

## Bleak House: Analogy and Intrigue as Narrative Techniques

✍ Shree Prasad Neupane

(Assistant Lecturer-Urlabari Multiple Campus, Morang)

### ABSTRACT

*This study entitled, “Bleak House: Analogy and Intrigue as Narrative technique” deals with the issue of the judicial evils presented in England during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The main source of justice is the court that should provide equal rights to the citizens and it should protect the basic rights of the citizens. The British Chancery Court is analogically presented in the novel. Fog analogically represents the court. Fog has covered everything like boats, rivers, green meadows and everything else. As in fog, nothing can be seen clearly about the Chancery Court. Several counsels and solicitors looked through the paper work of the court case called Jarndyce and Jarndyce which has gone for generations. But no one knows the reality about the case. So, the main problem of this study is to clarify how British Chancery Court has been polluted and the citizens are deprived of justice in British society. The main objective of the study is to identify the social evils created by the misuse of Chancery Court in Britain. The present study is qualitative in its nature and the use of figures of speech specially analogy and intrigue are studied in the novel. The events, setting and even the characters and their roles are studied, analyzed and interpreted the role of the court through the use of figure of speech. It is found that the nineteenth century British society was totally corrupted. The main source of justice that is the court was limited only in the hands of some limited people. They utilized the court only for their favor.*

**Keywords:** Analogy, Intrigue , Narrative Techniques, Justice, represent

### Introduction

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) is regarded as one of the best English novelists of the nineteenth century. “Bleak House” is one of the best-known novels of Charles Dickens. This novel was published in 20 monthly installments between March 1852 and September 1853. It deals with the social evils of the 19<sup>th</sup> century England specially created by the British Chancery Court. Pourjafari (2021) writes Bleak House

demonstrates the moral corruption of the ruling administration (P. 1). 'Bleak House' represents the highest point of Dickens' intellectual maturity. The novel contains vast, complex and engaging arrays of minor characters and sub plots which have made the novel vast and complex. Because of such characters and sub-plots, the novelist has succeeded in writing such a fine novel. The story of the novel is told partly by the novel's heroine, Esther Summerson and partly by an omniscient narrator. The real exposition of the British Chancery Court among the readers of the nineteenth century with the use of special narrative techniques of analogy and intrigue is the major statement of this analytical study. Regarding Chancery court Mimi Mathew notes "By the early nineteenth century, the British court of Chancery had become synonymous with procedural dysfunction and injustice" (Matthews, 2015, p. 1, para, 1)

### **Statement of the problem**

It is known to us that literature is the reflection of society. In the novel, Dickens deals with the social evils of the 19<sup>th</sup> century England specially created by the British Chancery Court. In this context, the main problem of this study is to reflect how Dickens presents the evil aspects of the court through the use analogy and intrigue as the narrative techniques in the novel. Regarding evil aspect reflected in Bleak House (Grounds, 2011) asserts that Dicken satirizes the contemporary condition of justice in London diagnosing the social ills.

### **Methodology**

This study concerns only with the novel entitled, "The Bleak House" written by the nineteenth century English novelist Charles Dickens. The main aspect of the study is how Dickens presents the evil aspects of the British Chancery Court. The events, setting and even the characters and their roles are studied, analyzed and interpreted. So, the present study is qualitative in its nature and the use of figures of speech specially analogy and intrigue are studied in the novel.

### **Analysis and Interpretation of the Study**

Dickens has succeeded to make the novel a great success through the use of analogy and intrigue as the narrative techniques in the novel. The term 'analogy' is derived from the Greek word 'analogia'. It is a similarity between like features of two things on which a comparison may be based. In the novel, Dickens presents the similarity between the fog and the court. Similarly, intrigue is the process of drawing comparison in order to show similarity in some aspects.

