

Bleak house by charles dickens: power of nature in the novel

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In this extract from ' Bleak House', Charles Dickens carefully constructs a catalyst for political protest in the court of law. Dickens explores the nature of power through the power held by those with more authority than others, such as the High Chancellor; he also depicts the power struggles of the people with less significance in society through specific language choices. As a result of the descriptive style of the extract, from the start, the reader is immediately informed of the corruption of the legal system, for instance " dense fog ", and " muddy streets" implies there is a lack of clarity regarding the court, demonstrating Dickens' frustration with the corruption of the law. Thus, it sets up the progression of rebellion that will follow.

Dickens illustrates the power of language as a form of political protest at the beginning of the extract, which seems to fit the setting of the narrative at this point in the novel, in terms of its historical context and being in a court of law. The lexical field of decay conveyed by the words and phrases: " decaying", " worn-out" and " dead" provide a convincing narrative for the reader, in which Dickens is able to explore various political ideas for example, he believes the English legal system served only itself instead of others, reiterating the corruption of the law. Dickens also demonstrates power when using imperatives in the High Chancellor's speech: " I will speak" and " I will mention" which can be perceived as an exertion of authority as though he needs to do this in order to prove he is a powerful figure. Contrasting with this is the fact that Dickens chose not to name some of the characters in the novel, those of which are mentioned in the extract " the young girl", the " boy" and " the man from Shropshire". He could have deliberately chosen not to name these characters to convey their lack of

influence in this court setting, seen as they are not even worthy of an identity, which highlights the clear distinctions between the social classes. The absence of identity here suggests the court's lack of compassion and more so the ignorance of the higher classes such as the High Chancellor, who cares little for anyone of a lower social status than him. These phrases, especially " young girl" are very condescending and patronising portraying that the people with authority were very submissive of everybody else, which could mirror the corruptness of the law in ' Bleak House'. Since the only two characters who are named in the extract are those who work in the court: " Mr Tangle" and " Lord High Chancellor", it implies that the less powerful people lack significance, which emphasises just how immoral and corrupt the legal system is. Consequently, the nature of power is an extremely significant aspect in this extract since it has enabled the author to strategically voice his frustration with the English legal system through word choice alone. The readers in 1853 would have had a much more traditional mindset so they would have probably been more reluctant to admit to the corruption of the government and the legal system whereas now, a modern audience would be able to sympathise with Dickens as we are more aware of corruption.

Furthermore, the temperament of power is explored even more through the language used, particularly with regards to the Lord High Chancellor. For instance, his incredibly high status is reinforced by the deliberate focus on titles throughout the extract, such as " the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery". This emphasises the concept of hypocrisy and the

repetition of “ High” (which is capitalised to signify the Chancellor’s importance), tells us that it is an impressive title which accentuates the vast amount of power that those in high positions possess at this moment in the extract. However, this could change as the novel progresses because the reader is aware that “ Mr Tangle knows more of Jarndyce and Jarndyce than anybody” so his broader knowledge of the law could mean that he can overtake the Lord High Chancellor later in the novel; Dickens has briefly touched on this idea in the middle of the extract when the Chancellor asks Mr Tangle for verification when he says “ Have you nearly concluded your argument?” which suggests he is searching for acceptance. But, the narrative swiftly returns to his assertion of power: “ I directed to be in attendance to-day and who are now in my private room”. This makes us question if the corrupt legal system will ever be resolved, which is reminiscent of the corruption of the church in many of Blake’s poems in ‘ Songs of Experience’. The recurring use of the personal pronouns “ I” and “ my” could imply the idea that the court of law only care for themselves, as it suggests somewhat of a self-obsession. This slight uncertainty of power mirrors the confusion that the court of law in England caused in 1853 due to it being both unjust and unfair illustrating Charles Dickens’ negative view on traditional law, so it refers to a change in power, linking to political protest.

Moreover, there is one “ man from Shropshire” who attempts to protest against the Lord High Chancellor as he is said to have cried “ My lord!”. The fact that he has “ cried” implies a sense of despair and desperation, conveying that he may want justice rather than the bias that is offered from

the law system. Also, this small act of verbal protest implies that he could be the first/ only person to realise that the system is unjust after the “Chancellor rises” possibly just to emphasise his excess of power. Dickens could be protesting about the fact that no one did rebel against the exploitation of the English legal system by means of another character who at first seems insignificant as he does not have a title but we do learn information that he is from Shropshire which is more than the “ young girl and boy” were given, so it gives him a little more power than them but not as much as the High Chancellor. Thus, it could portray that to resolve this problem, the act of rebellion must be greater in order to overthrow those with a lot of power like Mr Tangle and the High Chancellor.

Also, the word “ foggy” is repeated twice in the extract which could be recurring imagery representing the corruption of the law system in England. The phrase “ with a foggy glory” is an oxymoron which the author has included to illustrate that the truthfulness of the law system is merely façade and in fact, it is extremely unjust and untrustworthy. The specific choice of the word “ foggy” usually means you are unable to think or see, which could reflect how the public are blinded by the positive perceptions of the law system in that this is the only possibility to achieve justice, whereas it is biased and very much dependent on the decisions of the upper class. Therefore, Dickens is trying to highlight that law and those with a lot of authority have too much power and though it seems truthful and fair, is the complete opposite.

Throughout the extract, Dickens demonstrates that the legal system at the time the novel was written was very corrupt and not accurate at all. He conveys that the judiciary only serves itself and no one else, possibly due to their ignorance to anyone of a lower social status than themselves. This is portrayed by the somewhat unsuccessful protest of “ the man from Shropshire” and the power struggle between the upper and lower classes, and although it is apparent to the reader, it is not clear to the Lord High Chancellor that Mr Tangle is more aware than he conveys which is dishonest in itself. As a result, the author has signified that he is very much against corruption, and he wants a truthful legal system in order to achieve justice for those deserving of it. To conclude, Dickens has shown that the authority that the powerful figures have is the cause of the corruption, almost like a misuse of power.