THE CRITICS DEBATE

General Editor Michael Scott

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Published titles:

Sons and Lovers Geoffrey Harvey

Bleak House Jeremy Hawthorn

The Canterbury Tales Alcuin Blamires

Tess of the d'Urbervilles Terence Wright

Further titles are in preparation.

BLEAK HOUSE

Jeremy Hawthorn

M
MACMILLAN

For my wife, Bjørg

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Softcover reprint of the hardcover 1st edition 1987

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First published 1987

Published by

Higher and Further Education Division

MACMILLAN PUBLISHERS LTD

Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 2XS

and London

Companies and representatives

throughout the world

Hawthorn, Jeremy

Charles Dickens, Bleak House. – (The Critics Debate)

1. Dickens, Charles, 1812-1870. Bleak House

I. Title II. Series

823'.8 PR4556

ISBN 978-0-333-37867-0

ISBN 978-1-349-18505-4 (eBook)

DOI 10.1007/978-1-349-18505-4

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General Editor's Preface

OVER THE last few years the practice of literary criticism has become hotly debated. Methods developed earlier in the century and before have been attacked and the word 'crisis' has been drawn upon to describe the present condition of English Studies. That such a debate is taking place is a sign of the subject discipline's health. Some would hold that the situation necessitates a radical alternative approach which naturally implies a 'crisis situation'. Others would respond that to employ such terms is to precipitate or construct a false position. The debate continues but it is not the first. 'New Criticism' acquired its title because it attempted something fresh calling into question certain practices of the past. Yet the practices it attacked were not entirely lost or negated by the new critics. One factor becomes clear: English Studies is a pluralistic discipline.

What are students coming to advanced work in English for the first time to make of all this debate and controversy? They are in danger of being overwhelmed by the cross currents of critical approaches as they take up their study of literature. The purpose of this series is to help delineate various critical approaches to specific literary texts. Its authors are from a variety of critical schools and have approached their task in a flexible manner. Their aim is to help the reader come to terms with the variety of criticism and to introduce him or her to further reading on the subject and to a fuller evaluation of a particular text by illustrating the way it has been approached in a number of contexts. In the first part of the book a critical survey is given of some of the major ways the text has been appraised. This is done sometimes in a thematic manner, sometimes according to various 'schools' or 'approaches'. In the second part the authors provide their own appraisals of the

text from their stated critical standpoint, allowing the reader the knowledge of their own particular approaches from which their views may in turn be evaluated. The series therein hopes to introduce and to elucidate criticism of authors and texts being studied and to encourage participation as the critics debate.

Michael Scott

A Note on Text and References

I HAVE throughout used the Penguin edition of *Bleak House*, edited by Norman Page and with an Introduction by J. Hillis Miller (1971). Page references to the novel in the subsequent discussion are to this edition. Other works cited are identified by author and date of first publication, with page references as appropriate; full details of the works in question will be found in the References. Repeated references to the same work are by page number only.

There are variants between different texts of the novel available, and the reader should perhaps know a little about the debates concerning these. *Bleak House* was first published in nineteen monthly parts, of which the final part was a 'double number', from March 1852 to September 1853. It was published in book form in 1853, and subsequently in a number of different editions. The Penguin text is based on the 1868 Charles Dickens Edition, and the Penguin editor defends this choice by claiming that this was the edition which incorporates Dickens's final revisions.

His position has been (implicitly) attacked by the editors of the Norton Critical Edition of *Bleak House* (1977), George Ford and Sylvère Monod. They claim that there is 'very little evidence' that Dickens revised the text of *Bleak House* for the Charles Dickens Edition, and they argue very strongly in favour of their choice of the first, 1853, edition of the novel as 'copy text' for their edition.

My own opinion is that their argument is correct. I have however chosen to use the Penguin edition of the novel for purposes of reference, as (i) it is very widely used, (ii) it is cheaper than the Norton Critical Edition, and (iii) it does not reprint the text of the Charles Dickens Edition unchanged, but uses, on occasions, readings from the 1853 edition. I have

confirmed that none of my references or critical arguments involves the use of what is possibly a passage of dubious textual authority in the Penguin edition.

As I have tried to give a good indication of where in a particular chapter passages to which I am referring occur, in addition to the Penguin-edition page reference, readers who prefer to use the Norton Critical Edition should be able to trace references without too much difficulty. The Norton Critical Edition includes a list of textual variants which readers of the novel will find of great interest.