas Nickleby"(1838-1839), "Martin Chuzzlewit"(1843-1844), "Dombey and Son"(1846-1848), "David Copperfield"(1849-1850), "Bleak House"(1852-1853), "Hard Times"(1854), "Little Dorrit"(1855-1857), "Great Expectation"(1860-1861), and "Our Mutual Friend"(1864-1865).

Charles Dickens died on June 9, 1870, after he had suffered a stroke at the end of a full day's work.

Most of Charles Dickens' novels are centered around a character, seen from his childhood to his maturity. "Bleak House" is different because, although it has a great number of characters, it centers around an institution, the High Court of Chancery, the delays and costs of which bring misery and ruin to its suitors. The novel opens with a description of London in November. Fog appears both actual in the London streets and symbolic in the bleak building which houses the Court of Chancery, an institution which is the very opposite of a real court, where order and justice are the key words. Instead, the words used by Dickens with reference to the city and the court are "fog" and "mud".

London is covered with fog and mud, the sun has died. Everything is dark and the people move automatically, like dummies, through mud and fog. Fog covers everything: the city, the people, the whole country. There is no escape from this cold, dark, which penetrates even the Court of Chancery. The intensity of the groping atmosphere is at its highest point: there are numerous lawyers and petitioners and, above all, the Lord High Chancellor with "foggy glory round his head".

But the Court of Chancery is not only an obscure and gloomy institution, it is also a network of relations among various people at all levels of the society; which "has its decaying houses and lands in every district; which has its lunatic in every madhouse and its dead in every churchyard; which has its ruined suitor, borrowing and begging through the round of every man's acquaintance;..."

Reading this fragment we may observe the quality of the words and the arrangement of the sentences. The first paragraph contains sentences without a predicate, words denoting objects, forms and colours; the author used them to create a static, descriptive image. Repetition, either lexical or syntactical, is largely used, for the sake of emphasis. Thus the 2nd paragraph is based on reiteration of the word "fog", which becomes the main symbol of the passage; the idea is that there is not escape from it. The 3rd and 4th paragraphs begin with repetitions of the same syntactical patterns (*raw...rawest, dense...densest, etc...* and *never can there come...*), which emphasize the author's feelings towards the foggy weather and respectively the "foggy" Court of Chancery.

We can observe a certain gradation also. Fog is mentioned when London is described: fog penetrates every place in the country (up the river, down the river, on the Essex marshes, on the Kentish heights, on the yards, over the bridges) and suffocates everybody (the angry captain, the little 'prentice boy, the ancient pensioners).

The last paragraph contains an enumeration of the destructive effects which the activity of that legal institution has upon the litigants; it ends with a warning, which reminds us of the Dantean words written above the entrance of the Inferno: "Abandon all hope, ye who come."