The use of analogy in the novel makes the ideas vivid and effective. The British Chancery Court in the novel is analogically presented by Dickens. The use of analogy in the very first chapter in the novel presents the condition of the British Chancery Court vividly. Dickens describes the condition of British Chancery Court by comparing it to fog in the month of November. Dickens writes:

*"... fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes Fog, everywhere, fog up the river where it flows among green meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs; fog lying out on the yards, and hovering in the rigging of great ships and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners, wheezing by the firesides . . ."[chap.1, p 1]*

Here, Dickens presents the supremacy of fog. Fog has covered everything. It has covered the boats, rivers, green meadows and everything else. 'Fog' symbolically stands for confusion, darkness and illusion. Here Dickens means to say that as fog is everywhere, there is confusion everywhere. The confusion is created by British chancery court. Fog refers to the darkness of the court. British legal system has created confusion among the citizens. As in fog, nothing can be seen clearly about the Chancery Court. Several counsels and solicitors looked through the paper work of the court case called Jarndyce and Jarndyce which has gone for generations. But no one knows the reality about the case. Regarding the confusion of the court, Dickens writes:

*"This scarecrow of a suit has, in course of time, become so complicated, that no man alive knows what it means" (p.3)*

So, the fogginess of the court is chronic. The gloomy aspect of the fog is also connected to this case. The fogginess of the court has been there for a long. The confusion of the court is similar to the confusion created by a scarecrow. The public are not benefitted by the court. The activities of the court are vague and complicated for general people to understand. It is more clarified by the following extract:

*"....no man's nature has made better by it. In trickery, evasion, procrastination, spoliation, botheration, under false pretenses of all sorts, there are influences that can never come to good"(chap.1, p 4)*

The court has not brought positive change as it had to do. It has the negatively affected the people. Trickery, procrastination, false pretenses etc. are the general characteristics of the court. The court is only on the favor of the solicitors and the lawyers. The lawyers and the solicitors are benefitted a lot by it which is the social evil of the nineteenth England that the writer presents effectively in the novel using analogy and intrigue as the narrative techniques. Not a single person has been benefitted by it. The general public are failed to get justice when they are suffered by the problems.

The lawyers and the solicitors have taken the court as their inherited property. They have made a fortune in the court. So, Dickens further writes,

*". . .on such an afternoon the various solicitors in the cause, some two or three of whom have inherited from their fathers, who made a fortune by it ..." (chap 1 p. 2)*

Here it is clear that the court is taken as personal property for the solicitors and lawyers. They have got the job in the court not by their personal capacity but as inheritance. So, they have their monopoly in the court. They have created confusion like of fog in every activity of the court. Dickens further writes,

*".... no man alive knows what it means" (chap 1 p3).*

This sentence further highlights the confusion and chaos created by the court among the public. Only the solicitor and the lawyer know about the court and its activities, not the general public. Not a single alive man is clear about the activities of the court. The narrator provides such gloomy sentences and paragraphs for the evocative description of the British Chancery Court.

Similarly, Dickens has used intrigue as a rhetorical strategy to convey his message effectively to the readers through the text. Intrigue refers to crafty and involved plot to achieve the ends. So, Dickens has used a number of intrigues in the novel. Among them, I would like to mention the following:

- (1) Two narrators
- (2) Description of the bleak house, and
- (3) The introduction of many character

- (1) Two narrators

Esther Summer son and a third person omnipresent are the two narrators in the novel. Esther is the first-person narrator who narrates the story in past tense and he third person narrates the story in the present tense. They rely on each other; neither the narrative is complete on its own. In the third chapter, Esther replaces the third person narrator. This shift of a narrator has the effect of pulling the readers deeper into the story. In the very beginning of the third chapter, Esther says:

*"I have great deal of difficulties in the beginning to write my portion of these pages, for I know I am not clever...." (p.10)*

This sentence shows the naiveness of Esther in telling the story. Although Esther claims to have difficulty in telling her story that she is not very clever, her voice is clear and unhesitating as she tells us about herself. This all her description and her involvement in the Jarndyce case which is one of the intrigues that Dickens has used as a narrative technique in the novel which has made the novel successful.

