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CHARLES DICKENS' INFLUENCE ON EVELYN WAUGH'S WORKS

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Annotation:

The article deals with impact on Charles Dickens' works such as: "Bleak House", "Little Dorrit", "Nicholas Nickleby", "Oliver Twist" to Evelyn Waugh's A Handful of Dust.

Keywords: Lost City, Amazoniya, Macushi people

In A Handful of Dust several works by Charles Dickens mentioned, for example: Bleak House, Little Dorrit, Nicholas Nickleby, Oliver Twist. Charles Dickens who created some of the world's best-known fictional characters in his works. He is regarded as the greatest novelist of the Victorian era.

Professor of English at the University of Kentucky, Jerome Meckier maintains that reading Dickens in A Handful of Dust is a sort of Dantessque 'contrappasso':¹ since Tony Last behaved like a belated Victorian gentleman in Hetton and spent his days buried in his library, surrounded by modern savages, he will now end his days in a place as secluded as his mansion, surrounded by 'real'16 savages and reading a quintessential Victorian novelist. However, this interpretation appears simplistic, as Waugh's relationship with Dickens was not straightforward. First of all we know from Evelyn Waugh's biography that Evelyn's father was particularly appreciative of Dickens, as a publisher he derived most of his income from the royalties of Dickens's novels. Moreover, he used to organize evening family readings of Dickens and once his own family was truly Dickensian. This is how Evelyn Waugh was introduced to Dickens this was certainly his idea of reading. At the end of the novel, Tony Last's loud

For this reason some critics, like Robert Murray Davis, who authored the introduction to the Penguin edition of the novel, maintained that the ending of A Handful of Dust is to be understood primarily as a critique to Dickens. This

¹ Meckier, 'Why the Man Who Liked Dickens', p. 181



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interpretation however fails to explain the Dickensian echoes that surface in the text.

In fact, apart from the last chapters, Waugh refers to Dickens at least three ways.

First as a direct quotation, when Tony's aunt, France's comments about his mansion:

"The plans of the house must have been adapted by Mr Pecksniff from one of his pupils' designs for an orphanage."² and secondly in the chapter called Nobody's

Fault', which recounts the death of John Andrews, Tony Last's son. This phrase was in fact the working title of Little Dorrit. Through these words Dickens meant to

emphasize that no one in the society would take the blame for the evils that happened — like the people at the Circumlocution Office, or the lawyers in Bleak House or

Great Expectations, who always deny their liability. "Waugh uses the phrase ironically, and his detached style deploys the same lack of human sympathy

stigmatized by Dickens for the death of the boy — himself a kind of Paul Dombey to his father. Apparently this is the very opposite of how Dickens would write on

similar occasions, however, Waugh's genius is satirical"³ where Dickens's is empathic. The third Dickensian item in the novel is Tony Last's ludicrous divorce

case. In order to obtain a divorce from Brenda, Tony is supposed to prove his infidelity by spending a weekend at the seaside with a prostitute. Therefore he lands

in a hotel where waiters and private investigators disguised as customers are supposed to witness the misalliance in order to give evidence in court. Tony's at once

proud and clumsy behavior on this occasion recalls that of Samuel Pickwick from Decline and Fall during his lawsuit. Another interesting fact that lawsuit situations

was in A Handful of Dust and in Decline and Fall. But in Decline and Fall, a protagonist, Paul Pennifather was jailed when in A Handful of Dust Tony Last's and Brenda's divorce process took for a lawsuit .

In the article by Robert Phiddian, a professor of English, points out that "It is a

stretch, however, to name a great realist novel like Bleak House as, by genre, a satire, though its potent attack on the Victorian legal system is undoubtedly satirical.

Moreover, even in the most clearly framed place for satirical commentary in newspapers, the editorial cartoon, only a minority of cartoons function satirically –

² <https://mirabileictu.org/2015/06/03/evelyn-waughs-a-handful-of-dust-more-summer-reading-do-we-have-to-read-all-of-the-award-winners/>

³ https://www.academia.edu/28267034/Reading_Dickens_in_the_Jungle_A_Handful_of_Dust_and_Mr_Pip_The_Dickens_World_Post_Imperial_Readings_ed_by_Sajni_Mukherji_and_Saswati_Halder



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many are ‘merely’ humorous gags, with little coherent rhetorical purpose speaking rhetorically through them.”⁴

A Handful of Dust, possibly Waugh's most popular novel, had an uncommon genesis: according to its author, it developed as a prequel to a short story called 'The Man Who Loved Dickens', which is used as closing chapter. The story recounts the misfortunes of a man lost in the jungle and made prisoner by an illiterate lunatic who obliges him to read Dickens's novels aloud to the end of his days. The novel was written after the short story, backwards, so to say, in order to trace the past of that most peculiar man who ends up in the forest reading Dickens.⁵ The grafting of the novel onto the short story is not seamless. Critics have pointed out that there is a sort of fracture between the sardonic, ironic, satirical pages set in the UK and the surrealism of the last two chapters set in Brazil. The first part of the novel tells how Tony Last's wife, Brenda, has an affair with an insipid young man from London, which leads to their divorce, after the death of Tony and Brenda's son, Consequently, Tony decides to leave Britain in search of an Eldorado with a queer explorer, who dies in the jungle. Tony, sick and lost, is eventually rescued by Mr. Todd, the man who loves Dickens, who keeps him prisoner. Although the title of the novel overtly recalls a line of 'The Burial of the Dead' from the Waste Land, s the character of Tony Last himself looks rather like a prose version of Prufrock, where the protagonist is surrounded by a number of hollow men. According to Waugh, the Londoners that he describes are authentic modern savages, whose place is eventually taken by real jungle savages in the second part of the story,⁶ while Tony's plight in Brazil is just a distorted reflection of his plight in England.

British-American novelist, Salman Rushdie in an early interview about Midnight's Children points very perceptively to the same double qualities of Dickens's fiction: “There is a technique that Dickens used that I found very remarkable. He uses a kind of background or setting for his works which is completely naturalistic, down to the

⁴ https://www.researchgate.net/publication/259548255_Satire_and_the_limits_of_literary_theories

⁵ Christopher Sykes, Evelyn Waugh: A Biography (London: Collins, 1975). pp.195-196

⁶ See Jerome Meckier, 'Why the Man Who Liked Dickens Reads Dickens instead of Conrad: Waugh's A Handful of Dust', Novel: A Forum on Fiction 13:2 (1980), pp. 171-187.



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tiniest details. And on top of this completely naturalistic background he imposes totally surrealistic images.”⁷

In *A Handful of Dust* Evelyn Waugh used Charles Dicken’s technique of describing nature. Such descriptions we could see reading about Hetton village and in the last chapter – Lost City. From Salman Rushdie’s points out that Evelyn Waugh used the naturalistic and surrealistic descriptions to keep the events and the world which he wrote into reality. In Evelyn Waugh’s book we see a developed country and controversial Amazonia. If Evelyn Waugh takes examples for his stories from his real world, Victorian characters he has taken from Dicken’s works, showing undeveloped and stable bad conditions of the people.

Like his own, Rushdie argues, Charles Dickens's characters are “larger than life” because they are surrealistic and yet 'rooted in a recognizable real world'. 'Recognizable' is the key word. Dickens's 'figures' may be grotesque, but their archetypes are just ordinary people familiar to the readers. This recognition of the ordinariness tethers the novelist's 'invention', which would otherwise drift towards grotesque and melodrama. Reading Dickens in the jungle inevitably deprives the reader of this tether. As a result, Dickens will be read only for the inventive qualities of his work — mostly melodrama losing his realism, let alone social critique.

Substituting Dickens for the Bible, Todd does not undermine the value of Dickens, but he certainly poses a problem as to how his works should be read. In fact, initially, Tony enjoys reading aloud as much as Todd enjoys listening. Tony begins to begrudge it only when he realizes that he won’t be able to ever leave the place. Reading Dickens to while away the time of convalescence is not absurd in itself, it becomes absurd only after Tony realizes that he is hopelessly a prisoner in the jungle. Besides Tony remarks that his listener is not interested in the Victorian background, and he probably understands very little of the story, apart from the basic plot and some pathetic effects. In other words, Todd is as shallow a reader of Dickens as any. As we mentioned above, functions of satire usually target social conventions, or political individuals and situations. As a result, satire reveals much about its cultural context, informing readers of the manners, politics, or behaviors of its time. An example of satire occurs in the character of schoolmaster Wackford Squeers in Charles Dickens’ novel *Nicholas Nickleby*. Readers are fascinated by his ridiculous approach to teaching and his attempts to mask his cruelty, greed and ignorance, but

⁷ Chandrabhanu Pattanayak, 'Interview with Salman Rushdie', *The Literary Criterion* 18: 3 (1983), pp. 17-18



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we are also learning about social problem of the Victorian era, namely the presence of disreputable institutions that took unwanted children off their guardian's hands. The crucial topics from Charles Dickens works we could see in A Handful of Dust. The main problems of that age were taken from Bleak House, Great Expectations, Oliver Twist, Nicholas Nickleby and Little Dorrit. The satirical topics, mentioned in Charles Dickens works, were described in A Handful of Dust.