- (2) Description of the bleak house:

In the sixth chapter, Esther describes the bleak house vividly. The description of the bleak house is another narrative technique that Dickens has used in the novel.

The description of the house is analogically done in the novel. The house is confusing

and mazelike. The house has a long and confusing history. The owner of the house, Tom has already committed suicide. Now, Mr. Jarndyce lives in the house.

Esther's first impressions about the house are also confusing and mazelike. The narrator says:

*"It was one of those delightfully irregular houses where you go up and down steps out of one room into another and where you come upon more rooms when you think you have seen all there are and where there is a beautiful provision of little halls and passages ...." (Chap 6 p46)*

When Esther, Richard and Ada arrive at Bleak House, they have many chances to observe the house. They first see the bleak house in the distance on a hill. As they head quickly towards it, the house appears to disappear in the trees. The house has many rooms and the abundance of mismatched furniture. They all create confusion among the readers by describing the bustling life at Bleak House. Here, the confusion created by the house is equal to the confusion created by the British Chancery Court among the public.

### (3) Introduction of many characters:

In the beginning of the novel, Dickens manages to introduce the readers to a host of lively and vivid characters. In the first chapter, Mr. Tangle is introduced who knows more about Jarndyce and Jarndyce than anybody else. A group of characters like Kenze, Mr. Jarndyce Ada, Richard, Mr. Guppy, Miss Barbary, the Jellybys' family and other a number of characters are introduced in the novel. Mr. Tulkinghorn, whom Dickens describes as, "He is of what is called the old school" (chap.2 p 8)

Mr. Tulkinghorn is the Deadlocks' lawyer and legal adviser. He updates them on the Jarndyce and Jarndyce case.

Esther's previous life and her childhood days are also blurred for Esther in the novel. Her mother left her after giving birth. She is looked after by her aunt Miss Barbary. Esther is unknown about her relation with Miss Barbary until her aunt dies. In her narration, Esther says, "I had never heard my.... left me." (Chap 2 p 11)

Esther is grown up with her godmother, Miss Barbary. Only after the death of Miss Barbary Esther is revealed that Miss Barbary was her aunt. Esther tried a lot to

*Bleak House: Analogy and Intrigue as Narrative Technique*

find out her parents identify but could not. She inquired about the whereabouts of her parents to her godmother and also with Mrs. Rochael, the servant but they did not say anything to her about her parents. Esther had never heard her parents spoken of. Later on in the novel, she knows that Mrs. Deadlock is her mother.

The introduction of so many characters in the novel, their story, etc. create chaos among the readers as the British Chancery has created.

Similarly, the description of the ghost walk by the house called Chesney World in Lincolnshire is also confusing like the activities of the British Chancery Court. Mrs. Rouncewell, the housekeeper who has been living in the house for more than fifty years, tells that the footsteps of the ghost are always heard on the terrace.

In this way, Charles Dickens has used analogy and intrigue as the narrative techniques in the novel. The chaos and confusion created by the fog in the very first chapter is similar to the chaos and confusion created by the British Chancery Court among the general people in Britain. Similarly, the use of two narrators, use of many major and minor characters, sub-plots, the ghost etc. have created chaos among the readers as the British Chancery Court has done to the British people. This is all done effectively in the novel through the use of narrative techniques invented by the writer.

**References**

- Grounds, A. R. . (2011). Sorting through the Junk Box Dicken's Objects and the great Exhibition of 1851. Florida : University of South Florida .
- Matthews, M. . (2015, April 6). Mimi Matthews: USA today best selling author.  
Retrieved from [www.mimimatthews.com](http://www.mimimatthews.com) :  
<https://www.mimimatthews.com/2015/04/06/law-meets-literature-bleak-house-and-the-british-court-of-chancery/>
- Pourjafari, F. (2021). The Story of a city with Bleak Houses: The Study of the Social Distress in Dicken's Bleak House. International Journal of Scientific and Management Research, 4(8), 1-8.