Charles Dickens' Bleak House was about the Jarndyce family, who waited in vain to inherit money from the couples who argue with each other in long-lasting lawsuit. In A Handful of Dust we could see the same problem when Brenda asks four thousand settlement for a year, which is obviously too much for Tony Last. After the divorce requirements we will see the previous financial supports of Tony Last for Brenda's relatives.

Influence of Great Expectations and topics for A Handful of Dust were Mr. Biever family aims which they wanted to rise with the help of Brenda to a higher social class. The moral themes of Great Expectations are similar with the Waugh's work, showing importance of loyalty, conscience are more essential than social advancement or wealth. Not receiving big settlement from Tony Last, Brenda sees the true face of Mr. Biever's family. At the final part of novel A Handful of Dust.

Crucial topics from Nicholas Nickleby were obviously visible at the adventures of Tony Last to Brazil and Amazon when he would go looking for "a lost city". After breaking down with Brenda, Evelyn Waugh symbolizes "a lost city" as happiness. Not giving appropriate settlement for Brenda, Tony leaves the Hetton village, England. If we compare Tony Last and Dr. Messinger with the characters of in Nicholas Nickleby, in both works they go for an adventure to find better place and happiness. Meeting with other people and finding out other difficulties in other parts of the Earth, they would understand that there is no perfect place in the world. The place and surroundings for whom they argue, in reality better than in abroad.

Charles Dickens' Oliver Twist motives are noticeable in the chapter six A Handful of Dust. To get to wie-pie country or "Lost City" and Dr. Messinger and Tony took some Indians or Macushi people. Dr. Messinger and Tony last saw and knew condition of the people. They understood that they would go with them to wie-pie country if they give them different kind of good things as an exchange for working hours. This kind of poor conditions of the people we would see on Lost citizens or Todd's children. The same conditions we can notice in Oliver Twist novel. In order



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to earn for a living, people could do kill the people and go to harmful works or tasks putting their life in danger.

In Martin Chuzzlewit, Charles Dickens could show all types of selfishness. Martin Chuzzlewit is a wealthy man whose entire family members want to inherit money after his death. He lives in distance with his nurse, Mary, and a grandson Martin. Mary will get money as long as old Martin lives.

Another motif from Oliver Twist is funding good place for a living. Tony Last was a noble man. He had a good home inherited from ancestors which was located in Hetton village. After starting divorce process, not giving more property, he decided to go for travelling to “Lost city”, located in near Brazilian and Mexican islands. In spite of having enough money and the home, Tony Last went to there, forgiving that wherever you would go, you took your own thoughts, feelings or love in your heart. It doesn't matter where you will go. Evelyn Waugh proved an idea that there is no ideal place in the world. They had enough food, the roof for living, natural remedies for all diseases and organized various kinds of Indian parties. Tony found peaceful place to live, but not his wife and friends.

Charles Dickens and Evelyn Waugh have similarity of the describing nature on an undeveloped and developed city. For Charles Dickens' nature descriptions were like the additional characters to the works. They could add a satirical stylistic device like exaggeration, showing to enlarge events or feelings beyond normal bounds. Also, in Evelyn Waugh's works we could notice using the satirical stylistic device in nature depictions. We could see them in Evelyn Waugh's A Handful of Dust, Sword of Honour and Charles Dickens Great Expectation, Nicholas Nickleby.

As we know that in Evelyn Waugh's childhood, Waugh's family used to read him Charles Dickens' works. He was familiar with all characters and crucial topics. In his own books, Evelyn Waugh started to discuss the same problems and topics. Although Evelyn Waugh live in developed country, but in his works for the people who lived in undeveloped country and who are not mentally or logically developed enough, the author suggests to read Charles Dickens works, especially, Bleak House, Little Dorrit and Nickolas Nickleby. After reading and analyzing these works we could understand similar relationship problems and social topics.



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